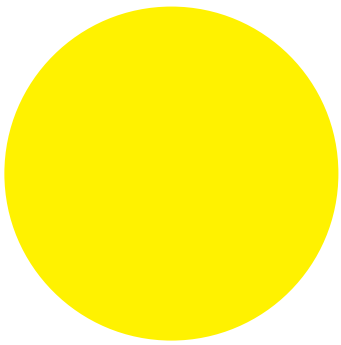


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The screen grab shows black smoke and flames rising from an oil tanker caught fire after it hit a mine while trying to leave the Strait of Hormuz on October 10, 2026.

Trump's unilateral approach limits mediating role in Iran dispute

By Delaram Ahmadi
Staff writer

INTERVIEW EXCLUSIVE

The Kremlin has announced that Russian President Vladimir Putin, in coordination with Tehran, conveyed Iran's position to US President Donald Trump regarding the possibility of reaching an agreement to resolve the conflict. But what significance does Russia's involvement carry at a time when countries such as Qatar and Pakistan are also acting as mediators? Amir Ali Abolfath, an international affairs expert, told Iran Daily that the defining feature of the Trump administration is its unilateralism and its desire to resolve the Iran issue on its own. Given this approach, he said, even Russia is unlikely to be able to break the deadlock.



Amir Ali Abolfath

IRAN DAILY: At a time when countries such as Qatar and Pakistan are seeking to mediate between Tehran and Washington, what significance does the Russian president's role in conveying Iran's position to the United States carry?

ABOLFATH: Russia naturally carries greater weight in international relations than countries such as Qatar and Pakistan. Although relations between Russia and the West, as well as between Russia and the United States, are currently somewhat strained, Putin has managed to establish a good personal relationship with Trump, and perhaps this channel could help.

However, the problem between Iran and the United States is not a matter of mediation. The two countries' respective demands are so far apart that it does not seem likely that any country, even one as powerful as Russia or China, could help bridge the gap. Nevertheless, every available avenue should be explored. If Putin's

friendly relationship with Trump can be used to convey Iran's message directly to the US president, or if Putin can persuade Trump to change his position toward Iran, that should certainly be welcomed.

Personally, however, there is little reason to be optimistic that even Putin can make a difference. Trump intends to put Iran in a position where it must either surrender or prepare for war. Iran, for its part, is not currently prepared to surrender. Therefore, the likelihood of war is very high.

Given that Russia had previously expressed its readiness to cooperate in transferring Iran's enriched uranium, how likely is it that the nuclear issue was part of Tehran's message to Washington? Could there be a division of diplomatic responsibilities between Russia's potential role in the nuclear file and regional countries' efforts to advance an understanding on issues such as the Strait of Hor-

muz and ending the conflict?

It is unclear whether this proposal is fully acceptable to both Iran and the United States. I have no indication that Iran has agreed to transfer all 400 kilograms of its 60-percent-enriched uranium to Russia. As far as I know, Iran's position is that some of this uranium should be diluted.

The Americans do not appear particularly keen on this arrangement either. The United States wants to remove this capability from Iran directly and on its own terms. It seems the Americans want to compel Iran to hand over the uranium voluntarily, with US oversight in place. Washington is concerned that if the uranium goes to Russia, the Russians might find a way to return it to Iran in the future, given their strained relations with the West and close ties with Tehran.

As for a division of diplomatic responsibilities, it must be said that this will not break the deadlock. It would be a mistake to assume that each of these countries can work

a miracle.

Ultimately, everyone is making an effort. Any country that has relations with both Iran and the United States will eventually try to find a way to resolve the issue. Yet no one has succeeded over the past 24 or 25 years. It is unlikely that anyone will succeed unless Iran and the United States change their positions.

What does the timing of Iran's position being conveyed to Washington, alongside the Moscow-Washington agreement to supply diesel to the US and global markets, tell us about the two countries' priorities under current circumstances?

Moreover, the diesel agreement may have been blown out of proportion. This, too, is characteristic of Donald Trump. During an election campaign, he needs to be able to say that he has accomplished something and that diesel prices will come down.

The details of the agreement that have been disclosed do not sug-

gest that Russia intends to export enough diesel to significantly increase market supply and drive prices down. The first shipment is said to involve 500,000 tons of diesel, an amount equivalent to half a day's consumption in the United States.

It is unclear whether such a relatively small volume could alter the dynamics of the energy market to the extent that it would justify saying Russia has abandoned Iran. Russia itself is currently facing a diesel shortage and is reportedly importing diesel from India. In addition, the entire arrangement depends on Ukraine halting its attacks on Russian refineries, which it is not doing. This is precisely why Trump has become angry and said that Ukraine's president must step aside.

Beyond that, Ukraine and Europe are also unhappy with the agreement. Such arrangements are unlikely to hold up unless the Ukraine issue is resolved in a fundamental way.

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Iran will strike enemy vessels again if necessary: *Senior commander*



Habibollah Sayyari
● IRNA

International Desk

Iran's Army Chief of Staff and Deputy Coordinator Rear

Admiral Habibollah Sayyari said on Sunday that Iran has struck enemy vessels and will target them again if further

action is taken against the country. "We have struck enemy vessels, and if anything happens

against Iran again, we will strike them," Sayyari said in an interview.

He said that the country has capabilities and resources that are widely recognized around the world.

"We have defended ourselves firmly and will continue to do so. Wherever necessary, we will take action to strike the enemy," he said.

Iranian Armed Forces have been in full control of the Strait of Hormuz since the start of the US-Israeli aggression against the country on February 28. Commercial traffic through the strait has fallen sharply, with vessel movements dropping to single digits amid the ongoing war on Iran and the restrictions on shipping through the strategic waterway. Tehran has said it will not

reopen the waterway until the United States meets its demands and takes steps to restore Iran's trust.

Iran has also warned vessels over using unauthorized routes to transit the waterway. Tehran says any movement in the chokepoint must be conducted under Iranian arrangements. The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Navy said on Saturday that a crude oil supertanker is in flames after striking a naval mine while attempting to exit the Strait of Hormuz via an "unauthorized and dangerous route".

The IRGC Navy said the tanker sought to leave the strait when it struck the mine, triggering a powerful explosion. It added that the supertanker had switched off its navigation and positioning systems before

the incident.

The vessel was now burning in a massive blaze visible to people living along the coast, the statement noted.

"A massive fire awaits any violating oil tanker that seeks to disregard the security and regulations of the Strait of Hormuz," the IRGC warned.

The incident took place after the IRGC naval forces struck a giant liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) carrier in the Strait of Hormuz attempting to pass through an "illegal route" south of the strategic waterway.

In a statement on Friday, the IRGC warned that action against vessels using unauthorized routes would no longer be confined to the Strait of Hormuz, saying violators would be pursued and punished across the entire region.

Yemen's Ansarullah warns airlines against using Saudi airports after Riyadh attack

International Desk

Yemen's Ansarullah resistance movement issued a new threat to Saudi Arabia's airspace on Sunday after an attack on the kingdom's international airport in Riyadh killed 12 people and wounded hundreds, forcing authorities to stop operations.

Saturday's attack, the deadliest on Saudi soil in more than a decade, was a sharp escalation in the Yemen war, where Riyadh backs forces against the resistance movement, who captured swathes of Red Sea coastline in a lightning offensive last month.

While the Ansarullah movement stopped short of claiming the strike, they threatened new attacks on the kingdom's airports, except for the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, warning passengers not to travel.

"The airports and airspace are exposed to targeting and constitute a theatre of operations for our forces," military spokesman Yahya Saree wrote on X. He stressed that Yemeni Armed Forces will continue implementation of the "airport for airport, siege for siege, and escalation for escalation" equation until the Saudi military aggression on Yemen ceases, and the tight blockade against the Arab Peninsula country is lifted completely.

The remarks came on the same day that Saudi fighter aircraft carried out a new spate of airstrikes against multiple locations across Yemen.



Smoke and flames rise from King Khalid Airport after Yemen's Ansarullah movement attacked the airport in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on October 8, 2026, in this screengrab obtained from a social media video.

The Saudi-led coalition fighting the group in Yemen attributed Saturday's attack to Ansarullah, calling it a "full-fledged war crime".

The assault on Riyadh's airport drew condemnation from the United Nations and world leaders including US President Donald Trump, who said he was considering joining Saudi strikes against the Ansarullah movement.

"We may. We're going to look at it. We just found out about the recent attack, so we'll make a decision," he told reporters.

Four Saudi citizens, two Bangladeshis, one American, one Egyptian, one Jordanian, one Syrian, one Palestinian and one Sudanese were killed, Saudi Arabia's civil aviation authority said. It said some of the 309 wounded were in serious condition.

Authorities suspended operations at the airport into Sunday, a senior aviation source said, with air traffic monitor Flightradar24 saying the closure was extended until 2100 GMT.

The US, Canadian, German and Spanish embassies in Saudi Arabia warned their citizens to avoid Riyadh airport. The strike was the deadliest attack in the kingdom since a 2015 suicide bombing.

While seizing large swathes of territory along the Red Sea coast in Yemen, the Ansarullah has also attacked Saudi transport hubs, oil facilities and other civilian targets in the world's largest crude exporter.

Saudi Arabia and the Yemeni forces it backs have struggled to contain Ansarullah's advance, despite a counter-offensive aimed at recapturing territory including the area around the Bab al-Mandab strait that is crucial to global energy flows.

The Ansarullah had already controlled the capital Sana'a and most of Yemen's major population centers since the start of the war in 2014.

Riyadh's military coalition intervened to support the government the following year.

Iran denounces Rubio's threat to 'dismantle ICC brick by brick'

International Desk

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei denounced US Secretary of State Marco Rubio's threat to dismantle the International Criminal Court (ICC) "brick by brick" if Washington's allies fail to rein in the tribunal, describing the move as a direct assault on the post-World War II institutional framework.

In a post on X on Saturday night, Baqaei recalled the lessons of the 1930s, noting that "international orders collapse not only through aggression, but when the use of force becomes normalized and the world remains silent."

He challenged European governments directly: "Does standing by an alliance mean defending international law and the post-WWII normative & institutional framework – or standing with the U.S. as it dismantles them?"

Baqaei warned that sacrificing law and justice to appease an aggressive ally reduces any talk of human rights and a "rules-based international order" to "empty rhetoric."

The remarks underscore Iran's longstanding position that selective application of international law by Western powers undermines the very institutions established after 1945 to prevent aggression and protect civilian populations.

US President Donald Trump's administration on Friday imposed new sanctions on the International Criminal Court, hours



after one of its former judges won the Nobel Peace Prize, putting Washington on a diplomatic collision course with European allies.

The court denounced the move as an "assault on the rule of law and on the very foundations of the international legal order," and called on its 125 member states to take action to defend it.

"The Court cannot stand alone. Its fate now rests also in the hands of the states that created it," it said in a statement. "This is not just about defending a single institution, but about safeguarding the international order grounded upon the rule of law. History will judge this moment."

The Trump administration has long been hostile to the court, founded in 2002 to prosecute war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide, and has previously imposed sanctions on its prosecutors and judges.

Friday's move goes much further, potentially punishing companies that provide services to the court itself, amounting to an unprecedented attack on an institution founded on an international treaty.

Trump's unilateral approach ...

Given the strategic relations between Tehran and Moscow and Russia's standing in international affairs, how will Putin's direct involvement in conveying Iran's message affect the Trump administration's calculations? Could this role increase the cost of disregarding Iran's positions and pave the way for a more realistic political solution?

The defining feature of the Trump administration is that it wants to resolve its dispute with Iran directly and on its own. Unlike Obama, Trump does not believe in a collective approach or the P5+1 framework, and he has also sidelined Europe. If Europe is not at the negotiating table, Russia is certainly not going to be given

such a role.

The Trump administration is characterized by unilateralism. Trump argues that the dispute is between Tehran and Washington and that the United States does not need anyone's help. Either Iran will willingly accept Washington's demands, or American military and economic power is sufficient for the United States to force Iran to surrender on its own.

Given this logic and approach, I am not very optimistic that the Russians will be able to untangle the problem for us.

Nevertheless, diplomacy remains ongoing. Even during a war, diplomacy continues. War itself is also part of the same diplomatic process. When the parties fail to achieve their desired objectives, they

resort to war in the hope that it will give them greater leverage to impose their demands through diplomacy.

Under the current circumstances, unfortunately, the balance has shifted much more heavily toward war than toward an agreement.

I do not subscribe to the notion of a war-versus-negotiations dichotomy, because negotiations are already taking place. If there is a dichotomy, it is between reaching an agreement and going to war.

So far, the Americans have imposed two major wars on Iran without achieving their objectives. It is possible that they could impose a third war and still fail to achieve what they want. But negotiations are continuing.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist

CARTOON



Iran to press ahead with 20,000-MW nuclear power plan despite attacks

Economy Desk

Iran will continue work on its plan to generate 20,000 megawatts of nuclear power, the head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) said on Sunday, describing attacks on sensitive nuclear and industrial facilities as war crimes. “Our construction projects did not stop even during the war, and they will not stop,” Mohammad Eslami said at the international conference “Ecocide: the Silent War Crime” in Tehran, warning of the environmental consequences of strikes on nuclear and industrial facilities. The AEOI has included the 20,000-MW nuclear power target for the year 2041 in its strategic document and the national development plan. According to Eslami in 2024, implementation had begun following site selection and the launch of activities by construction and operation companies, with projects at different stages of progress. The organization is also required to accelerate nuclear power development and meet the quantitative targets for clean energy production within the specified timeframe, including a target of 3,000 MW under Iran’s seventh development plan. Referring to the environmental benefits of Iran’s only nuclear power plant, Bushehr, Eslami

said that the 1,000-MW facility had prevented the release of about 90 million metric tons of carbon into the atmosphere to date. “Based on assessments by the World Association of Nuclear Operators (WANO), the Bushehr nuclear power plant ranks among the world’s top 10 in terms of safety and efficiency,” he said. The plant produces no emissions, Eslami said, and has a very high level of safety. He added that such performance and achievements should not be halted but replicated. “We will continue implementing the 20,000-MW nuclear power plan with strength,” he said. Eslami also referred to attacks on Iran’s nuclear and non-nuclear facilities during the US-Israeli war that began in late February. He said the strikes had targeted not only nuclear facilities, where an attack could have far-reaching consequences, but also oil refineries, petrochemical complexes and irradiation centers served by the AEOI to support public health and food safety. Eslami said the attacks had targeted facilities that use radioactive sources in various industries. An irradiation system contained 17 radioactive sources, while petrochemical companies used 117 such sources. Many of the country’s

large, advanced industries rely on precision instruments based on nuclear technology for safety and measurement, he added. Steel factories also contained 146 nuclear source packages. He also mentioned research systems and scientific centers at Sharif University of Technology, Isfahan University of Technology, Iran University of Science and Technology and Shahid Beheshti University. Eslami criticized the attackers for disregarding the human and environmental consequences of their actions, saying the strikes demonstrated their distance from humanity and indifference to human life. Turning to the applications of nuclear technology in health care, he said the technology had brought profound changes to people’s lives. Without it, many diseases, particularly cancer, would be more difficult to diagnose, he said, adding that nuclear technology provides services in both diagnosis and treatment. “How can a country that has developed and acquired this technology be asked to abandon it simply because a bullying



power demands it?” Eslami said. He also criticized what he described as a double standard in nuclear policy, referring to US plans to expand its own nuclear power capacity. The US has reached agreements and made plans to increase the number of its nuclear power plants, Eslami said, adding that the US president had ordered a fourfold increase in the country’s nuclear power capacity in 2025. “How can a country that has imposed the greatest pressure and restrictions on Iran put the development of its own nuclear

industry on the agenda while preventing Iran from accessing the same technology?” he said. Iran has faced Western sanctions for decades over its nuclear program.

Iran plans sterile-mosquito project

In a separate development on Sunday, the AEOI and Iran’s Ministry of Health, Treatment and Medical Education signed an agreement to develop insect sterilization technology to control the invasive Aedes mosquito and combat dengue fever, chikungunya and Zika.

Under the agreement, the two sides will draw on the country’s scientific, research and technological capabilities to establish a facility for mass-rearing sterile male Aedes aegypti mosquitoes and conduct pilot and field studies to assess the technology’s effectiveness, ISNA reported. The AEOI will also cooperate in providing gamma or X-ray irradiation equipment, training personnel in irradiation technology, supplying specialists in irradiation and dosimetry, and ensuring the performance and maintenance of the equipment delivered under the agreement.

Tehran, Ashgabat discuss rail, road cooperation, new border route

Economy Desk

Iran and Turkmenistan have agreed to advance a road project linking Gamdagh and Etrek, with construction expected to begin within the next one to two months, Iranian Transport and Urban Development Minister Farzaneh Sadeq said, as the two countries seek to expand transport cooperation and follow up on previous agreements. Sadeq, speaking about the outcome of her recent two-day visit to Turkmenistan, said the trip was aimed at reviewing previous understandings and following up on their implementation. Her ministry is responsible for pursuing the work of the Iran-Turkmenistan Joint Economic Commission, she said, according to IRNA. During a meeting with the head of Turkmenistan’s side of the joint commission, the two sides reviewed earlier agreements and understandings and made progress on



several areas of cooperation, Sadeq said. Rail transport and border terminals, particularly those serving rail traffic, were among the main areas of progress, she said, adding that closer cooperation was important given Turkmenistan’s role in moving cargo entering Iran. On road transport, Sadeq said the construction of the Gamdagh-Etrek road had been put on the agenda to address existing problems and facilitate travel. Under an agreement between the two sides, construction is expected to begin within the next one to two months. An Iranian company with the capacity to carry out the project

has been selected as the contractor, she said. The road will be built on Turkmenistan’s territory and is expected to ease travel for Iranian truck drivers and improve road links between the two countries. The Turkmen side also considers the route necessary for developing its road network, she added. Energy cooperation was another topic discussed during the visit, with agreements reached that she hoped would yield results in the near future. Sadeq said regional talks also covered trilateral cooperation between Iran, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan, as well as coordination among Iran, Turkmenistan and Russia.

Iran-Afghanistan trade deals exceed \$400 million at Kabul exhibition

Economy Desk

Iranian companies have signed contracts worth more than \$400 million at Afghanistan’s fifth Abu Hanifa International Exhibition in Kabul, the head of the Iran-Afghanistan Joint Chamber of Commerce said. Mahmoud Seyadat told IRNA in an exclusive interview on Saturday that a shift toward joint investment and production could significantly expand economic cooperation between the two countries. Seyadat said that the exhibition was particularly significant because of the level of participation by businesspeople and the presence of official Iranian delegations. For the first time, a delegation from Iran’s Chamber of Commerce attended the event, including members of its board of directors and more than 50 businesspeople active in various sectors, he said. Seyadat identified a change in the approach to bilateral economic cooperation as one of the main features of this year’s exhibition. While previous interactions had



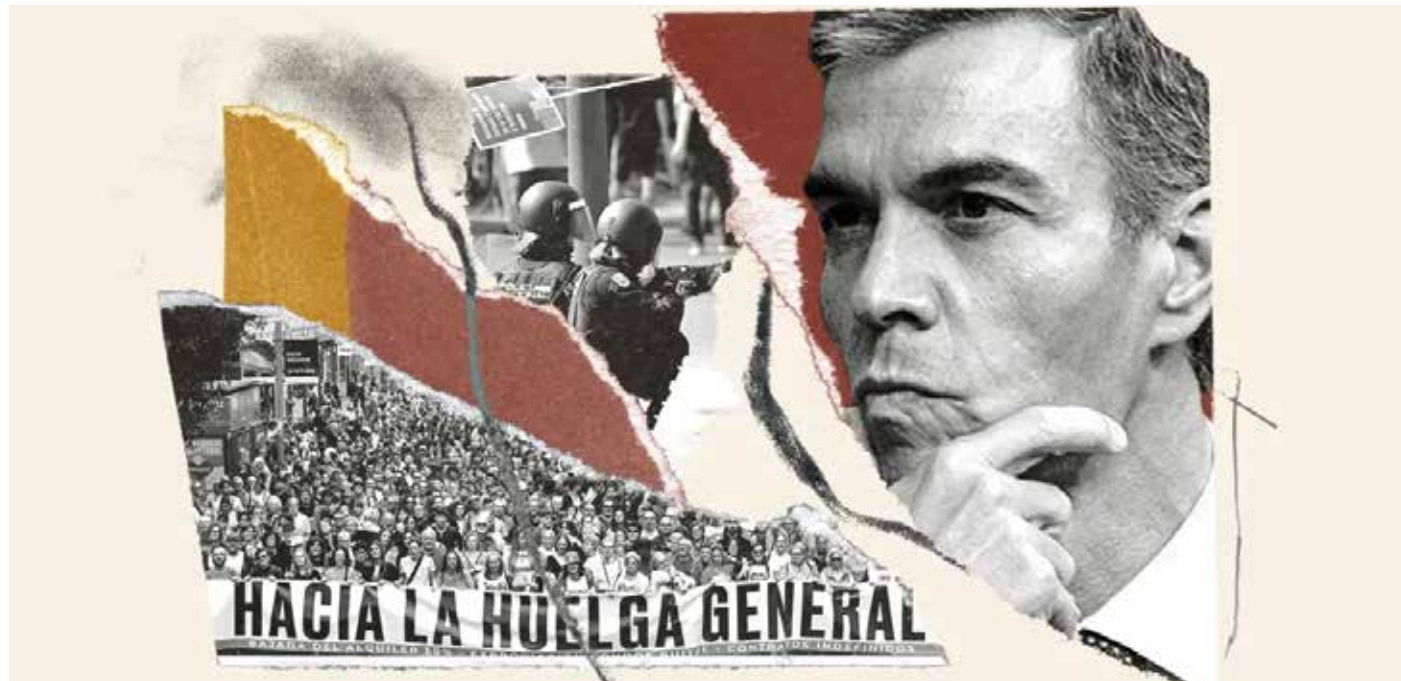
largely focused on exports, businesspeople are now paying greater attention to joint investment, technology and knowledge transfer, and participation in domestic production in Afghanistan, he said. Support for production and investment in Afghanistan has created conditions for greater participation by domestic businesspeople and foreign investors, Seyadat said. Iranian companies can therefore expand their exports while establishing a more lasting and effective presence in the Afghan market through participation in production projects and joint investments. Seyadat said the Iranian government needed to support the expansion of economic ties with Afghanistan.

Measures should include backing investment in the country, expanding exports of technical and engineering services, activating the export guarantee fund and introducing incentives for exporters, he said. Another important issue in developing trade with Afghanistan was enabling export transactions to be settled in rials and establishing an appropriate mechanism for importing Afghan-made products into Iran, he said. Implementing these measures could facilitate trade, reduce barriers and help establish more sustainable economic relations between the two countries. Seyadat said Afghanistan, despite difficulties stemming from nearly five decades of internal and

external wars, was pursuing reconstruction and development. Many Afghan businesspeople who had been living abroad had returned and were active in various economic sectors, he said. Despite existing challenges, economic activity and reconstruction in Afghanistan were continuing, while support for production and investment was creating new opportunities to expand regional cooperation, he added. Seyadat also pointed to border restrictions and closures involving Pakistan, saying the current circumstances could create greater opportunities for Iran to enter the Afghan market. He said Iran was expected to play a more prominent role in meeting Afghanistan’s economic needs. To capitalize on this opportunity, border problems must be resolved quickly, truck movements facilitated, and the transit and export capacity of border crossings expanded, Seyadat said. If obstacles are removed and agreed measures implemented, Iran’s exports to Afghanistan could increase to \$10 billion, he added.

Sánchez's gamble

This 'all-in' election will have int'l impact



By Nic Lawley
Special advisor to the
director of Chatham
House

OPINION

The decision by Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez to call a snap election is a risky move, but he will have felt he had little choice. His decision fires the starting gun on a year of vital and polarized elections across Europe.

The announcement is not entirely unexpected. Spain was required to hold an election by August 2027 anyway. And Sánchez's multiparty coalition has looked fragile since it formed in July 2023: it has not passed a full budget since.

In January, the government approved a decree that regularized the status of 500,000 undocumented migrants and asylum seekers — a move unusual among EU countries generally committed to tightening migration restrictions. In July, the Spanish enclave of Ceuta was overwhelmed by a surge of tens of thousands of migrants, leading to criticism of government policy from within Spain and abroad, including US President Donald Trump.

This month, a new issue has arisen as protests grow over housing affordability. The protests prompted the government to introduce emergency legislation, only to see the bill rejected by Spain's Parliament late last week. This gave Sánchez his opening to call a general election, arguing that 'to do more, we need to renew and broaden the support of the people'.

What are Sánchez's chances?

Sánchez is a proven survivor and faced similar difficulties in 2023. But calling an election now is a gamble. The summer's crises have given his political opponents plenty to work with, and trouble assails the prime minister and his party, the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE), from every side. The opposition on the right will use the January decree and images of the Ceuta crisis to rally their vote and criticize the government's competence. The left will point out the housing crisis has deteriorated under Sánchez. Then, there are the corruption scandals that plague the prime minister. Some of his closest political allies are embroiled in the Koldo case — an investigation into corruption in health procurement contracts during the COVID-19 pandemic. In a separate case, the prime minister's own wife has been charged with embezzlement and corruption.

To survive, Sánchez will use the same playbook that worked for him in 2023, where he characterized the contest as a choice between 'Sanchismo' (his brand of social democrat politics) or a 'backward-looking' far right. His hope will be that opposition to the PP right wing opposition party — and far right Vox party in particular — will mobilize left wing voters in a highly polarized contest. Vox leader Santiago Abascal regularly speaks of a 'migrant invasion' and used Sánchez's January decree to call for 'Repatriations, deportations and remigration'. Notably, Sánchez's speech on the

steps of La Moncloa (the Spanish prime minister's residence) put international talking points at the centre of his pitch, contrasting his positions with the those of the right, and particularly US President Donald Trump and Argentinian President Javier Milei:

'We have strived to build a better world for our fellow citizens and for the rest of humanity,' he said, 'supporting Ukraine, the European Union, and the United Nations in their darkest moments. Denouncing genocidal regimes when others remained silent.'

'Fighting tyrants, techno-oligarchs, and speculators who want to destroy the future of our sons and daughters to enlarge their pockets. Doubling our aid to international cooperation while others boasted of cutting it with their chainsaw or on that military



The illustration shows Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez along with snippets of the Ceuta border crisis and protests over housing affordability.

● THE TIMES



The opposition on the right will use the January decree and images of the Ceuta crisis to rally their vote and criticize the government's competence. The left will point out the housing crisis has deteriorated under Sánchez. Then, there are the corruption scandals that plague the prime minister. Some of his closest political allies are embroiled in the Koldo case — an investigation into corruption in health procurement contracts during the COVID-19 pandemic. In a separate case, the prime minister's own wife has been charged with embezzlement and corruption.



Spain's Health Minister Mónica García (left) and ERC Party spokesperson Gabriel Rufián converse during the plenary session. Rufián is seen as a potential unifier of the fragmented parties to the left of PSOE.

● EFE

altar of five per cent of GDP'

Spain's voting system

50 days of intense campaigning and negotiation between parties will now follow. These negotiations matter because of Spain's electoral system.

Spain uses the D'Hondt method in provincial constituencies, which punishes parties polling in low single figures. Small parties can survive by running together on a joint list, but past attempts have had mixed results.

Sumar is the largest of these groupings. Despite having no leader, it has launched 'Frente Amplio' (the Broad Front) to try to pull support together. Much will depend on the firebrand MP Gabriel Rufián. He is seen as a potential unifier of the fragmented parties to the left of PSOE. But he is not a Sumar figure, and internal politics and personalities have a habit of wrecking electoral pacts in Spain. Podemos, PSOE's coalition partner, joined Sumar's list in 2023 but broke away within months.

For Sánchez, what happens to his left matters more than ever. His pitch therefore needs to be binary. Expect him to use 'Trump, Milei and Flávio Bolsonaro (ahead in Brazil's presidential race after the first round) as bogeymen to focus minds even before the ballots are printed.

On the right, the Partido Popular (PP) will likely approach a 'Ming Vase strategy' of trying to just get through the next 50 days without any major mishaps. It is not clear that this can work. Questions about what a coalition with Vox would look like will follow their leader Alberto Feijóo. His inability to respond adequately to such questions in 2023 likely cost him victory.

Spain's vote will now be the first in a series of crucial European elections. France chooses a new president in spring 2027. Italy, Poland, Finland and Greece are due to vote before the year is out. Many of these contests will look like Spain's, with some seeing fragile coalitions on the left facing a confident and surging right.

The results will matter well beyond domestic politics. For instance, as the US continues to demand the continent do more for its own defence, disruptive elections will make it harder to make progress on a more coherent joint European approach to security. This campaign will be closely followed across the continent — and from across the Atlantic — as politicians seek to perfect their pitch in ever more polarized times.

The article was first published by Chatham House.

Let voters have their say

OPINION

There are moments in the life of democracies when parliament, because of its divisions and deadlocks, is unable to respond to the urgent needs of a country — and when that happens, it means it is time to give citizens

a voice. Spain is living through one of those moments.

The failure of two housing decrees to secure passage in Congress on October 2 led Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez to bring the term to an early end, amid a deep societal and political debate over the insur-

mountable barriers that many people face in accessing rental housing and home ownership. Galvanized by the eviction of Maricarmen Abascal, the debate goes far beyond that particular case and touches on existential issues such as the constitutional promise of "a

decent quality of life". Faced with the current parliamentary paralysis — a government without a majority and beset by legal cases, and a right- and far-right opposition that has pushed the tension inside Congress to unprecedented levels — democracy has a mecha-

nism to untie the knot: early elections.

The November 29 election will allow parties and candidates to confront each other's proposals on issues such as the housing crisis, which has mobilized tens of thousands of people in the streets, and to resolve at the

ballot box what worries and divides society. After years of polarization and partisanship in the worst sense of the term, it is time for clarification.

The playing field is defined. The Popular Party (PP) and Vox already have their roadmap: they will focus on the corruption cases

”

The far-right party Vox appears to be the partner the PP would favor if it wins without an absolute majority, but it is not a party like the others. The xenophobic rhetoric of its leaders, its proximity to global racist movements and parts of its program that contradict the Constitution place it in positions more radical even than leaders such as Giorgia Meloni of Italy or Marine Le Pen of France. The election will give voters a chance to scrutinize every platform, including those that could have a destructive impact on a diverse and pluralistic society.

affecting the Socialist Party (PSOE) and on the Ceuta crisis after the influx in late July of 70,000 people from Morocco. The risk for PP leader Alberto Núñez Feijóo, who aspires to succeed Pedro Sánchez at La Moncloa, the seat of government, is that in his eagerness to broaden his base to the right, he may radicalize his positions so much that he scares off moderate voters.

The PSOE and the left are reaching the end of the term with the polls against them, but in the protests after Maricarmen Abascal's eviction, they have found a lever to mobilize the grassroots. After months consumed by legal cases, they can now return the debate to the realm of social policies: those aimed at addressing citizens' everyday needs, such as housing, education and healthcare, areas in which the socialists have driven decisive changes during decades of democracy.

Faced with profound public discontent over housing, the government has at least made a belated effort to begin seeking answers. The political right — the national parties as well as the Catalan regional party Junts — frustrated it. Social democracy now has an opportunity to demonstrate that its solutions are still valid, and to assert its legacy of social progress, as well as the pacification of Catalonia after the unilateral secession bid, and Spain's role in a world



where multilateralism and international law are under assault.

There is a danger that no one, progressive or conservative, should underestimate: the possibility that, for the first time since the death of the dictator Francisco Franco and the consolidation of democracy, a far-right formation could govern in Spain. Today, that possibility is real. Vox ap-

pears to be the partner the PP would favor if it wins without an absolute majority, but it is not a party like the others. The xenophobic rhetoric of its leaders, its proximity to global racist movements and parts of its program that contradict the Constitution place it in positions more radical even than leaders such as Giorgia Meloni of Italy or Marine Le Pen of France. The election

will give voters a chance to scrutinize every platform, including those that could have a destructive impact on a diverse and pluralistic society. Nothing has been decided yet. The prospect of a government with Vox ministers and policies cannot be trivialized, nor should the major parties resign themselves to that outcome. The Spanish elections will also be decisive on this cru-



Santiago Abascal, leader and presidential candidate of Spain's far-right party Vox, gestures as he speaks during a rally.
● JUAN MEDINA/REUTERS

cial question for Spain and for its position in Europe and the world. It is time for the voters to have their say.

The editorial first appeared on *El País*.

Spain's snap election

Why Sánchez called it, what comes next



By Javier Carbonell
Policy Analyst

OPINION

Spain is something of a political paradox. Its economy has been growing faster than most other major European economies, while Pedro Sánchez's governments can point to a substantial progressive record, from the green transition and expanded social policies to development aid and the regularisation of migrants. Many of these measures have been fiercely criticised by the right. Yet, in the end, it was an issue on which the left should theoretically have had the political advantage — housing — that pushed Sánchez to call an early election.

Spain is experiencing one of Europe's most acute housing affordability crises. The issue exploded politically after the eviction of Maricarmen Abascal, an 87-year-old woman who had lived in her Madrid home for seven decades. Her eviction triggered large demonstrations and renewed mobilisation around housing across the country.

The government responded with two emergency housing decrees containing stronger protections for tenants and measures intended to regulate the rental market. Their defeat in Congress, however, exposed the weakness that has haunted



Sánchez's government since the 2023 election: it does not have a reliable parliamentary majority. Junts, the Catalan pro-independence party on the centre-right, joined the PP and Vox in voting down the measures. Sánchez has now turned that parliamentary defeat into an electoral confrontation, calling a general election for November 29. His argument is clear: if the government cannot secure enough votes in parliament to tackle the housing crisis, voters

should give it a stronger mandate.

The starting point is difficult for the left. Recent polling puts the PP ahead of the PSOE and shows Vox as particularly strong. A future PP-Vox government is, therefore, one of the central possibilities shaping the campaign, although its composition would depend on the result and subsequent negotiations. Sánchez, however, has been here before. In 2023, the PP

also led the polls, yet Sánchez mobilised enough support for the PSOE and later assembled a parliamentary majority that allowed him to remain prime minister.

The biggest uncertainty may lie to the left of the PSOE. The space once occupied by Podemos is fragmented, with several parties preparing to contest the election through a new Frente Amplio platform, while Podemos remains outside it. Whether the left can reorganise quickly



Maricarmen Abascal, 87, is being evicted on a stretcher from her apartment in Madrid, Spain, on September 23, 2026.
● GETTY IMAGES

enough may prove decisive. Sánchez is a master at turning difficult situations on their head. He faces difficult odds, yes — but so will his adversaries when they face him.

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Paris 2026 World Taekwondo Grand Prix:

Salimi, Zandi triumph
as Kiani falters in women's quarters

Sports Desk

Iran's Arian Salimi and Abolfazl Zandi grabbed gold medals in their respective events at the Paris 2026 World Taekwondo Grand Prix to boost their bids for an Olympic quota for Los Angeles 2028.

Nahid Kiani, meanwhile, having suffered a last-eight setback at the Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games, endured a second disappointing campaign in eight days, crashing out in the women's -57kg quarterfinals.

A winner of a historic Olympic silver medal at Paris 2024, Kiani had a promising start on Saturday, beating South Korea's Kim Ga-hyeon 2-0 (19-8, 10-7), and then rallied from behind to defeat France's Manissa Lakehal-Rollings 2-1 (7-10, 19-3, 10-7) to set up a quarterfinal clash with high-profile Brazilian Maria Clara Pacheco. The reigning world champion emerged victorious in successive rounds (7-0, 11-2) before going all the way to collect her third Grand Prix gold of the season.



Iran's Arian Salimi (red) is seen in action against Great Britain's Caden Cunningham in the +80kg final at the Paris 2026 World Taekwondo Grand Prix on October 9, 2026.

● WORLD TAEKWONDO

out the round 14-9. Despite looking drained after a hectic schedule, which also featured a gold medal at the Asian Games, Salimi responded strongly in the second round, taking it 13-9 to set up a decider. The 22-year-old Iranian then prevailed 11-7 in the third to secure his second medal in this year's Grand Prix Series, following his bronze in Muju, South Korea, last month, and collect 60 points in the WT Olympic Kyorugi Rankings. Salimi began his campaign with a straight-round victory (8-7, 12-8) over fellow Iranian Mohammad-Hossein Yazdani, and then defeated Marat Mavlonov in back-to-back rounds, securing his third successive win over his Uzbek opponent following his victories in the finals of May's Asian

Championships and the Asian Games.

Salimi also outclassed Belarus' Artsiom Plonis in successive rounds to advance to the semifinals, where the Iranian overcame Seif Eissa, the reigning -87kg world champion, 2-0 in a high-profile meeting, ending the Egyptian's hopes of back-to-back Grand Prix titles.

In the men's -58kg, world and Asian champion Zandi, who finished empty-handed at the Asian Games after an injury forced him out in the quarterfinals, bounced back in style, sweeping reigning Olympic champion Park Tae-joon of South Korea 2-0 (7-4, 11-6) in the final. Zandi also opened with a win in an all-Iranian battle, beating Mahdi Razmian 2-0 (6-0, 12-3), before a 2-0 victory (14-7, 13-7) against Nigeria's Nouridine Issaka sent him into the semifinals. Zandi led his last-four clash against Jesus Fraile Rodriguez with a 21-2 win in the first round before the Spaniard withdrew from the second.

Double gold

Salimi capped off his impressive run in the men's +80kg division with a come-

back victory over Caden Cunningham in Saturday's final, repeating his triumph over the Briton in the final

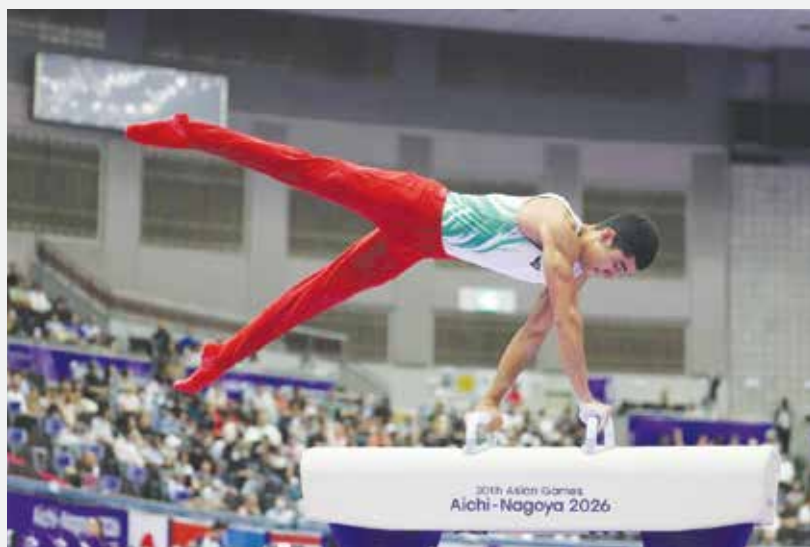
at the Paris 2024 Olympics. The pair traded scores in a fierce opening round before a head kick helped

Cunningham take the lead for the first time at 8-6. Salimi kept chasing, but the Briton held firm to close

Future bright for Iranian gymnastics
after impressive run in Nagoya

Sports Desk

Iranian artistic gymnastics offered a glimpse of its considerable potential at the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games, combining impressive medal-winning performances in the men's competition with historic breakthroughs in the women's events despite the administrative turmoil that has plagued the sport's national governing body in recent years.



A 10-member Iranian delegation, comprising seven men and three women, traveled to Japan following efforts by the Sports Ministry and the National Olympic Committee to overcome the management crisis and internal disputes that have plagued the country's Gymnastics Federation.

In the men's artistic gymnastics competition, the Iranian roster featured Mahdi Olfati in the vault, Mahdi Ahmadvand on the rings, Arman Khodaei on the pommel horse, Mohammadreza Hamidi on the horizontal bar, and Siavash Siahi on the rings.

Hangameh Hadiani, meanwhile, made history by becoming the first Iranian woman since the 1979 Islamic Revolution to compete at the Asian Games in the vault while wearing Islamic hijab. Fatemeh Tavassoli and Yalda Hassan-Shokati represented Iran in women's trampoline, while Arya Mam-Abdollah and Mohammad Saeidabadi competed in the men's event. Coaches Reza Kheirkhah, Mahan Bajrang and Somayeh Cheraghi also

qualified for finals, underlining the country's growing ambitions beyond simply gaining international experience.

Khodaei, just 20, delivered the campaign's most remarkable result by winning silver on the pommel horse. Competing in his first international event, he secured Iran's first-ever Asian Games medal in the apparatus.

A winner of a historic silver medal at Hangzhou 2022, Olfati replicated his success in the vault, though he narrowly missed out on gold by just 0.066 points. The women's campaign, meanwhile, carried significance beyond the results. Hadiani's appearance in Islamic dress marked a historic milestone for Iranian women's gymnastics, demonstrating that the athletes could compete on the continental stage while observing the country's dress requirements.

In trampoline, Mam-Abdollah narrowly missed out on a medal in what many believed was the result of controversial judging decisions in the final. Tavassoli also made history as the first Iranian female gymnast to qualify for an Asian Games final. Hassan-Shokati could also have challenged for a strong result but for an injury that disrupted her campaign. Together, their performances and milestones point to a bright future for the sport in Iran ahead of major events in the coming years.

The results in Nagoya offer a message to Iranian sports policymakers as they look toward the Los Angeles 2028 Olympics: artistic gymnastics, one of the Olympics' most medal-rich sports, should not be overlooked amid administrative disputes.

With sustained support, improved management and continued investment, the sport could become a more significant source of international success for Iran.



Iran's Arman Khodaei performs in the men's pommel horse final at the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games on September 24, 2026.

● IRNA

played a significant role in Iran's campaign, with their close relationships with the athletes and technical expertise helping seven Iranian gymnasts reach the finals of their respective events.

The standout performance came in the men's artistic gymnastics events, where all five Iranian competitors

AFC Champions League Elite:
Esteghlal eyes two in two,
Tractor looks to open account

Sports Desk

Esteghlal will look to build on an impressive opening-day win against Al Sadd when they face another Qatari opponent, Al Gharafa, away from home in the AFC Champions League Elite today at Al Rayyan's Thani bin Jassim Stadium.



● AFC

Jasir Asani stole the show with a goal and an assist as the Tehran Blues defeated Al Sadd 3-0 in their league-phase opener in Basra before the international break, but the in-form Albanian winger remains a doubt for today's game after being forced off injured midway through Thursday's 1-1 away draw against Tractor in the Persian Gulf Pro League.

Al Gharafa could hardly have asked for a tougher opening-round opponent, having faced Al Hilal away from home, with the four-time Asian champions coming away with a 2-1 win.

While the final score suggested a tight contest, it was anything but, as Al Gharafa had just over 31 percent possession and managed only three shots on target.

Meanwhile, the other Iranian top-flight side, Tractor, will look to get

off the mark in this year's continental elite club competition against Qatar's Al Shamal SC, having suffered a 1-0 defeat to the UAE's Shabab Al Ahli in Dubai on matchday one.

The two sides will square off at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Muscat, which serves as Tractor's home venue for the match, after the

Iranian side's players endured an exhausting multi-stage journey, including overland travel through Iraq, to reach the Omani capital. Tractor will be without Iranian international goalkeeper Alireza Beiranvand, who has been left out of the squad for disciplinary reasons following Thursday's domestic league draw.

Head coach Javad Nekounam's men will need to improve their finishing, having managed just one shot on target from seven attempts against Shabab Al Ahli.

Debutants Al Shamal came within a whisker of defeating two-time champions Al Ittihad Club in their opener, only to settle for a 1-1 home draw after Georginio Wijnaldum's stoppage-time equalizer salvaged a point for the Saudi Pro League heavyweights.

Iranica Desk

The Sixth International Exhibition of Rural and Nomadic Capabilities was held at the Tehran International Exhibition Center from October 8 to 11, featuring local music performances, traditional cuisine and displays of Iran's diverse ethnic customs. The event drew a strong turnout, although some visitors and exhibitors said attendance could have been even higher with broader publicity. Speaking during a visit to the exhibition, Anoushirvan Mohseni-Bandpey, deputy minister for tourism affairs at the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism, described rural and nomadic areas as a strategic opportunity to strengthen local economies and support sustainable development across the country. He highlighted Iran's climatic, cultural and social diversity, saying the country's villages and nomadic regions offer not only natural, historical and cultural attractions but also embody an important part of Iran's identity and traditional way of life. He said the strategic use of these assets could create new opportunities for domestic tourism. Mohseni-Bandpey noted that rural and nomadic tourism extends beyond visiting natural attractions or showcasing local products. Customs and traditions, local ceremonies, indigenous architecture, traditional cuisine, handicrafts and the lifestyles of local communities are valuable assets that can be used to create distinctive travel experiences and introduce Iranian culture to domestic and international visitors. The deputy tourism chief said developing the sector requires linking cultural and natural resources with tourism planning and local community participation. He stressed that tourism can contribute to the sustainable

● iranica.news

Iran turns to rural tourism to boost local economies



development of rural areas only when its benefits improve residents' livelihoods, strengthen local businesses and create employment opportunities, while also ensuring the protection of the environment and cultural heritage. Highlighting the importance of the exhibition in presenting the capabilities of Iran's provinces, Mohseni-Bandpey said such events help introduce visitors to lesser-known attractions, locally produced goods and a wide range of travel opportunities. He added that such exhibitions can also strengthen links among tourism professionals, local producers, suppliers of cultural and economic products, and tourism planners. Meanwhile, Farshid Zabihi, director of the Tehran Province office of the Iran Nomadic Affairs Organization, highlighted the

ethnic diversity of the province's nomadic communities. He said the province's nomads include groups from different parts of the country whose presence in the Tehran region dates back approximately 400 years, and who have continued their traditional ways of life and economic activities over the centuries. Zabihi added: "In Tehran Province, Lor, Turkic and Persian nomads live and work in five tribal confederations and 27 sub-tribes. In this respect, the province's nomadic community can be regarded as a diverse collection of Iranian ethnic groups and cultures." Referring to visitors' interest in local products and traditional foods, he said: "People have always welcomed locally produced goods and traditional cuisine. At this year's exhibition, products and foods such as

Aash, a traditional thick soup; Doogh, a yogurt-based drink; and nomadic-style kebabs have been offered and have attracted considerable public interest." The participation of Tehran Province's nomads alongside other ethnic groups from across the country demonstrates that, beyond its administrative and economic importance, the capital is also home to a wide range of cultures and traditions. Events such as this provide an opportunity to introduce these cultures to the public and give them greater visibility. The head of the Iran Nomadic Affairs Organization, Jahanbakhsh Mirzavand, also described the exhibition as an opportunity to showcase the potential of these communities. He said the current government had prioritized economic sustainability, income diversi-

fication and more viable livelihoods for rural communities and nomads. From this perspective, the exhibition is more than a venue for showcasing products or holding cultural performances; it also serves as a platform for highlighting the economic, tourism and production potential of different regions across the country. With proper planning and support, these capacities could help create jobs and stimulate local economic activity. A member of the nomadic community from Khuzestan Province also pointed to the public interest in the event, saying the exhibition has consistently attracted visitors and that Iranians hold rural and nomadic communities in high regard, as many families have roots in these communities. He said publicity for this year's

exhibition could have been more extensive, adding that attendance would have been higher if promotional and information campaigns had been conducted on a larger scale, as in previous editions. "At this exhibition, we have tried to introduce visitors to aspects of our culture and way of life through traditional musical instruments, local cuisine and cultural rituals," he said. The exhibitor added that the Bakhtiari tribe and other ethnic groups had also presented their distinctive ceremonies and traditions, including traditional wedding rituals, which had been well received by visitors. Showcasing these traditions alongside local products offers younger generations an opportunity to learn about customs that form part of the cultural identity of different regions across Iran — traditions that remain an integral part of everyday life in rural and nomadic communities. At this year's exhibition, more than 400 booths were set up to showcase the capabilities and products of the country's provinces, while 50 booths were dedicated to startups and technology. In addition, 500 performers, organized into 40 groups, presented traditional songs and music from different regions of Iran. The public's enthusiastic response to the event once again demonstrates that showcasing the cultures and lifestyles of Iran's ethnic groups, alongside the productive and economic potential of rural communities and nomads, can attract considerable public interest, particularly among families. Nevertheless, broader publicity about the dates and programs of such exhibitions could encourage greater public attendance and enable more people to benefit from these cultural opportunities.

Ancient qanats play vital role in Zanjan's water sustainability



● chn.ir

Iranica Desk

Zanjan Province has 828 registered qanats, traditional underground water channels that represent a valuable heritage and play a vital role in sustaining the region's water resources, an official with the provincial Agricultural Jihad Organization said. Majid Ja'fari, director of the organization's Water and Soil Department, said qanats are more than engineering structures; they are living heritage that must be protected through careful planning, chn. ir wrote.

In recent years, the active participation of farmers in desilting projects has been one of the main factors behind efforts to restore and maintain the qanats, he noted. Despite being centuries old, these traditional systems continue to play a key role in supplying water and preserving the sustainability of local water resources. Ja'fari said the qanats are a testament to the ingenuity of past generations in adapting to climate change. Protecting them, he added, is essential not only for agriculture today but also for the future of tourism and

cultural heritage in Zanjan. He said the ultimate goal is to preserve qanats not only as sources of water but also as symbols of sustainability and local identity, as well as attractions for domestic and international tourists. Visiting these remarkable structures, learning about the traditional knowledge and techniques used to construct qanats, also known as Kariz, and experiencing life alongside farming communities could help turn Zanjan into one of Iran's leading destinations for agricultural tourism, he added.

Maragheh Apple Festival demonstrates agricultural, cultural heritage

Iranica Desk

The Maragheh Apple Festival, held annually in mid-October, is one of the country's important events for promoting rural development, the Presidential Office's Director General for Rural Development and Underprivileged Areas said. Alireza Nakhaei emphasized the office's support for holding various rural and agricultural festivals, saying that such events should help strengthen rural economies and promote tourism across the country.

He said these objectives should be given serious consideration by local officials in organizing the 13th edition of the Maragheh Apple Festival, according to chn.ir. Describing the festival as one of the oldest events of its kind, Nakhaei said that after 12 editions, greater efforts should be made to generate income and significantly improve the livelihoods of orchard owners in Maragheh, East Azarbaijan province. He also highlighted Maragheh's tourism potential and

its historical and cultural heritage, saying these assets, combined with the county's strong agricultural sector and apple production, could turn it into a major hub for rural tourism. Nakhaei added that festivals are not merely cultural events that bring joy to local communities; they also showcase the tangible and intangible heritage, customs and traditions of different cities. Such events should be held on a grand scale, with media outlets used to promote the regions' potential, he said.

● MEHR





Fars Province reflects Iran's history, cultural identity: Minister

Arts & Culture Desk

Southern Fars Province reflects Iran's history and cultural identity, Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Minister Reza Salehi-Amiri said Sunday at the opening of the second Shiraz Expo 2026 and the first Shiraz Art Expo in the provincial capital, Shiraz.

Salehi-Amiri highlighted the province's rich cultural heritage, historical landmarks and artistic traditions, describing Fars as the birthplace of prominent Iranian literary and artistic figures. He thanked the organizers for creating a platform to show the province's capabilities.

Fars is home to numerous historical sites, including part of the Sassanid Archaeological

Landscape of Fars Region, a UNESCO World Heritage site. The property comprises eight archaeological sites in Firuzabad, Bishapur and Sarvestan, featuring architectural remains, palaces and urban layouts dating to the Sassanid Empire, which ruled from 224 to 651.

Beyond preserving historical landmarks, Salehi-Amiri stressed the importance of supporting creative talent and strengthening the role of culture and the arts. He praised the province's creative young people and women active in the arts, describing them as valuable assets.

He also called for better commercialization of products and easier export procedures,



Iranian Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Minister Reza Salehi-Amiri speaks at an art expo in Shiraz, southern Iran, on October 7, 8682.

● IRNA

while expressing hope that the exhibitions would lead to memorandums of understanding and contracts that expand cooperation.

The exhibitions aim to present Iran's cultural, tourism and handicraft potential alongside its broader economic capabilities. Their lasting impact will depend on whether the event generates concrete agreements and sustained cooperation, helping translate cultural heritage into opportunities for preservation and development.



Children find place in the spotlight during National Children's Week

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults is offering free theater performances to working children and children from underprivileged areas of Tehran. during National Children's Week. The plays "Bastur", written and directed by Niloofar Rafiei, and "God's Cookies", written and directed by Arash Sharifzadeh, are going on stage for groups of children in Tehran on October 11 and 12, the Mehr News Agency reported. The initiative follows an October 8 performance in Qom, a city south of Tehran. The play "I Want to be Born", directed by Behnaz Mahdikhah, was staged for children from underprivileged areas of the province. Organizers



said some of the children were attending a theater performance for the first time. On Sunday, President Masoud Pezeshkian also addressed a ceremony marking National Children's Week, urging children and the wider public to stand together. He said no force or enemy could bend or defeat the Iranian nation's will. National Children's Week runs from



A scene from "God's Cookies" by Arash Sharifzadeh staged for underprivileged children in Tehran during National Children's Week.

● ISNA

October 7 to 13 under the slogan "Children's smiles, the alphabet of the homeland". Its program guidelines emphasize children's participation, cultural equity and greater attention to children in underprivileged areas.

They also call for better access to books, the arts, play and other cultural activities. The free performances are intended to give children greater opportunities to experience theater and participate in cultural life.

Disaster risk reduction must begin before disaster strikes



By Keyvan Akraminia
Natural hazards expert

OPINION EXCLUSIVE

October 12, Iran's National Day for Natural Disaster Risk Reduction, offers an opportunity to reconsider one of the most pressing challenges facing societies today: a challenge that can no longer be addressed simply by providing relief after disaster strikes. A substantial share of disaster losses stems from social, economic, structural and environmental vulnerabilities that develop long before a hazard turns into a crisis.

Earthquakes, floods, droughts, storms and other natural hazards do not inevitably lead to disasters. What turns a hazard into a destructive event is the extent of a community's exposure and vulnerability, together with its level of preparedness. From this perspective, reducing disaster losses depends less on what happens when a disaster strikes than on decisions made years beforehand.

Experience around the world has shown that investing in prevention, risk reduction and preparedness costs far less than compensating for losses after a disaster. Strengthening infrastructure, enforcing building standards, managing water and soil resources responsibly, preserving vegetation, developing early warning systems, educating the public, fostering a culture of safety and conducting regular drills can all significantly reduce the impact of disasters.

A key element of disaster risk reduction is strengthening community resilience. A resilient community is not one that never faces a disaster. It is one that can identify risks, plan for them, respond effectively when an emergency occurs and recover as quickly as possible. Public participation is equally important. Public education should go beyond a few basic recommendations issued when disaster strikes. Every household needs to understand the hazards it faces, identify safe and high-risk areas in its surroundings, have an emergency plan

and learn essential skills such as first aid, firefighting and safe evacuation. Schools, workplaces, neighborhoods and families are four vital links in the chain of community preparedness.

Effective disaster management also requires coordination across institutions. No single organization can manage a major disaster effectively on its own. Cooperation among government agencies, emergency services, municipalities, healthcare facilities, the armed forces, law enforcement agencies, non-governmental organizations, the media and the public is essential to reducing casualties and damage. Clear operational plans, a proper division of responsibilities, emergency communications and joint exercises are crucial to making that cooperation work.

Climate change, uneven urban development, population growth in hazard-prone areas and ageing infrastructure have made disaster risks more complex. Policy must therefore move beyond a purely reactive approach towards comprehensive risk management. Under this approach, hazard identification, risk assessment, vulnerability reduction, preparedness, response and recovery form an interconnected chain. Iran's National Day for Natural Disaster Risk Reduction serves as a reminder of a fundamental truth: while hazards cannot always be prevented, many of their devastating consequences can be reduced. Investing today in understanding risks, reducing vulnerabilities and improving preparedness can substantially lower the human and economic costs when disaster strikes.

Disaster risk reduction is not the responsibility of a single agency or group. It is a national and social responsibility. A safe society does not wait for disaster to strike before trying to repair the damage. It recognizes risks in advance, prepares for them and strengthens its resilience.

This day should be more than a date on the calendar. It should prompt a fundamental question: if a major disaster struck today, how prepared would Iran be?

Hafez's antidote to modern echo chambers



By Reza Gerami
Research of classical Persian poetry

OPINION EXCLUSIVE

October 12 is more than a date on the Iranian calendar. It is an occasion to rediscover a thinker whose significance has not diminished over the centuries but, remarkably, has only grown sharper. While history often gathers dust on the shelves of the past, Khwaja Shams al-Din Muhammad Hafez of Shiraz remains astonishingly alive. Yet to celebrate Hafez merely as a poet of love and mysticism is to overlook the subversive brilliance of his work. A closer reading reveals a rare truth: here was a 14th-century intellectual who anticipated an affliction of our digital age and perhaps even offered an antidote to it: the tyranny of certainty.

We live in an age of echo chambers. Modern algorithms feed us content that confirms our existing biases, narrows our horizons and encourages us to retreat into rigid, self-satisfied intellectual enclaves. We are constantly pressed to take sides, apply dogmatic labels and reject anything that gives rise to doubt. In this binary world of "us versus them",

Hafez stands as a powerful counterpoint. His poetry champions intellectual fluidity. One of the less discussed dimensions of Hafez's work is his opposition to totalizing narratives. Throughout his Divan, he appears in the guise of the "rend," an irreverent, unconventional figure who moves through the grey areas of life. The rend is no preacher speaking down from a pulpit. He is a provocateur who delights in exposing the hypocrisy of those who claim to hold the keys to absolute truth. When a hypocrite lays exclusive claim to virtue, Hafez does not respond with a direct argument. Instead, he offers a poem that ensnares the reader in uncertainty.

His method might be called semantic subversion. He deliberately crafts verses whose meanings resist a single, fixed interpretation. Is he speaking of divine love or earthly wine? Is he praising the beloved or criticizing a corrupt religious figure at the head of a mosque? He refuses to provide a definitive answer, because he understands that when every question is settled, thought itself begins to die. By denying readers the comfort of simplistic moral conclusions, Hafez compels them to undertake one of the hardest tasks of all: independent thought.

That is why his work remains an ever-changing mirror. Hafez refuses to act as a spiritual

master who tells us what to believe. Instead, his poetry invites us to come to terms with the discomfort of not knowing. This approach, the way of the rend, was precisely what Johann Wolfgang von Goethe recognized centuries later. In Hafez, Goethe found more than a master of beautiful verse. He found a kindred spirit who understood that the human soul is too vast to be confined within any single ideology. Goethe's West-Eastern Divan was his own attempt to draw on this Hafezian freedom, treating ambiguity not as a weakness but as a gateway to a broader understanding of humanity.

In a world bombarded by voices demanding that we choose a side, Hafez invites us to the tavern, where sinners and saints sit side by side, united by the knowledge that they are all searching for a truth greater than the self. Today, Hafez deserves to be celebrated not merely as a master of rhyme, but as a defender of the radical idea that doubt is a virtue. Amid the pressures to conform, the best way to preserve our humanity is to remain open, keep asking questions and never stop searching. In Hafez's tavern, we are not followers; we are explorers of ourselves.

Perhaps that is the most revolutionary lesson a 14th-century poet can teach us.