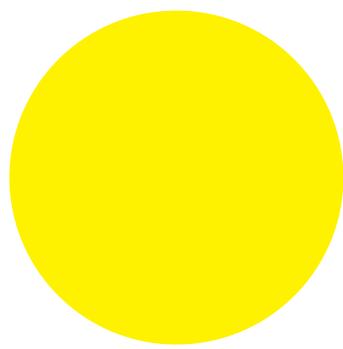


Araghchi: European
appeasement of US
bullying undermines
int'l peace, security

2 >



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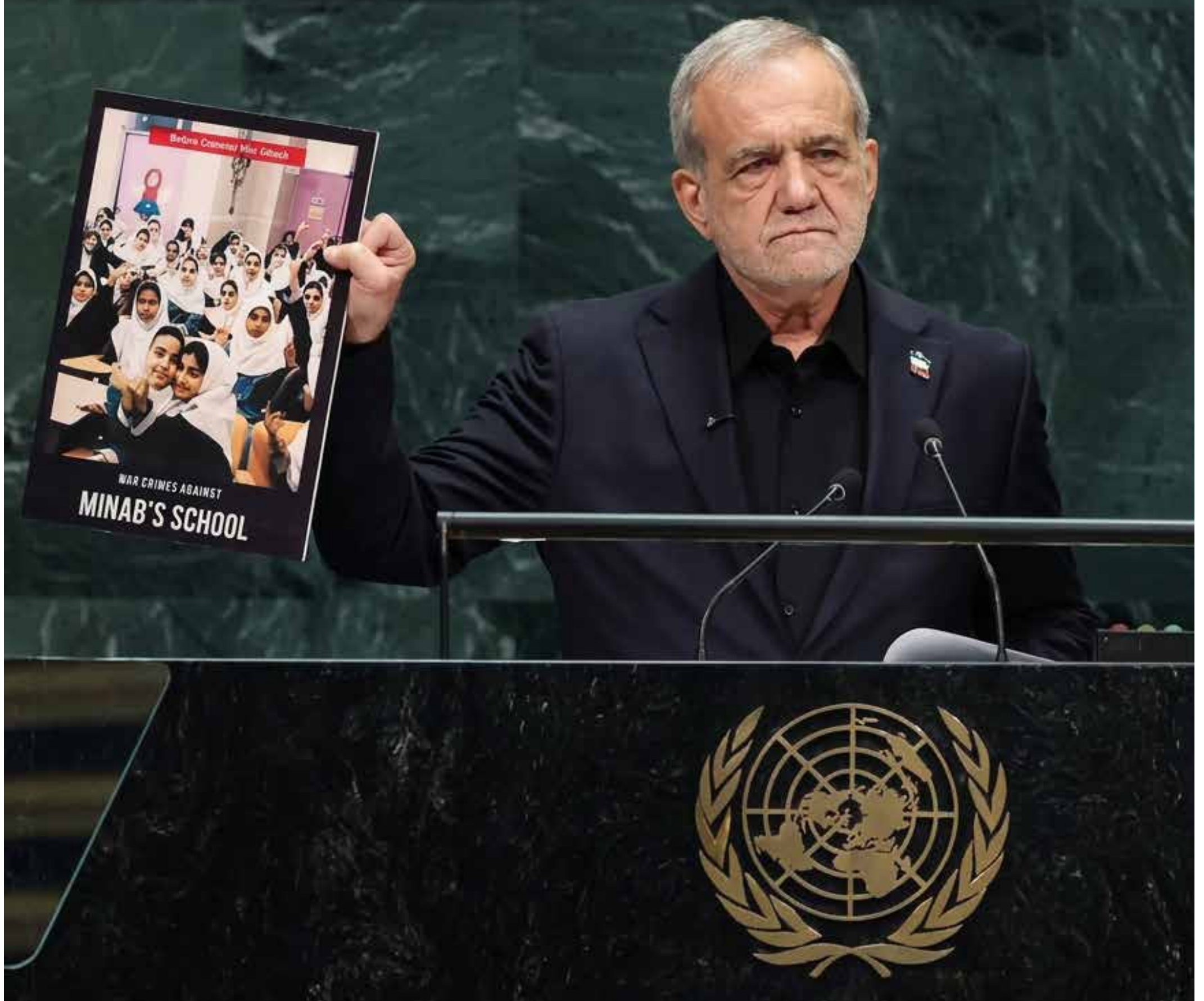
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IranDailyWeb

Pezeshkian: 'Either we will build security together, or we will endure insecurity together'

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Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian holds a photo of students who were killed in a US strike on a school in Iran's southern town of Minab on February 28 as he addresses the 81st United Nations General Assembly at the UN Headquarters in New York, on September 23, 2026.

AFP

Pezeshkian: 'Either we will build security together, or we will endure insecurity together'



Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian addresses the 81st United Nations General Assembly at UN headquarters in New York City, US, on September 23, 2026.
● REUTERS

International Desk

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian said on Wednesday that no country in the Middle East region will have security on its own, stressing that, "Either we will build security together, or we will

endure insecurity together".

Addressing the 81st United Nations General Assembly on Wednesday in New York, the Iranian president said that Iran would preserve its strength and called on the world to pursue peace and justice rather than another war.

Referring to remarks by the US President Donald Trump during his speech at the General Assembly, who called Iran a terrorist state, Pezeshkian said Iran itself is a victim of terrorism.

"I come from an Iran whose leader was assassinated without any legal reason or justification. I come from an Iran where a school was bombed. Look at the children of Minab, children who were bombed and killed. Israel and the United States martyred our children with their weapons. Our children had committed no crime," he said.

The US and Israel launched wide-ranging strikes on Iran on 28 February, assassinating the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, several top commanders and thousands of Iranians.

In response, Iran's Armed Forces launched attacks on US military bases in regional countries and Israel's positions in the occupied territories. Iran also closed the Strait of Hormuz, through which around 20% of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas travels.

Iran not afraid of war

Pezeshkian added that Iran has never started a war and has consistently demonstrated its commitment to the negotiating table. The war, he said, has been imposed on Iran, but the country had shown that it was not afraid of war when defending itself and would not shy away from negotiations when seeking peace.

Pezeshkian underlined that Iran would stand to the last breath in defense of the country.

He said the US and Israel attacked Iran with the latest military equipment, while Iranians had defended their country with strength.

Referring to targeting of schools, hospitals, scientific centers, bridges and infrastructure by the US and Israel during the aggression against Iran, the Iranian president described the strikes as violations of international law.

Pezeshkian said the theme of the UN gathering is rebuilding trust, arguing that trust could not be created through words alone and required an end to double standards.

'Nuclear bomb in Israel, inspectors in Iran'

"Atomic bombs and other weapons of mass destruction in this region are in the hands of the Israeli regime; but inspections are requested from Iran! Israel massacred 70,000 people in Gaza, but Iran was bombed at the negotiating table! Israel has nuclear weapons, is not a member of the NPT, has never allowed a single inspector into the occupied territories throughout its disgraceful existence, but receives billions of dollars in free weapons as a reward and enjoys immunity to bomb any capital it wishes!" Summarizing the tragic paradox of the current geopolitical landscape, Pezeshkian reiterated: "I repeat: the nuclear bomb is in Israel, but the inspectors are in Iran! Israel kills, but Iran is sanctioned!" Pezeshkian underlined that if international law is enforced only when it suits powerful states, more countries would conclude that they could secure their safety only by relying on their own power.

"That will be the beginning of a more dangerous world for all of us," he said.

Araghchi: European appeasement of US bullying undermines int'l peace, security

International Desk

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said that European appeasement in the face of US bullying would in no way serve international peace and security.

Araghchi made the remarks in a meeting with the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Kaja Kallas on the sidelines of the 81st session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, where the two discussed the latest regional and international developments.

Araghchi stressed the importance of a constructive role by the European Union in international developments and called on the bloc to avoid approaches based on double standards and appeasement in the face of US bullying.

The Iranian foreign minister also pointed to what he described as Iran's practical commitment to diplomacy aimed at achieving peace and security across the region. He said repeated US breaches of commitments had been the sole factor disrupting diplomatic processes.



Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (L) meets EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Kaja Kallas on the sidelines of the 81st session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York on September 22, 2026.
● IRNA

The European Union, Araghchi said, had unfortunately in numerous cases chosen to appease US bullying instead of adhering to principles it claims to uphold, including the rule of law and respect for human rights.

Such an approach, he said, "would in no way be in line with international peace and security."

Their talks also covered developments related to the conflict in Ukraine, as well as the situation in West Asia amid continuing US aggressive actions and economic warfare against Iran.

Iran's Araghchi also held a meeting with Dutch Foreign Minister Tom de Bruijn in New York.

During the meeting, he strongly criticized "the double standards of European countries" concerning regional developments, pointing specifically to their silence and appeasement regarding the "aggressive actions and crimes" committed by the US and Israel against Iran.

"The foreign minister noted that European nations cannot, on the one hand, claim to uphold the rule of law and human rights while, on the other, remaining indifferent to – or even supporting – blatant military aggression by the US and Israel against Iran," it added.

De Bruijn emphasized the importance of diplomacy and outlined his country's

perspectives on ongoing regional developments and interactions between Iran and Europe.

In a separate meeting with his French counterpart, Jean-Noel Barrot, Araghchi criticized France's "interventionist" positions towards Iran and urged the French Embassy to respect national laws and regulations.

He also called France's stance on regional developments, particularly its position regarding the US and Israeli military aggression against Iran, "unacceptable".

Referring to France's "double standards" on human rights, Araghchi said Paris could not claim concern for rights while remaining silent over "crimes against humanity" committed by the US and Israel against the Iranian people.

Baqaei: Iran conveyed conditions to US during Araghchi-Witkoff meeting

International Desk

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Es-mail Baqaei said Tehran had engaged with the United States through a Qatari mediator in New York and conveyed conditions for the resumption of negotiations to end war between the two countries.

Iran's conditions include an end to fighting on all fronts, a halt to US acts of aggression, an end to the US naval blockade and economic war against Iran, and the release of Iranian assets, Baqaei told IRNA late on Tuesday.

He said Iran has also conveyed its conditions for diplomacy in recent weeks, including its position on issues such as the security of the Strait of Hormuz.

"Today, the presence of our delegation in New York provided an opportunity to clearly convey these points to the American side," he noted.

His remarks came after Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and US envoys Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner communicated through mediators on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York, the first such contacts since a Pakistani-mediated interim ceasefire agreement collapsed in July.

"Steve and Jared had a very productive meeting today with mediators of Iran, merely mediators. Let's see what happens with that," US President Donald Trump said after the meeting.



The meeting between Steve Witkoff, Jared Kushner and Iranian officials lasted for three hours, Trump said, adding that another talk would be "scheduled in the very near future."

The development came as the US war on Iran has dragged on for nearly seven months.

Negotiations to end the US-Israeli aggression against Iran collapsed in July after Washington violated the terms of a Memorandum of Understanding mediated by Pakistan and Qatar.

The 14-point agreement put an end to the most intense fighting between the two countries. However, the US began attacking Iran in July after it violated the terms of the understanding 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.

Iranian military calls Trump's 'annihilation' threats sign of 'strategic desperation'

International Desk

Iran's military dismissed US president's threat to "annihilate" the country as a sign of the US "strategic desperation", warning that it's ready to respond with "crushing" attacks far more severe than earlier in the war.

The General Staff of Iran's Armed Forces and the Khatam al-Anbiya Central Headquarters, the Islamic Republic's highest operational command unit, in a

joint statement on Tuesday said that the country would deliver "even harsher, crushing, and unpredictable blows" to aggressors. The warning came after the US President Donald Trump used his address to the UN General Assembly's 81st annual meeting on Monday to claim he was poised to make a "big decision" on whether to make a deal or "quickly annihilate" Iran, besides repeating his allegations against the Islamic Republic of pursuing "a nu-

clear weapon."

The Iranian military pledged that a response of such magnitude awaited aggressors as well as the rulers of the United States and the Israeli regime, citing the record of Iran's decisive and successful confrontation in the face of previous wars imposed on the nation, including the last two rounds of unprovoked American-Israeli aggression.

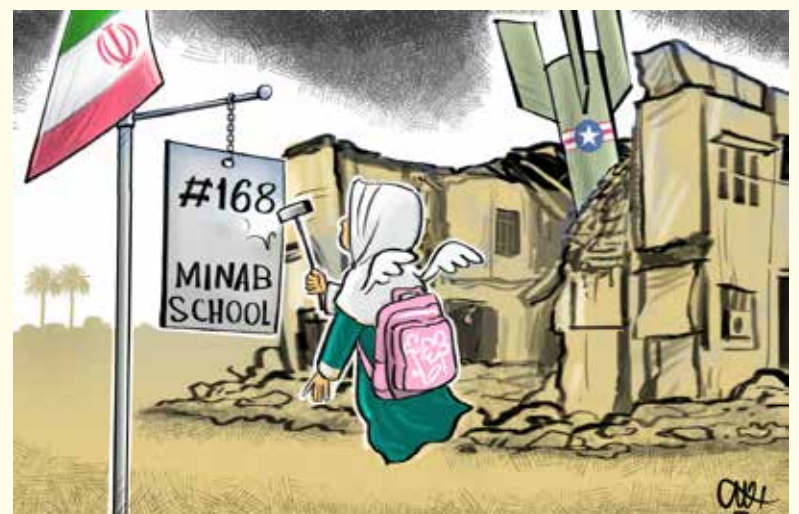
According to the statement issued by the Iranian

military bodies, Trump's remarks failed to reflect battlefield realities and demonstrated "America's strategic deadlock" in its confrontation against Iran. Repetition of "baseless allegations and threats" should not be interpreted as a sign of the US's strength, the statement noted. It reminded that the mismatch between the threats and the actual erosion of US military capabilities reflected "strategic desperation" rather than power.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist

CARTOON



Iran keeps China, Turkey, Iraq routes open as four others canceled under US sanctions

Economy Desk

Flights between Iran and China, Turkey and Iraq's Najaf continued Wednesday as new US sanctions targeting Iran's aviation sector took effect, while flights to Baghdad, Oman, Azerbaijan and Tbilisi were canceled, the head of Imam Khomeini International Airport City said. Ramin Kashef-Azar, speaking to IRNA, said Iranian airlines were continuing to operate international flights despite the latest US pressure on the country's aviation sector.

"Flights to Iraq through Najaf airport are continuing without interruption, but Baghdad airport is currently not providing services to Iranian flights," he said. The developments followed an Iraqi decision to suspend Iranian flights to Baghdad from Wednesday after the US threatened sanctions against airports servicing Iranian carriers, according to sources cited by Reuters.

Kashef-Azar also said flights to China were operating normally according to schedule.

Flight-tracking website Flightradar24 showed that a Mahan Air aircraft that departed Tehran landed in southern China on Wednesday. Mahan Air flight 093 landed in Guangzhou at 4:39 p.m. local time (0839 GMT), according to the website.

Yerevan flights continue, two canceled

Flight schedules also showed that sev-



eral Iranian airlines continued to operate on the Yerevan-Tehran route.

At Yerevan's Zvartnots International Airport, aircraft operated by Iranian airlines Caspian Airlines and Fly Kish departed for Tehran on Wednesday. Two of the six scheduled flights from Yerevan to Tehran were canceled, according to the airport's flight informa-

tion.

Flight schedules at Imam Khomeini International Airport also showed several Iranian airlines operating flights to and from Turkey.

Kashef-Azar said that, apart from Mahan Air, which faces restrictions on flights to Turkey, other Iranian airlines were continuing to operate flights to

several Turkish destinations, including Istanbul, Ankara, Gazipasa and Izmir.

"At present, with the exception of Mahan Air, which is facing restrictions on flights to Turkey, other Iranian airlines are operating flights to various destinations in the country without any problems," he said.

He added that because foreign airlines

had not returned to Iran since the start of the US-Israeli war at the end of February, Iranian carriers including Qeshm Air, Taban Airlines, Sepehran Airlines and Vares Air were handling passenger traffic from neighboring countries and other destinations.

"Flights to the country of China are also operating without any problems, and flight schedules to this country are being carried out according to the timetable," Kashef-Azar said.

"The Civil Aviation Organization is continuously negotiating with aviation authorities in other countries to ensure that Iranian airlines can operate international flights with the fewest possible restrictions," he added.

The flights came as Washington moved to tighten pressure on Iran's aviation sector. On Sept. 8, the US Treasury Department sanctioned 27 Iranian airlines as part of a broader campaign announced on Aug. 24, warning that foreign companies supporting Iran's aviation industry could face sanctions and restrictions on access to the US financial system.

US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said on Monday that Washington would seek to shut down Iranian airlines worldwide from Sept. 23 by threatening secondary sanctions against foreign aviation service providers that continue working with them. He said companies could risk access to the US dollar system if they fuel Iranian aircraft, provide landing services or sell tickets for Iranian carriers.

South Pars restores half of war-damaged gas capacity



Economy Desk

Iran has restored about 50% of the gas production capacity damaged at its South Pars field during the 40-day US-Israeli war that began on Feb. 28, a deputy oil minister said, as the country works to repair the damage ahead of winter.

Ahmad Zeraatkar told Fars news agency that some damaged units had been brought back online ahead of schedule as part of a program launched after the attacks on South Pars facilities in March.

"With the measures taken, about 50% of the damaged capacity had returned to service by Sept. 22, and production in this part has resumed," he said. He did not give a figure for the volume of capacity restored. Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad, however, told

Parliament's Energy Commission on Tuesday that Iran had recovered 100 million cubic meters of gas processing capacity after four gas refineries were taken offline. Zeraatkar said four domestic financing projects had been launched as part of one of the country's largest financing arrangements, with reconstruction work now under way. "The planned capacity restoration program has been achieved, and all the planned measures will be completed before the start of winter," he added.

According to the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC), damage to gas industry facilities during the war was extensive, with nearly 7,924 cases recorded.

Attacks on four South Pars gas refineries in March reduced gas production capacity

by about 230 million cubic meters. Paknejad said the four refineries going offline had resulted in the loss of about 230 million cubic meters of gas processing capacity. Efforts to use spare capacity at other refineries had allowed Iran to recover nearly 100 million cubic meters of that loss, he said.

"However, a shortfall of more than 120 million cubic meters remains and will be added to this year's gas imbalance, requiring the development and implementation of precise and specific management mechanisms," he said. According to NIGC, Iran's gas industry had already been facing a daily shortfall of about 300 million cubic meters before the war. Iran has about 34 trillion cubic meters of proven natural gas reserves, making it the world's second-largest holder of gas reserves after Russia. The country accounts for about 17% of global proven gas reserves. Despite its vast reserves, a significant portion of Iran's gas potential remains undeveloped because of sanctions-related constraints and insufficient investment.

Chamber chief urges export plan for medicinal plants, organic products

Economy Desk

The head of Iran's Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture criticized the lack of attention to the country's medicinal plants and organic products, calling for serious planning to boost exports and build global brands.

Samad Hassanzadeh, speaking at an international conference on the development of production and exports of Damask rose, organic medicinal plants and related products, said Iran had so far failed to make proper use of its significant potential in the sector or build suitable brands for its products in global markets, Tasnim news agency reported.

"Unfortunately, we have so far been unable to properly capitalize on the country's valuable resources and potential and establish suitable brands for these products in global markets," he said.

"Damask rose is one of the few products that has managed, to some extent, to put Iran's name among the world's producers of aromatic plants," he added.

For years, various programs have been carried out in areas such as Kashan to cultivate Damask roses, produce rosewater and manufacture other products derived from the plant, creating opportunities for the country, Hassanzadeh said.



But Damask rose is not Iran's only potential in the sector, he said, adding that the country has other valuable plants that could be used to create added value and expand exports.

Low productivity compared with rivals

Iran has 60,000 hectares under Damask rose cultivation, 12 times the area in Turkey and Bulgaria, its global competitors, said Parviz Kheirkhah, a member of Iran's Rose and Rosewater Association, according to ISNA.

Economic productivity per hectare is about \$2,000 in Iran, compared with \$12,000 in Turkey, Kheirkhah said, describing the figures as a serious warning for industry players and policymakers.

Regional potential, value chains

Hassanzadeh also pointed to production potential in different parts of Iran, saying South Khorasan produces products such

as jujube and barberry as well as various medicinal plants. The slopes of Mount Sahand, Ardabil, Azerbaijan and other parts of the country also have significant potential in medicinal plants, he said. "If we can connect these products through production and value chains, very good opportunities will emerge to create added value, develop related industries and increase the country's export revenues," Hassanzadeh said.

Organic products as an export opportunity

Hassanzadeh said organic fruits and plants were being sold at high prices in global markets and that organic certification had become an important brand in the international market. Products with organic certification, particularly in agriculture and medicinal plants, command higher prices in global markets than many conventional

products, he said, adding that this could provide an important export opportunity for Iran.

He criticized the lack of attention to the sector in Iran, saying authorities had failed to develop adequate and coordinated plans to make use of its potential.

Sanctions and other restrictions had also prevented Iran in recent years from establishing an adequate presence in global markets and introducing its products internationally as it should, he said.

Call for greater presence in int'l markets

Hassanzadeh stressed the need to introduce Iranian products at international markets, exhibitions and specialized seminars and to build global brands for them.

He cited saffron as an example, saying he had recently heard that Turkey, despite producing saffron on a very limited scale, had sought to register a global saffron brand in international organizations. Iran is one of the world's largest saffron producers and the product has long been known by Iran's name, he said.

A lack of government support and planning, along with some neglect by Iranians themselves, had prevented the country from making proper use of these resources and potential, Hassanzadeh said.

US-China summit

Too big and too small to fail



By Scott Kennedy

Senior adviser in Chinese Business and Economics at the CSIS

O P I N I O N

This week's summit between President Donald Trump and Chinese leader Xi Jinping will be their second meeting of the year, with potentially two more engagements still to come. That the leaders of the world's two most powerful countries are meeting to talk about their bilateral relationship and international affairs is an achievement deserving appreciation. But the gap between their limited ambitions in terms of likely topics and outcomes, on the one hand, and the challenges facing the world, on the other, points to a growing vacuum of global leadership.

Too important to permit failure

Both the United States and China have a strong self-interest in keeping the relationship at least superficially calm. The American economy has substantial strengths, driven mainly by investments in AI, but also glaring weaknesses, among them persistent inflation, rising unemployment, and ballooning debt. The bond market is already wobbly, with yields continuing to rise, suggesting increasing anxieties about deep-seated risks in the economy's foundations. With the midterms approaching, it is not in the Trump administration's self-interest to generate a crisis in the bilateral relationship right now.

Beijing likely is computing a similar calculus. Despite — or perhaps because of — its technology gains, its macroeconomic forecast is equally, if not more, shaky. Xi is in the early months of planning for the 21st Party Congress, to be held in the fall of 2027, which likely will give him a fourth five-year term as head of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Like Trump, his political fortunes will be burnished by a stable international environment, which, in large part, comes down to keeping the peace with Washington. Hence, observers can expect the current commercial cease-fire to be extended, with China permitting a greater flow of rare earths to the United States and others (Japan's access to rare earths is also a high priority for Washington) and the Trump administration not imposing cumulative tariffs on China higher than the rate in place as of the October 2025 Busan meeting. Beijing has reportedly sought to extend the current



BEN HICKEY/THE ECONOMIST

arrangement to the end of the Trump administration, whereas the United States prefers only a six-month extension. The obvious compromise would be one more year.

Too small to not meet expectations

The other reason the summit will not fail is because expectations have been whittled down to almost nothing. Beijing would likely prefer a long list of deliverables and Washington a shorter list, but neither has much ambition for path-breaking arrangements and compromises. Instead, expect limited deals, progress, and outcomes, such as both sides agreeing to reduce tariffs to standard levels for \$30 billion of the other side's exports; more deals on Boeing planes, aircraft components, and agricultural goods; an initial discussion of AI safety issues; subtle adjustments in language about trying to end the conflicts in Ukraine and the Persian Gulf; and an emphasis on the importance of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and G20. Trump and Xi will likely meet in November in Shenzhen and in December in Miami for more of the same.

Not a G2

Although Trump and Xi will outwardly get along, this is not a G2. They are finding a way to manage the bilateral relationship, but they are not whatsoever working together as co-stewards of the international order. Nor is either interested in providing substantial public goods to provide conditions for a more enduring stability. This is a great power competition tempered by interdependence, a rough balance of power, and a need by both to handle challenges at home.

Given the widening global distribution of power, the decline of alliances, and the centrality of non-state actors, a G2 would never accurately reflect the significance of the US-China relationship. That said, the meeting is a lost opportunity to tackle fundamental challenges, such as the international effects of macroeconomic imbalances, the growing risks from AI, the wars in Ukraine



Billionaire Elon Musk (c) gestures after attending a welcome ceremony for US President Donald Trump with President Xi Jinping at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, China, on May 14, 2026.

REUTERS

and Middle East, and climate change. But the Trump administration is inherently constrained from doing more. It is pursuing an imperial foreign policy built primarily on a rigid emphasis on sovereignty, hard power, and bilateral interactions. Concerns about international legitimacy and multilateral norms that set guidelines for responsible behavior that constrain everyone, including the United States itself, are off the table. It also does not see a similar level of danger from climate change or AI safety as others do. Moreover, the breakdown of the interagency process means the Trump administration is typically bouncing from one problem to another and is insufficiently prepared to handle complex challenges over an extended period.

As a result, the administration's strategy is encountering obstacles on both the trade and security fronts, with problems in one area (e.g., an uneasy truce with Beijing) hindering success in others (e.g., gaining Beijing's help on Ukraine and Iran). Washington increasingly finds itself playing defense simultaneously on multiple fronts. Conversely, Beijing could conceivably do much more, but it is content running out the clock on the Trump administration and keeping pressure from the European Union and others at bay, all while gradually advancing its own approach to global governance in the various fora it leads, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and the World Artificial Intelligence Cooperation Organization (WAICO). Although Xi will likely bring an impressive group of corporate executives from some of China's leading high-tech firms, if past is prologue, they are unlikely to be given room to showcase their companies and expertise, meaning a lost opportunity for China to present a more nuanced picture of its society to an important audience.

A lost opportunity

Whenever the leaders of the planet's two most powerful countries — and some of their top companies — get together, there is a chance to do big things. But that would require sustained commitment from both parties, which does not currently seem possible in either capital. If nothing goes horribly wrong — and Xi expresses faux admiration at the White House's new helipad — the two sides will consider the gathering a success. But others should not.

The article was first published by the Center for Strategic and International Studies.



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Xi Jinping's four-point peace proposal

Can China mediate US-Iran war?



● LAU KA-KUEN/SCMP



By Atul Kumar
Fellow in Strategic Studies
Programme at ORF

O P I N I O N

On September 12, 2026, Chinese President Xi Jinping reiterated his four-point proposal for peace in the Middle East in his BRICS speech in New Delhi. First presented during Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince Sheikh Khaled bin Mohammad's visit to Beijing last April, the proposal rests on four principles: peaceful coexistence, respect for national sovereignty, international rule of law, and coordination between development and security.

Xi argued that a political settlement leading to a permanent and comprehensive cease-fire would facilitate de-escalation and end hostilities, helping to rebuild trust and establish a new regional security architecture. Xi's speech and the proposal suggest that after observing the successive failures of mediation in the US-Iran-Israel War, China is now inclined to play a more direct role in facilitating a settlement.

The war in the Middle East has now continued for over six months, marked by multiple rounds of attacks followed by tactical pauses. Both the US and Iran have also pursued negotiations, but a durable resolution remains elusive. US President Donald Trump has even suggested that the war may continue until after the US midterm elections in November.

Several states have sought to mediate the conflict. Oman, Pakistan, and Qatar have played facilitative roles, while Egypt and Turkey have supported diplomatic efforts and carried messages between the parties. Most major powers, however, have remained on the sidelines, calling for peace and indirectly encouraging both parties to seek a cease-fire and resolution. China, similarly, has sought a cease-fire

and peace and indirectly exerted influence over Pakistan and Iran. However, the leading mediators either lack the coercive leverage of great powers or carry perceptions of strategic bias. Unless a major power or a coalition of them becomes more directly involved, the conflict may prove difficult to resolve. The war's second-order effects on regional economies, particularly energy supplies and their dependent sectors, make greater involvement by major powers increasingly urgent and necessary.

For China, the war has raised input costs for its manufacturing sector, while instability around the Strait of Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb could compound these pressures by disrupting energy supplies and trade. Both waterways are critical to China's energy security, commercial connectivity and Belt and Road interests; their destabilisation would therefore deepen the conflict's economic costs for China and aggravate wider regional insecurity.

China is Iran's largest oil customer, purchasing 80 percent of the latter's shipped oil in 2025, and Tehran's access to Yuan-denominated trade has

been an important economic lifeline against the US sanctions. Further, Beijing has also openly opposed unilateral US sanctions targeting Chinese entities involved in Iranian oil trade. These ties give China unusual access to Tehran and can prove crucial in mediation.

China's leverage over Washington is indirect, but Trump understands that Beijing can raise the costs of prolonged confrontation. The two powers have intensified their economic rivalry, but their deep economic interdependence leaves room for high-level bargaining. Washington's recognition of Beijing as a near-peer, together with Trump's promotion of a possible "G2" relationship, could provide additional scope for such engagement. Collectively, these factors give Beijing a potentially valuable role in mediat-

ing between the two sides. Beijing's rhetoric on mediation has also gained momentum, with its 2023 role facilitating the restoration of diplomatic relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia frequently cited as evidence of China's potential to contribute to another regional settlement.

Middle Eastern states have increasingly engaged China and signalled support for a proactive Chinese role. Since the war began, several senior Middle Eastern leaders have travelled to China, including Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince, the King of Jordan and Qatar's Prime Minister, alongside the foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia, Iran and Kuwait. In addition, Xi visited Egypt and engaged other regional leaders during the recent SCO Summit in Bishkek and the BRICS Summit in New Delhi. These interactions suggest that consultations between China and Middle Eastern states are taking place at an increasingly high tempo. In parallel, Trump visited Beijing in May, while Xi is expected to visit Washington on September 24, where the Middle East will be a major item on their agenda.

The eventual Chinese mediation in the US-Iran War, if proven successful, could mark the end of the unilateral moment. An existing superpower concluding a war with a smaller regional power on terms shaped by a rival rising power would offer a powerful image of America's relative decline. Already, US bases have come under sustained attack, while regional states are increasingly wary of granting Washington unfettered access lest the embers of war reach their shores. A successful Chinese mediation could end the war and help restore regional stability. However, it will signal a broader erosion of US primacy and accelerate Washington's strategic retrenchment from the Middle East.

The article was first published by Observer Research Foundation.



Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Khaled bin Mohammad (c-r) arrives in Beijing, China, on April 13, 2026, to meet with Chinese officials.

● SOCIAL MEDIA



China's leverage over Washington is indirect, but Trump understands that Beijing can raise the costs of prolonged confrontation. The two powers have intensified their economic rivalry, but their deep economic interdependence leaves room for high-level bargaining. Washington's recognition of Beijing as a near-peer, together with Trump's promotion of a possible "G2" relationship, could provide additional scope for such engagement.



Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games:

Nemati wins kumite gold, Iran crashes out in men's football

Sports Desk

It was a day of mixed fortunes for the Iranian delegation at the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games as Mahmoud Nemati claimed a second karate gold for the country while the U23 team crashed out in the group stage of the men's football event following a 4-1 defeat against North Korea.

A day after Morteza Nemati triumphed in the men's kumite -75kg class, reigning Asian champion Mahmoud replicated his elder brother's success by winning the top prize in the +84kg category.

Nemati began his campaign with a 5-0 win against Vatthana Xayasan of Laos and then defeated Nepal's Tenzing Sherpa by the same scoreline to set up a final clash with world bronze medalist Sanad Sufyani of Saudi Arabia in a repeat of the final showdown at June's Asian Championships in Bali, where the Iranian had emerged victorious.

Nemati overcame a two-point deficit in the early stages of the contest to secure a 6-3 victory over his familiar foe, rounding out an impressive run for the Iranian karate squad, which also featured three silver medals on the previous day at the Toyohashi Gymnasium.

Ali-Asghar Asiabari set-

led for a runner-up finish in the men's -84kg, following a 9-1 loss to high-profile Jordanian Mohammad Al-Jafari – the reigning Asian champion and bronze medalist at the 2025 World Championships.



Iranian karateka Mahmoud Nemati celebrates after winning the men's kumite +84kg gold medal at the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games on September 23, 2026.

● VARZESH3

In the women's competition, meanwhile, 20-year-old prodigy Fatemeh-Zahra Saeidabadi fell to a controversial 6-4 loss to Malaysia's Adeola Fay Robert in the -55kg final, though it still provided Iran women's head coach

Zangeneh with some consolation after world champion Atousa Golshadnejad crashed out in the first round of the -68kg class. The Iranian trio of Fatemeh Sadeqi, Zeynab Hosseini and Sepideh Amini also won silver in the women's

tee himself a place on the podium. Fotouhi bowed out in the quarterfinals after losing to his compatriot in an all-Iranian clash. Pakdaman advanced from the group stage with four wins and one loss before beating an Uzbek fencer

peared to be well on its way to a place in the quarterfinals when North Korea's Ri Song Hung scored an own goal to put Iran U23 in front with 17 minutes played at the Wave Stadium Kariya. The game, however, turned

draw against the UAE in the simultaneous fixture to finish atop the group with five points, while the Iranian team was sent packing.

Beach volleyball

The pair of Abbas Pourasgari and Alireza Aqa-

Iranian team of Abolhassan Khakizadeh and Amirali Qalenovi in securing a place in the knockout stage.

Pourasgari and Aqajani will conclude the group stage against the Thai duo on Saturday in what will be a top-spot decider in Pool F. Khakizadeh and Qalenovi will also look to claim the top spot in Pool H when they take on the host pair of Kota Kurosawa and Taito Mizumachi today at the Hekinan Ryokuchi Beach Court.

3x3 basketball

Iran's women's 3x3 basketball team continued its perfect run in Pool B, defeating Chinese Taipei 14-10 to advance to the quarterfinals.

Shamim Nouri contributed seven points and eight rebounds, with Mahla Abedi adding six points and seven rebounds, as the Iranian trio claimed a third successive victory, having beaten Uzbekistan (19-5) and Japan (18-16) earlier.

Elsewhere at the multi-sport event, Iran claimed a first victory in four outings in men's handball, defeating Kazakhstan 28-23 to finish fourth in Group B with three points and advance to the quarterfinals. In kabaddi, Iran's women's team fell 37-23 to India to finish runner-up to its formidable opponent in Group A, while the men's team defeated Malaysia 67-33.

team kata event, courtesy of a 5-0 defeat to world champion Vietnam in the final.

Sabre bronze

There was further success for Iran in fencing as the country's sabre captain Ali Pakdaman secured the bronze medal in the men's individual event.

Pakdaman and fellow Iranian fencer Mohammad Fotouhi competed in the individual sabre event, with Pakdaman reaching the semifinals to guaran-

tee himself a place on the podium. Fotouhi bowed out in the quarterfinals after losing to his compatriot in an all-Iranian clash. Pakdaman advanced from the group stage with four wins and one loss before beating an Uzbek fencer

Football humiliation

Having beaten the UAE 3-1 in its Group B opener before a goalless draw against China, head coach Hossein Abdi's side ap-

peared to be well on its way to a place in the quarterfinals when North Korea's Ri Song Hung scored an own goal to put Iran U23 in front with 17 minutes played at the Wave Stadium Kariya. The game, however, turned

Iran U23 head coach Hossein Abdi looks dejected after a 4-1 defeat against North Korea in the men's football group stage at the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games on September 23, 2026.

● VARZESH3

jani claimed a second successive victory in the preliminary phase of the men's beach volleyball event on Tuesday, defeating Oman's Ahmed Al-Housni and Khalfan Al Mamari 2-0 (21-12, 21-13) to join their fellow

Sports Desk

Alireza Dabir, the chairman of the Iranian Wrestling Federation, said the country would withdraw from the upcoming U23 World Championships in Las Vegas if even one Iranian wrestler is denied an entry visa by the United States.

The 10th edition of the annual showpiece will kick off on October 12 at the Thomas & Mack Center in Las Vegas, where Iran – represented by 20 wrestlers – will look to repeat the 2024 freestyle team title, having finished runner-up to the United States last year, while chasing a fifth Greco-Roman crown – and third in a row – in seven years. Iranian sport has struggled with entry visa complications for international tournaments in recent years, especially since a military conflict between Iran and a US-Israeli coalition began on February 28. The Iranian wrestling squad missed out on the 2023 U23 Worlds in Ti-

rana, Albania, due to the same issue, while members of the national team's support staff were prevented from entering the United States for the 2026 FIFA World Cup in June. In the latest development, Iran's men's wheelchair basketball team had to withdraw from the IWBF World Championships in Ottawa earlier in the month after host Canada refused to issue entry visas to head coach Behrouz Soltani and his assistant, Mohammadreza Dastyar. Dabir said some obstacles had emerged over the issuance of US visas for members of Iran's delegation, adding that he had decided not to apply for a visa himself because he expected his application to be rejected. "We have decided that I will not take action to obtain a visa because they



probably will not issue one to me. We are waiting for visas to be issued for the other members," Dabir said. "As I said before, if a visa is not issued to the mem-

bers of the team, especially the wrestlers, even one person, we will definitely send neither the freestyle team nor the Greco-Roman team. We have made it clear [to United World Wres-

ting] and are firmly committed to this decision." Despite the uncertainty over Iran's participation, Dabir said the wrestlers had been working hard in preparation for the event

in recent weeks. "These boys have worked hard and are ready to compete," said the former world and Olympic champion. "If the United States wants to win the freestyle competition by any means, then the way to do it is to deny visas to some of our boys," Dabir said. "I hope that if the competition is to be held fairly, visas will be issued to all members of our team." Las Vegas has also been named the host city of the 2027 Senior World Championships, which will serve as part of the qualification pathway for the Los Angeles 2028 Olympic Games. Dabir had hinted back in May at launching a petition to strip the United States of hosting next year's event should Iranian wrestlers be denied en-

try visas for the upcoming U23 Worlds.

"I told Mr. [Nenad] Lalović that Iran, the United States, and Russia are title rivals, and if the US doesn't want to grant us visas this year, they will do the same again to Iranian and Russian wrestlers for the 2027 Senior Worlds, leaving the Americans with an easy path to secure Olympic berths while we chase quotas in other tournaments," Dabir had said of his conversation with the Serbian head of the sport's international governing body.

"If that's the case, we should submit a petition to change the 2027 host, just like the 2026 event was moved from Bahrain. We are seriously pursuing this. If our U23 team doesn't receive full visas, I will be among those speaking with other federations to collect signatures to move the 2027 Worlds to another country. That event has Olympic quotas, and we cannot afford to jeopardize our young athletes' careers."

Lorestan home to around 100 historic bridges

Iranica Desk

Approximately 100 historic bridges are located in Lorestan Province, many of which have been registered on Iran's National Heritage List, according to the province's director general of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts.

Speaking to ISNA, Ata Hassanpour highlighted the exceptional architectural diversity of Lorestan's bridges and their importance to the province's cultural heritage.

He added that the country's only specialized center dedicated to historic bridges is located in Lorestan and serves as the national research and conservation base for these structures.

Hassanpour said significant funding was allocated for the first time in 2025 to restore a

number of historic bridges in the province. The funding was used to restore the ancient Pol-e Dokhtar, Kolehr-Mamulan, Afrineh and Siyahpeleh bridges.

Regarding the condition of the Kashkan Bridge following

the devastating 2019 floods, Hassanpour said funding had been allocated to study one of its piers. The study was completed in 1404, and the project is scheduled to enter its implementation phase in 1405 (2026-2027).

He stressed that the goal is not to reconstruct the pier in its original form, but to stabilize the existing structure so that it can withstand future flooding. Hassanpour also announced the discovery of a historic bridge pier during construction work in Borujerd. He said the pier probably dates to the Pahlavi era, although its exact date has yet to be determined. He added that archaeological investigations would be carried out as construction work continues to determine whether other remains of the bridge are present at the site. Highlighting the historical significance of Lorestan's bridges, Hassanpour said the province's mountainous terrain, along with its numerous rivers and valleys, had made bridge construction essential for overcoming natural obsta-



Pol-e Dokhtar Bridge
● chn.ir



Kolehr-Mamulan Bridge
● farsnews.ir

cles since ancient times.

He noted that bridges were built in Lorestan during various historical periods, including the Achaemenid, Parthian and Sassanid eras, and that some of these structures have survived to the present day. Beyond their architectural value, the bridges also reflect Lorestan's historical role as a corridor connecting different parts of western Iran. Many were built along important routes and adapted to the region's rugged terrain, showcasing the engineering

knowledge and construction techniques of their respective periods. Their locations along rivers and historic travel routes also highlight the relationship between infrastructure, settlement and trade over the centuries.

Hassanpour emphasized that Lorestan's historic bridges are an important part of the province's cultural identity and tourism potential. He said their preservation, restoration and introduction to visitors require sustained attention and continued funding.

Iranica Desk

Shabestar, in East Azarbaijan Province, may at first glance be defined by a handful of well-known historic landmarks. Yet the region's tourism potential extends far beyond a single monument or a particular historical period. A diverse collection of historical, natural and cultural attractions, along with traditional handicrafts, is scattered across the towns and villages of the city. If properly introduced and connected, these assets could turn Shabestar into one of northwestern Iran's most diverse tourism destinations.

According to available information, 45 historical, natural and cultural sites in Shabestar have been registered on Iran's National Heritage List. In addition, four natural sites and two examples of intangible cultural heritage have been included on national registers. However, what could further highlight Shabestar's tourism potential is not simply increasing visitor numbers at individual attractions, but creating a coherent tourism route linking the city's various destinations, according to chn.ir.

At the heart of Shabestar, a number of historic landmarks reflect the city's rich cultural heritage. The tomb of Sheikh Mahmoud Shabestari, the 14th-century Persian poet and mystic, is regarded as one of the region's most important cultural monuments. Nearby, the Jaame Mosque of Shabestar reflects another layer of the city's history, preserving traces of different historical periods. Because these monuments are integrated into the urban fabric, they offer an opportunity to combine

heritage tourism with an experience of everyday life in the city.

The town of Khameneh, with its centuries-old plane trees and historic buildings, presents a different side of Shabestar. Its old plane trees are important natural and cultural features of the town and, together with the mosque and the tomb of Mir-Panj, form a cluster that could appeal to visitors interested in history, architecture and nature. Such attractions also demonstrate that tourism in Shabestar is not limited to prominent landmarks; natural and urban features are themselves part of the area's historical identity.

Tasuj, another historic town in the city, is home to a Jaame Mosque and a



An old plane tree in Khameneh
● chn.ir

historic bathhouse located near the bazaar. Together, these sites offer visitors a glimpse into the structure of traditional Iranian cities and the relationship between markets, mosques and public spaces. Their proximity could facilitate the development of a pedestrian tourism route through the town's historic fabric, allowing visitors to experience not just an isolated monument but part of the city's historical structure as a whole.

In Kouzeh Kanan, cultural

Shabestar connects history, nature, culture



Jaame Mosque of Shabestar
● chn.ir



Kouzeh Kanan, National Crafts City
● chn.ir

and economic potential is closely linked to traditional handicrafts. The town is known for its long tradition of pottery and its pottery workshops, while its designation as a National Crafts City in the field of pottery has further underscored the importance of this heritage. Visits to pottery workshops and opportunities to learn about the production of traditional crafts could become part of the city's tourism experience while also directing tourism revenue

more directly toward local communities and artisans. Shabestar also has considerable archaeological potential. The Qarah Tappeh and Gol Tappeh archaeological sites in Zeynabad are among the remains that trace human settlement and activity in the region back to much earlier periods. If protected, properly introduced and equipped with the infrastructure necessary for visitors, these sites could form another link in the city's tourism chain, offer-

ing a picture of the region's history before the emergence of its modern towns. In northern Shabestar, the port town of Sharafkhaneh occupies a special position. The historic Tal Pier is a remnant of a period when Sharafkhaneh was an important center of port activity on the shores of Lake Urmia. The lake's current condition, alongside the remains of its former port operations, adds a new dimension to the area's tourism narrative. Sharafkhaneh could simul-

taneously tell visitors the story of the region's economic and transportation history and the environmental changes that have affected Lake Urmia.

Taken together, these attractions demonstrate Shabestar's potential to develop a multifaceted tourism route. Such a route could begin with history and mysticism in Shabestar, continue to the architecture and natural features of Khameneh, proceed through the historic fabric and bazaar of Tasuj, connect with pottery and handicrafts in Kouzeh Kanan, and then extend to the archaeological sites and historic port of Sharafkhaneh. Such an approach could encourage visitors to move beyond a brief stop at a single at-

traction and spend several days exploring the city. In recent years, steps have also been taken to strengthen accommodation infrastructure. The Sedaghat Boutique Hotel, for example, has been launched and has created employment for 10 people. Expanding small, locally operated hotels and accommodation facilities could enable tourists to stay longer in the city and visit several attractions during their trip. The handicrafts sector also

has potential to contribute to the tourism economy. Around 25 active workshops operate across the city, while a handicrafts market has been established to sell products made by local artisans. Alongside the region's historical and natural attractions, these businesses could form part of a broader tourism value chain, allowing visitors not only to see heritage sites but also to engage with local products and culture. Despite these assets, Shabestar's main challenge cannot simply be described as a lack of attractions. The more important issue is how these attractions are presented, connected and developed for tourism. Many visitors may enter the city with the intention of seeing a particular landmark, but without clearly defined routes, adequate services, accommodation and an integrated tourism program, they may leave after only a short stay.

The future of tourism in Shabestar will therefore depend to a considerable extent on the city's ability to transform a collection of scattered attractions into a unified and coherent experience. If its historic monuments, archaeological sites, natural landscapes, handicrafts, urban heritage and cultural traditions are presented as part of an interconnected tourism network, Shabestar could evolve from a destination for short visits into a place where travelers stay and explore for several days. Such an approach would not only provide greater exposure for the city's cultural heritage but could also ensure that a larger share of the economic benefits generated by tourism reaches local communities.



Wartime photos by six photographers to be released from national archive



Arts & Culture Desk

Iran is set to publish photographs by six prominent Iranian photographers documenting the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war, drawing on the National Library and Archives of Iran's digital collection as the country marks its annual Sacred Defense Week, ISNA reported on Wednesday.

The collection features images of battlefields, war-affected areas, funerals and burials of those killed, as well as grieving families.

The photographers are Reza Deghati, Manoochehr Deghati, Kaveh Golestan, Mohammad Farnood, Alfred Yaghoubzadeh and Kamran Jebreili. Some of the photographers documented events and everyday life in

war-affected areas at close range. Their work forms part of the visual record being released through the archive's digital resources.

Sacred Defense Week begins each year on Sept. 22, marking the start of the Iran-Iraq war, and runs through Sept. 28. In 2026, it falls from Sept. 22 to 28.

The war began on Sept. 22, 1980, when Iraq attacked Iran, and a ceasefire took effect on Aug. 20, 1988, after nearly eight years of fighting.

Iranian war photographers documented more than battlefield operations, helping preserve a visual record of combatants, civilians, damaged cities and the human consequences of the conflict.

Alongside photographers work-

ing for media organizations and official institutions, independent photographers also travelled to the front lines and produced their own accounts.

Their photographs became important visual documents of the war, with some published outside Iran. Deghati covered six years of the conflict and won first prize in the news category of World Press Photo in 1983 for a series of Iran-Iraq war images.

Yaghoubzadeh was present at the front from the early years of the war, documenting combatants, destruction and its human impact.

Golestan left an extensive body of work from the 1980-1988 conflict, continuing his documentary approach to social photography.

Minister urges rural students to pursue science, honor national identity

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Culture minister Abbas Salehi on Wednesday urged rural students to pursue academic success regardless of where they live, saying the country's 3.5 million rural pupils should know that "the future belongs to you". "The flag is not just paper or cloth; it is the identity card and identity of a nation," Salehi said while speaking at the start of the school year at Shahid Sadooghi School in Kashar Olya village near Tehran, Mehr News Agency reported.

He said the flag, like a national identity card, must be protected and called on students to "stand up for the country" when needed. Salehi highlighted Delaram village near Tafresh, a city in central Iran, saying 175 doctors emerged from the hamlet with nearly 200 households.

He said villages could also nurture doctors, engineers and scientists, and that birthplace should not limit academic achievement. The minister paid tribute to student and teacher casualties, saying 36,000 students and 5,000



A schoolgirl gives a bouquet to Culture Minister Abbas Salehi as he visits a school in village near Tehran, Iran on September 23, 2026.

● MEHR

teachers sacrificed their lives for the country during the eight-year Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s. He also cited 277 students and 67 teachers and education workers who fell after Israel launched a war on Iran in June 2025.

Shajarian; a voice that redefined Iranian singing

By Alireza Sepahvand
Journalist

OPINION EXCLUSIVE

The first day of Mehr (September 23), the seventh month in the Persian calendar year when the school year begins in Iran, is not merely the birthday anniversary of a great singer. This day recalls the birth of an artist who, in the history of Iranian music, attained a position beyond that of a singer. Mohammad Reza Shajarian was among the few artists whose name cannot be explained merely through a few works, albums, or memorable performances. Shajarian became part of the musical memory of Iranians and, more importantly, throughout several decades of artistic activity, created a new image of "Iranian singing." Shajarian was born on September 23, 1940, in Mashhad, and from his childhood years was familiar with singing and music. But what later distinguished him from many of the singers of his generation was not merely possessing a beautiful-toned and powerful voice. A good voice can make a singer famous, but it is not enough to make him enduring. What transformed Shajarian into a different phenomenon was his ability to turn the voice into a language.

He did not merely sing poetry over a melody. Poetry lived in Shajarian's singing. The words acquired weight and character in his mouth, and each line, according to the meaning and atmosphere of the poem, took on its own musical form. That is why, in many of his performances, even before the listener pays attention to the musical complexities, they connect with the meaning and emotion of the poetry.

Shajarian drew upon the heritage of the great masters of Iranian singing and the radif, but he did not remain within that heritage. His profound familiarity with the radif, his knowledge of gushahs and dastgahs, and years of working with masters such as Abdollah



Davami and Nour-Ali Boroomand provided a foundation for the formation of his independent artistic identity.

In fact, perhaps one of the most important aspects of Shajarian's artistry is precisely this: that he established a balance between "loyalty to tradition" and "personal creation." He neither broke away from the past nor remained in the past.

If we want to look more precisely at his singing, we should begin with his tahrirs. Tahrir in Shajarian's singing is not a display of vocal power. Even in the most complex tahrirs, there is a musical logic. He uses tahrir as a musician uses a phrase, shaping it. Speed, duration, pauses, cadences, and returns all follow the structure of the singing and the meaning of the poetry.

This can also be seen in his phrasing. Shajarian gives silence as much importance as sound. Sometimes a brief pause in his singing is as powerful as a long tahrir. Sometimes he produces a note so simply and unpretentiously that the listener may not, at first glance, notice its technical difficulty. Yet this "seemingly simple simplicity" is the result of years of knowledge, practice, and control.

His vocal timbre was another distinctive feature. Shajarian's voice did not lose its character across different vocal ranges. In the low register, it had dignity, and in the high register, power. But more important than these two qualities was his ability to change his expression. A singer may have a powerful voice, but may be unable to express sorrow, grandeur, love, protest, or longing in different forms with that same voice. Shajarian possessed a broad range in this regard.

That is why his position cannot be measured merely by the number of his works or his public fame. Shajarian's importance lies in the influence he had on our conception of singing. After him, a singer who wanted to be serious and possess an identity inevitably had to define his relationship with the heritage Shajarian had created.

But alongside all these technical and artistic qualities, another aspect of his personality was also important to the people, and that was his humility and closeness to them. Despite his very lofty position, Shajarian did not distance himself from the people. His relationship with audiences, students, colleagues, and members of the music community was not merely a professional relationship.

This human quality, alongside his artistic character, created a more complete image of him.

Nevertheless, perhaps it is better on Shajarian's birthday anniversary to speak less about his fame and more about his "singing." To speak about how a voice can become a language. How tahrir can move beyond a display of technique and reach the expression of emotion. How one can remain faithful to the radif without becoming absorbed into it. And how one can sing the poetry of Hafez, Saadi, Rumi, or other poets in such a way that the listener feels as though the poem is being heard for the first time.

Shajarian has left us, but that is not the main issue. Artists of this kind are mortal, but their language remains. Future generations may hear his voice through different means, their musical tastes may change, and even the form of singing may change, but it is unlikely that the history of Iranian singing will be able to remove the name of Mohammad Reza Shajarian from its narrative. He was not merely one of Iran's greatest singers. Shajarian was one of those who gave Iranian singing identity, distinction, and a new language.

And perhaps that is why the first of Mehr remains not an ordinary day for Iranian music.

Iran to stage cultural week in four Russian cities to cement ties

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran will hold a cultural week in four Russian cities from Sept. 24 to Oct. 6, featuring 13 cultural, artistic, scientific and professional programs aimed at presenting the country's historical, cultural and contemporary identity. The event will take place in Moscow, St Petersburg, Kazan and Astrakhan as part of efforts to deepen cultural ties between Iran and Russia, said Hossein Divsalaar, deputy head of the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization for scientific and cultural cooperation in an interview with ISNA published on Wednesday. "The program will go beyond cultural showcases by bringing together artists, academics, cultural institutions and professional groups from both countries," Divsalaar added. A key new focus is the creative

industries, including cinema and animation, video games, toys, and fashion and clothing. Business-to-business (B2B) meetings and specialized talks will allow Iranian participants to discuss the Russian market, joint projects and exports of cultural products and services. One of the main events will be a performance by Iran's National Orchestra at Moscow's historic Bolshoi Theatre, one of Russia's leading opera and ballet venues. The orchestra will also perform in Kazan and St Petersburg. Kazan will host programs centered on the Qur'an and the life and character of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), coinciding with the city's designation as the 2026 Islamic Culture Capital.

The cultural week will also include a major cultural and artistic exhibition showing capacities from more than 30 cul-

tural and artistic fields, as well as a film and animation week, programmes for children and teenagers, academic and scientific meetings, and initiatives to promote cultural exports and creative industries. The event is being held on an unprecedented scale across four Russian cities, organizers said. Divsalaar said the initiative's success would not be measured solely by visitor numbers. The continuation of professional cooperation, negotiations, agreements and contacts after the event would also be important, he said. He added that discussions launched during the cultural week should be followed up after its conclusion to turn them into joint projects involving artists, universities, cultural institutions and economic and cultural professionals in both countries.