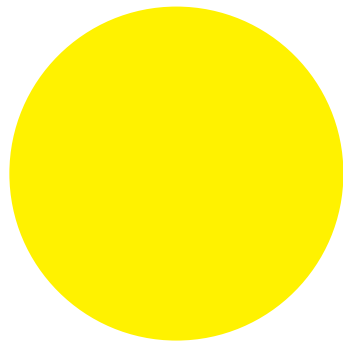


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Iraq will struggle to keep borders with Iran closed under public pressure

By Delaram Ahmadi
Staff writer

INTERVIEW EXCLUSIVE

Iraq announced on October 21 that it had closed the Shalamcheh border crossing (al-Shaib) to both passenger and commercial traffic until further notice. Reports have attributed the move to a review of security measures, technical issues and the installation of inspection equipment. However, the timing of the closure, along with a similar move previously made by Pakistani authorities, has fueled speculation that the measures may be linked to US efforts to shut down all trade routes with Iran.



Hassan Hanizadeh

In an interview with Iran Daily, Hassan Hanizadeh, a Middle East affairs expert, said that although the Iraqi government was under US pressure to close its borders with Iran, the deep human and emotional ties between the peoples of the two countries would ultimately force Baghdad to back down.

IRAN DAILY: Do you think the official explanation presented by Iraq is sufficient to justify the complete shutdown of the crossing? Given US pressure on Iran, is it possible that political considerations or pressure from Washington also played a role in the decision?

HANIZADEH: The Iraqi government has announced that the Shalamcheh border crossing in Khuzestan Province has been closed due to technical problems. As a result, many passengers from both Iraq and Iran are now stranded at the Iran-Iraq border. The Iraqi government, particularly local authorities in the country's southern provinces, is currently negotiating with officials in Khuzestan Province to reopen the Shalamcheh crossing.

It is hoped that the technical problems will be resolved in the coming days. However, it appears that Iraqi Prime Minister Ali al-Zaidi's government is seeking to close the country's borders with Iran under US pressure. In the past, it also closed its airspace to Iranian flights. But following widespread public protests and the presence of demonstrators at Iraqi airports, al-Zaidi's government was forced to reopen its airspace to Iranian flights.

The situation in Iraq is such that the government cannot define its relations with Iran without taking into account the country's civil institutions and governmental and state interests. US President Donald Trump is now exerting considerable pressure on al-Zaidi's government to drastically scale back its relations with Iran. However, given the deeply emotional ties that the Iraqi people have with Iran, the Iraqi government cannot simply carry out Washington's directives. Therefore, the closure of the Shalamcheh crossing is temporary, and the Iraqi government will be compelled to reopen its borders to Iranians under domestic public pressure.

What impact will the closure of this crossing, particularly given the lack of prior coordination with Iran, have on economic relations and trade between the two countries?

Most trucks carrying Iranian goods to Iraq travel through the Shalamcheh border crossing to reach the country's southern provinces. Dozens of trucks carrying Iranian goods are now stranded at the crossing, a situation that will make Iraq's economic conditions more difficult.

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Nothing will be same as before aggression against Iran: *Araghchi*

'US military bases failed to bring security to their host countries'

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Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (C) participates in a panel discussion held in Tehran on October 25, 2026, on the role of martyred Iranian diplomat Kamal Kharrazi in building consensus on foreign policy.
● MEHR



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Qalibaf: Any new aggression will trigger response 'beyond imagination'

International Desk

Iran's Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf said Iran is prepared to meet any violation of its territorial integrity with a response beyond its enemy's imagination, asserting that the country will not be intimidated by threats of all-out war or assassination.

"We will not be intimidated, and we are ready to deliver a response beyond the enemy's imagination to any violation of the territorial integrity of our great Iran," the top legislator said on Sunday, addressing the opening of a parliamentary session.

"Threats of an all-out war or assassination will not force the Iranian nation to back down from its rights and interests," he added.

Qalibaf argued that it was the United States that bogged itself down in a quagmire through its miscalculations and unprovoked war against Iran, and now it is the Americans who have to take the necessary steps to

extricate themselves.

"Until the Americans change their behavior, abandon their bullying and rapacious ways, and make tangible, concrete, and genuine amends in practice for their violated commitments, none of their claims will carry even the slightest credibility for the Islamic Republic," he stated. "Iran has nothing new to say."

His remarks came as the US officials have recently escalated rhetoric against Iran, threatening to bomb Iran's Kuh-e Kolang, which translates as Pickaxe Mountain.

Trump's new threats

US President Donald Trump said on Friday the US may carry out another military operation against Iran just as the Iran war nears its eight-month mark and rising fuel prices weigh on the US midterm elections.

"We may do another little Epic Fury," Trump told a rally in Florida, using the US military's term for its war on Iran.

He also on Saturday said Washington could

strike Iran as soon as "tomorrow," or reach a "big, beautiful" agreement with Tehran, amid reports that he's weighing renewed attacks on the Islamic Republic.

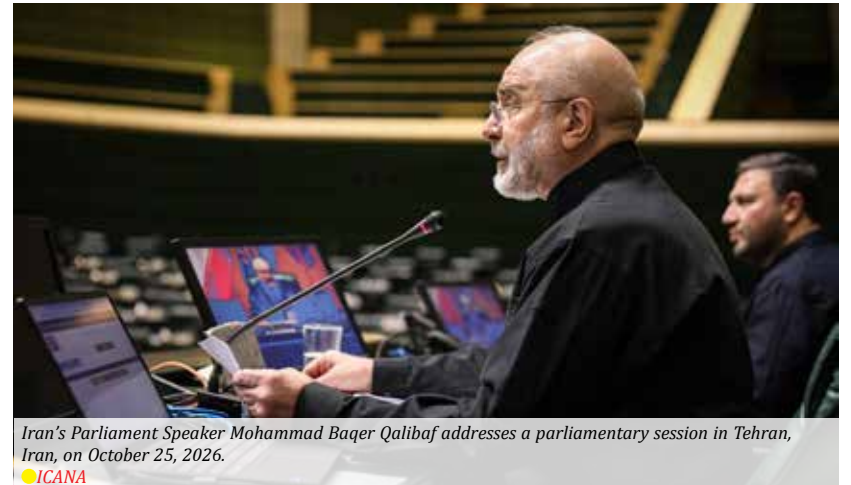
"We're thinking about doing it, and maybe tomorrow," Trump told reporters when asked how far along he was in considering a possible attack.

"Do you really think I'm going to tell you if I'm going to do it?" he added.

Trump said Iran could still avoid further military action by reaching an agreement with the US, noting that "they want to make a deal, but the problem is, will they hold the deal?" On Friday, he said this month the US would not launch an attack on Iran before the November 3 elections that will determine control of Congress, where Trump's Republican Party holds a narrow majority in both chambers.

The US and Israel launched an unprovoked war on Iran on February 28, killing thousands of Iranians.

Iran responded with a series of retaliatory



operations targeting US military assets and bases across the region. The two sides later signed a memorandum of understanding in Pakistan. But Washington soon violated the agreement by failing to respect Iran's

arrangements concerning the Strait of Hormuz, which was largely closed during the war on Iran, severely disrupting regional maritime traffic and placing further pressure on energy shipments.

Nothing will be same as before aggression against Iran: Araghchi

'US military bases failed to bring security to their host countries'

International Desk

Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said on Sunday that "nothing will be the same" as before the US-Israeli aggression against Iran, stressing that fundamental and strategic changes have taken place in West Asia since then. He made the remarks during a meeting held in Tehran to discuss the role of martyred Iranian diplomat Kamal Kharrazi in building consensus on foreign policy.

Kharrazi, who served as an advisor to the martyred Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, was assassinated in a US-Israeli strike earlier this year.

He said that fundamental and strategic changes have taken place in West Asia and that nothing will be the same as it was before the 40-day imposed war.

"For decades, the Strait of Hormuz has remained open, and neither Iran nor Oman, the two coastal states bordering the waterway, has imposed any restrictions on maritime traffic. On the contrary, both countries have helped ensure security and safety and protect the marine environment," he added.

"However, the current war has changed everything. We must acknowledge that new realities have emerged. The shipping routes through the Strait of Hormuz will no longer be the same as before, nor will the Strait be managed as it was in the past."

Iran restricted transit through the Strait of Hormuz in response to the US-Israeli aggression that began on



February 28. On June 17, Tehran and Washington signed a Pakistan-brokered Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), whose Article 5 places responsibility for reopening and managing the Strait squarely in Iran's hands.

However, Washington attempted to undermine Iran's sovereignty over the strait and imposed a naval blockade in violation of the war-ending deal, prompting Tehran to declare the vital global energy chokepoint closed to all traffic. Additionally, in his remarks, the foreign minister said that if the aggressors have any sense of reason, they will not try another military assault against the Iranian nation, noting, "They've tried twice, and they've seen the results." The US and the Israeli regime waged their first criminal war against Iran, which lasted 12 days, in June 2025. Their second aggression began on February 28, 2026, and came to a halt in early April after 40 days. In both wars, Iran's resistance and successful retaliatory operations forced the aggressors to accept a ceasefire.

Regional security weakened
Araghchi also stressed that regional

security must be ensured by the countries of the region themselves, without relying on or requiring the presence of foreign forces.

Iran and the regional states should live together in peace, without foreign interference, he said. "This is the only way to achieve peace, security, and stability in our region."

Iran maintains relations with all the Persian Gulf countries while working to reach a shared understanding on a new regional security framework, he continued.

Meanwhile, the top Iranian diplomat said that the recent wars constitute a turning point in the history of the region as they have fundamentally disrupted existing security structures and reshaped the regional landscape.

"These wars have demonstrated that the security arrangements of certain countries in the region, which rely on a foreign military presence and external intervention, have proved ineffective," he pointed out.

"American military bases in the region have failed to bring peace and security to their host countries. On the contrary, their presence has itself become a source of insecurity."

Iranian army says it shot down US drone over Bandar Abbas

International Desk

Iran's air defense systems shot down a US LUCAS drone over the southern port city of Bandar Abbas, the Iranian army said on Sunday.

The Iranian Army said that the Army's air defense systems, operating under the country's integrated air defense network, hit and shot down a US LUCAS drone over Bandar Abbas, a city close to the Strait of Hormuz.

The Low-cost Uncrewed Combat Attack System, or LUCAS, is a one-way attack drone. Its design is a copy of Iran's HESA Shahed-136. The cost of the drone is claimed to be \$35,000 per unit.

This is not the first LUCAS drone that Iranian forces have shot down. Another LUCAS drone was also shot down by the Army in July while flying over southern Iran.

In an announcement on Tuesday, the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) said its air



defense forces had intercepted and shot down an American MQ-9 Reaper long-endurance drone over the Strait of Hormuz. Back in September, Brigadier General Majid Mousavi, the chief IRGC's Aerospace Force, said the US has developed the LUCAS drone by emulating Iran's Shahed-136 unmanned aerial vehicle and incorporated it into its military arsenal.

Mousavi highlighted Iran's diverse fleet of Shahed-class drones, designed for combat, surveillance and reconnaissance missions, describing the country's indigenous drone capabilities as a major asset

in national defense. He also said Operation True Promise 1 set a record for the use of domestically developed drones, which were operated by the IRGC Aerospace Force. The latest drone presence over Iranian territory comes amid Washington's repeated violations of the Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), reached after 40 days of US-Israeli war on Iran.

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

Iraq will struggle ...

This is because Iranian goods enjoy considerable popularity among the Iraqi public. If Iranian products are no longer exported to Iraq,

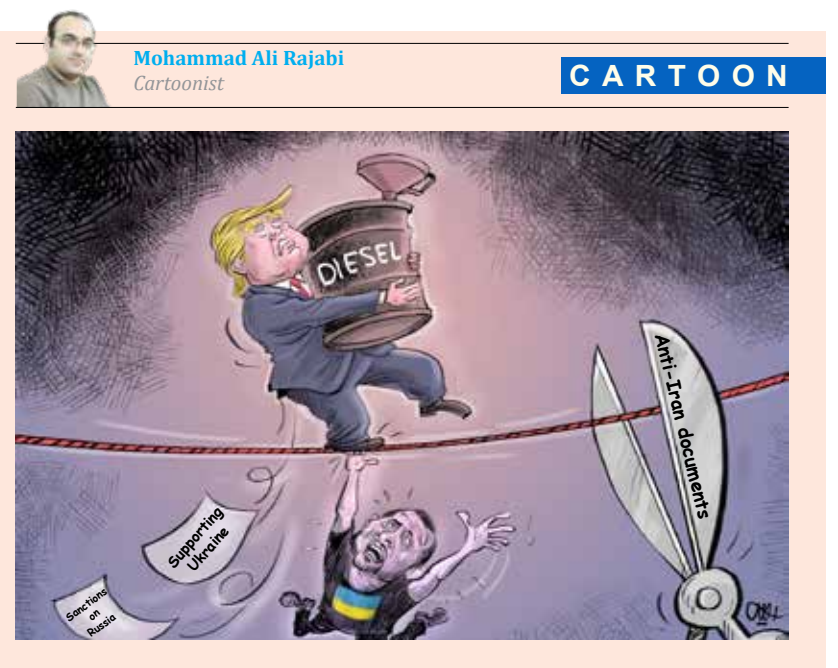
the country will naturally face difficulties in securing food supplies. Even in Iraq, the choice of food products and goods from different countries is influenced by religious considerations. The majority of Iraqis prefer Iranian products to goods from other countries, a preference rooted in the religious and emotional ties that most Iraqis have with Iran. For this reason, the current situation suggests that the Iraqi government will have no choice but to maintain economic relations with Iran, given the strong demand for Iranian goods among the Iraqi public.

Could this measure be extended to other border crossings between Iran and Iraq? What options does Iran have to prevent disruptions to trade and passenger traffic?

In any case, relations between Iran and Iraq are complex. First, relations between Tehran and Baghdad are shaped by the two countries' social, political and security needs. However, beyond official government and state protocols, the Iraqi people, most of whom are Shiites, have deep emotional ties with Iran.

Any hostile move by the Iraqi government against Iran, whether in the economic, security, political or social spheres, would therefore be met with a negative reaction from the majority of the Iraqi public.

Consequently, relations between Iraq and Iran are not merely relations between two governments; they are, above all, relations between two peoples, extending far beyond official government protocols. In fact, given the influence the United States wields in Iraq and the fact that Iraq's financial flows are monitored by the US Treasury Department, the Iraqi government is under intense American pressure. Nevertheless, the Iraqi people's participation in political affairs and their deeply human and emotional attachment to Iran will naturally compel the government to take public sentiment into account. As a result, Baghdad cannot simply carry out Washington's directives.



Europe in trouble, blaming Muslims



By Farid Hafez
Senior researcher
with Georgetown
University's The
Bridge Initiative

OPINION

As protests in France turned violent two weeks ago, the French far right quickly resorted to racist language to blame the Muslim youth for the violence. Weeks earlier, when thousands of migrants tried to enter the Spanish enclave of Ceuta from neighbouring Morocco, the Spanish far right spoke of an organised “invasion” by Moroccans. United States President Donald Trump has also chimed in, claiming that this is about “Islam wanting to take over”. While the far right’s readiness to exploit crises to fuel Islamophobia is to be expected, the idea that Islam and Muslims are to blame for Europe’s growing woes is no longer reserved for that extreme of the European political spectrum. Two weeks ago, while student protests were heating up in France, the European Parliament quietly passed a resolution “on the need for an EU strategy to counter Islamist entryism and the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood network”. The text was tabled by the centre-right European People’s Party (EPP), the largest group in

the parliament, which European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen hails from. It passed with 381 votes in favour, 167 against and 15 abstentions. Four other groups backed the EPP almost unanimously: the far-right Patriots for Europe and Europe of Sovereign Nations, the liberal Renew Europe, and the European Conservatives and Reformists. The Social Democrats, the Left and the Greens mostly voted against but could not stop it. The resolution, which draws on a highly problematic report by the French government on “political Islamism,” makes a number of flawed claims that have wide-ranging implications for Muslim communities.

It defines “Islamist entryism” as “a political strategy of influence, progressive structuring, institutional penetration and ideological legitimisation”. It claims that “Islamist influence operates through a broad and fragmented ecosystem of associations, foundations and cultural, educational, religious, charitable, university, youth, anti-discrimination or social action structures”. More specifically, it says that “diversity, equity, inclusion and anti-discrimination frameworks may be diverted as vectors of institutional legitimisation, by integrating a politicised religious identity into legitimate causes for the

protection of minorities”. In other words, networks like the Muslim Brotherhood “infiltrate” European societies through anti-Islamophobia initiatives.

The resolution is not binding and European Union member states do not have to implement it. Its call to put the Muslim Brotherhood and affiliated individuals and entities on a terror list is unlikely to be implemented across Europe, given the movement’s renunciation of violence as a political tool. However, the resolution still gives legitimacy to an ideological framework that can have grave implications for Muslim communities.

It puts under suspicion Muslim institutions and organisations that operate independently of the state and presents the inclusion of Muslim civil society in public activity as a form of infiltration. The resolution names several organisations, including the Brussels-based European Network Against Racism (ENAR), as espousing this type of “Islamist” behaviour, and calls for blocking access to EU funding and restricting any EU-funded entity from working with them. The vague notion of a “Muslim Brotherhood network” can make guilt by association possible for almost anyone.

This can easily be weaponised by outside actors and already

has been. The United Arab Emirates, for example, has funded a wide-ranging campaign in Europe and elsewhere to smear individuals and organisations as Muslim Brotherhood affiliates. Interestingly, a few months before the resolution was tabled, an Emirati ambassador participated in a conference titled “Muslim Brotherhood: A real threat to Europe” held at the European Parliament. While Emirati influence is there, the resolution itself problematises “foreign funding” that allegedly supports “Islamist entryism” from Qatar or Türkiye, another indication of the geopolitics behind the scenes.

Most importantly, the resolution frames defending Muslims against racism as part of an Islamist infiltration plot. This can directly impact initiatives and public debates that seek to address Islamophobia in European societies. Symbolically, the resolution is a major victory for Europe’s right-wing anti-Muslim forces. It shows that the European Parliament has started abandoning any firewall against the far right as the centre right draws closer and closer to the far right. The EPP appears to have almost completely absorbed the far-right agenda but seeks to cushion it in the language of national security. The resolution also demonstrates how European Islam-



French police kicks back a tear gas canister at a student protest in Nancy, France, on October 2, 2026.

● MUHAMMED SAID TAKO/
ANADOLU



Two weeks ago, while student protests were heating up in France, the European Parliament quietly passed a resolution “on the need for an EU strategy to counter Islamist entryism and the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood network”. The resolution, which draws on a highly problematic report by the French government on “political Islamism,” makes a number of flawed claims that have wide-ranging implications for Muslim communities.



Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates to European Union Mohamed Ismail Al Sahlawi (back-L) attends a conference titled “Muslim Brotherhood: A real threat to Europe” held at the European Parliament on June 2, 2026.

● WAM

phobia has evolved. The fear is no longer of the immigrants as strangers who fail to “integrate” but of the Muslims who are able to speak for themselves and defend their civil liberties.

For the centre right, this Islamophobic framework comes with political perks. Not only is it able to benefit electorally from anti-Muslim fearmongering, but it is also able to strike at those on the left who choose to reject racism and stand up for Muslim communities.

It is no surprise that the idea of “Islamism” — Islamo-gauchisme in French — is being promoted on the political scene in France. Jean-Luc Mélenchon of the left-wing La France Insoumise (France Unbowed) is particularly popular among marginalised communities and a strong contender for the presidency. He is now being accused of encouraging the “rioters,” who — it is implied — are Muslim.

This dual attack on the left and on Muslims mirrors the old Judeo-Bolshevik conspiracy theory that blamed Jews for the spread of communism with the aim of destroying Western civilisation.

Today, “Islamism” serves conservatives, liberals and the far right alike as a scapegoat in their effort to complete a counter-revolution against the modest progress the West has made on tackling racism and inequality since the 1960s. Their project appears to be a fortress Europe without Muslims.

However flimsy the basis of the “Islamist entryism” resolution is, we should expect further legally dubious moves by conservative alliances in individual member states to curb Muslim agency outside state control, especially when it defends Muslim civil liberties. Meanwhile, fearmongers will keep blaming Islam for social ills and for legitimate protests against austerity, and politicians will keep directing public anger at Muslim communities to distract from their own governance failures.

What is needed now is a strong response to this conservative counter-revolution through a firm defence of civil liberties for everyone.

The article first appeared on Al Jazeera.



France's riots, mounting debt reveal a country in disarray

Pivotal presidential election looming



By Grégoire Roos
Director of
the Europe
Programme at
Chatham House

OPINION

Only three weeks after the peaceful celebration of Pope Leo XIV's visit, France offered an altogether different spectacle over the weekend: burning cars, looted shops, violent clashes with police and the historic town hall of Limoges engulfed in flames.

The contrast between the two events is stark. But they may both point to something deeper: a profoundly divided society, facing a crisis of self-confidence, hoping to recover a sense of direction and purpose. Beneath France's political anxiety lies an anxiety about the future, in a world increasingly shaped by algorithms and faceless technology.

Although this anxiety is not unique to the country, the timing is particularly bad for France.

A hijacked social protest

It all started with high-school students protesting deteriorating teaching conditions and staff shortages. University students soon joined them, followed by trade unions and veterans of the 'yellow vests' movement, as grievances expanded to encompass living costs and declining public services.

By October 17, some 550,000 people had demonstrated, according to the ministry of the interior; organizers claimed 800,000. In any case, it was one of the largest mobilizations since protests against the government's pension reform bill in 2023, which has since been dropped.

Most participants protested peacefully, although some young demonstrators were severely injured in clashes with police. Their demands were also quickly overshadowed by rioters who looted shops, attacked police officers and set public buildings alight. The French government imposed a curfew in the most sensitive districts of Paris and other major cities, bracing for further escalation this past weekend. Such violence is hardly unique to France. Milan also suffered protests and looting last weekend, and the Italian government has just passed new anti-riot laws. Britain too experienced widespread rioting as recently as the summer of 2024. But the timing is exceptionally damaging for France. Its public debt is approaching 119 per cent of GDP, while weak growth, a persistently high deficit (the fourth highest in the eurozone) and soaring borrowing costs have placed France's public finances under mounting pressure (it has been subject of an excessive deficit procedure by the European Commission since 2024). Meanwhile, the parliamentary stalemate that followed President Em-



Rioters set fire on the streets of Paris, France, on October 18, 2026.

● JAN SCHMIDT-WHITLEY/
LE PICTORIUM AGENCY

manuel Macron's ill-fated decision to dissolve the National Assembly in 2024 has made it almost impossible to restore financial discipline and has pushed France to the brink.

With the public purse under such strain and the destruction caused by the riots projected to exceed €1.2 billion, the question of who will eventually foot the bill is politically extremely sensitive. A new riot insurance scheme, planned for 2027, could push up premiums for small shopkeepers. For those whose premises have been vandalized or looted, being made to shoulder the cost of public disorder (and criminal behaviour) risks deepening the sense of injustice and resentment that has helped fuel social unrest.

The images of disorder reinforce the impression of anarchy and a country without a clear

political direction — if not a failing state. They spurred a bond sell-off, heightening pressure on the French debt even further. This could be seen by malign foreign powers as an opportunity for destabilization, although there is no clear established evidence at this stage that external actors interfered and fuelled the unrest. But former prime minister and presidential candidate Gabriel Attal's proposal to allow temporary restrictions on social media platforms during riots illustrates the growing concern over their capacity to amplify violence and threaten public order. The Italian defence minister went a step further, openly declaring that the Milan riots were the result of a 'hybrid war against the West' waged via 'TikTok, social media and YouTube'.



A yellow vest placed by protesters on the statue of Marianne on the Monument à la République in Paris reads, "2026: The police mutilates high schoolers."

● CARL COURT/GETTY IMAGES



France's political centre no longer holds

With the 2027 presidential election only six months away, the political stakes couldn't be higher. Marine Le Pen, leader of the far-right National Rally, has already used the violence to strengthen her discourse on law and order, while hard-left leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon has sought to capitalize on the social anger to denounce institutionalized police violence and rally the left-leaning electorate. Their political projects differ profoundly, but both are taking advantage of the dissatisfaction with a political centre that has struggled to demonstrate that it can still deliver — or hold at all. In polls, the two leaders are still the favourites to reach the second round of the presidential election.

It is difficult to address France's current predicament without drawing a parallel with Europe's other major economy, Germany. The far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), which won 20.8 per cent in the 2025 federal election, now polls at roughly 28–30 per cent. Germa-

ny, of course, has seen nothing comparable to France's weekend of rioting, and the sources of discontent are not identical. Anger mostly stems from a deterioration of Germany's industrial model in the face of rising energy costs, more restricted export markets and growing competition from China, alongside disputes over immigration and the feeling of a loss of identity. But the French and the Germans are asking the same question: can established political parties still protect living standards and offer a credible future? The success of the National Rally and the AfD suggest they don't think so.

Europe's weakening social contract

These are signs of a broader European socio-political crisis, further highlighted by recent protests in several European countries. For decades, the continent's social bargain rested on the expectation of growing prosperity, economic security and a better life for one's children. That expectation has clearly weakened just as Europe faces intensified global competition and the prospect of AI transforming entire professions for which young people have spent years preparing. The sense of social demotion and purposelessness is becoming personal. France offers a graphic warning of the political risks when such anxiety isn't properly addressed by governments, constrained by an ever-shrinking fiscal space. But the risks are high for the European Union (EU) too. As political anger directed at national governments grows, pressure on EU institutions and the compromises on which European cooperation depends will likely mount as well. Le Pen has confirmed that she wouldn't fear a confrontation with Brussels over the EU budget if elected president. And the AfD has repeatedly called for an end to the support for Ukraine, a reset of Germany's relations with Russia and the normalization of economic relations with Moscow, especially on gas imports. At a moment when Europe needs to show a united front to bolster its defence, deter Russia and revive its competitiveness, further political fragmentation in Paris and Berlin would severely undermine the continent's resilience.

During the May 1968 riots in France, prime minister Georges Pompidou was asked by journalists to summarize the mindset of president Charles de Gaulle. His reply: 'reform yes, chaos no'. With only six months to go before his decade in power comes to an end, President Macron has little time left to ensure that his legacy won't be summed up by the opposite: reform no, chaos yes.

The article was first published by Chatham House.

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Sports Desk

If there were to be a search for a marquee division at the 2026 UWW Wrestling World Championships in Astana, it would be hard to look past the freestyle 97kg category, where four of the biggest names in world wrestling will battle it out for the top prize.

Between them, American Kyle Snyder, Russia's Abdulrashid Sadulaev, Akhmed Tazhudinov of Bahrain and Iran's Hassan Yazdani hold five Olympic gold medals and 14 world titles. Over the past 11 years, every world title in this weight class has been won by either Snyder, Sadulaev or Tazhudinov.

Of these four champions, it is probably Yazdani, making his World Championships debut at this weight, who will find it hardest. Yazdani won his Olympic title at 74kg in 2016 before winning three world titles at 86kg and now moving up to 97kg.

A second Olympic gold has proved elusive for the Iranian sensation after successive final defeats against his familiar American foe David Taylor and Bulgaria's Magomed Ramazanov at Tokyo 2020 and Paris 2024, respectively. With Los Angeles 2028 two years away, Yazdani has moved up two weight classes – after returning from an 18-month injury layoff last year – to compete in the Olympic 97kg category ahead of chasing the ultimate prize at the sporting extravaganza.

He secured his place at the World Championships by beating Olympic bronze medalist Amirali Azarpira twice in the national team trials. While that result shows he will be a threat, Yazdani's form will be tested in a division that has no shortage of challengers.

None are greater than Snyder and Sadulaev. For the better part of the last decade, the 97kg class has been synonymous with the rivalry between the two. The American, who



L-R: American Kyle Snyder, Iran's Hassan Yazdani, Russia's Abdulrashid Sadulaev, and Bahrain's Akhmed Tazhudinov will feature in the freestyle 97kg field at the Wrestling World Championships. ● UWW

Wrestling World Championships: All eyes on stacked 97kg field as Yazdani enters new territory

won his third world title in 2022, made a resurgence of sorts by winning world gold in 2025.

Sadulaev, who won his last world title at 97kg in 2021 before dropping to 92kg to claim his sixth world gold in 2024, had begun his return to the weight class impressively. He won the Muhamet Malo Ranking Series in February and later claimed gold at the European Championships. He will arrive in Astana with something to prove against his longtime rival.

Tazhudinov, the 2023 world and 2024 Olympic champion, has had a mixed run. He finished third at the 2025 World Championships and the 2026 Asian Championships. He bounced back to win the Buda-

pest Ranking Series in July.

But why assume that the 97kg division will be a four-way fight for gold? Over the past few months, Japan's Arash Yoshida has emerged as a genuine dark horse looking to upset the established order. The 22-year-old won the Asian Championships in April, beating Tazhudinov emphatically before defeating Azarpira 4-0 in the final, though he lost 4-3 to the Iranian in the semifinals of the Asian Games. He will be itching to put that result behind him.

Snyder, who has never locked horns with Yazdani throughout their illustrious careers, hopes the two wrestling greats will cross paths when the 97kg competition gets underway in the Kazakh capital on Thursday.

"I spoke with Yazdani maybe a month ago, and we both said it would be great to compete against each other at this tournament, so hopefully it happens," Snyder said at a press conference on Friday.

"I think that this is the deepest weight class that I've ever wrestled in in my life," Snyder said. "There are a lot of really tough guys in the weight class. That's what makes it exciting." It is not hard to see what has gotten the juices flowing for the 30-year-old two-time Olympic medalist.

As the top seed, Snyder faces a potential quarterfinal clash with longtime nemesis Sadulaev, who will be chasing a seventh world gold.

What remains unknown is whom Snyder will have to beat

first to reach the quarterfinals. And, as he pointed out at the press conference at Barys Arena, any one of a number of unseeded wrestlers is capable of taking down the reigning champion in the first round.

Topping that list is Yazdani. Snyder said he was impressed with Yazdani, adding that the Iranian appeared to have no difficulty making the transition in terms of power.

"When I watched him wrestle Azarpira, I didn't see any difference between the two. Both looked similar in regard to strength, and I think Azarpira is one of the strongest guys in the weight class," Snyder said.

"I wrestled Yazdani one time in practice, for about 20 minutes," Snyder said. "It was many years ago, so we haven't

wrestled in a while."

Still, he knows that Yazdani could not have accomplished what he has without possessing what Snyder called "the will of a champion."

"He's so determined, he's so resilient. I think about all the things that he has gone through and experienced in his career. All of the legends that he has defeated. There aren't many wrestlers who have had that level of experience."

"And then, of course, tactically, everyone knows he's going to underhook you, he's going to wrestle at a really high pace immediately when the match starts. He's a good scrambler, he has good leg attacks. So, being ready for all those different things. I think that he's a very worthy competitor."

AFC Champions League Elite:

Esteghlal, Tractor to face in-form Emirati opposition on matchday 3

Sports Desk

Persian Gulf Pro League clubs Tractor SC and Esteghlal will take on in-form Emirati opponents when they resume action in the AFC Champions League Elite this week.

Tractor will play away to Al Ain at Hazza bin Zayed Stadium on Monday, while Esteghlal will face Shabab Al Ahli at Dubai's Rashid Stadium the following day.

The two Iranian sides will enter matchday three on the back of contrasting fortunes so far in the continental club competition. While Esteghlal has enjoyed a perfect start to the league stage, defeating Qatari opponents Al Sadd (3-0) and Al Gharafa (2-1), Tractor is searching for its first victory after opening the campaign with a 1-0 loss to Shabab Al Ahli, followed by a goalless draw against Qatar's Al Shamal a fortnight ago at Muscat's Sultan Qaboos Sports



● AFC

Complex, which served as the Iranian side's home venue for the match. Tractor sits 12th in the expanded 16-team West Zone table.

Al Ain and Shabab Al Ahli have also made a clean sweep of victories in the tournament and are joined by Esteghlal and Saudi heavyweight Al Hilal as the only teams with six points in the standings.

Al Ain hammered Cristiano Ronaldo's Al Nassr 4-0 at home in its opener before

comfortably beating Iraq's Air Force SC 4-1 in Basra to go top of the standings on goal difference.

Shabab Al Ahli, meanwhile, followed its victory over Tractor with an impressive 2-1 win over Saudi Pro League outfit Al Ittihad in Jeddah, thanks to a first-half double by Iranian international striker Sardar Azmoun.

Azmoun was again on target when his team defeated Al Ain 2-0 last week to move second in the UAE

Pro League table with 13 points, one behind Al Jazeera and level on points with Al Wasl and Al Ain after six rounds of matches.

Shabab Al Ahli again emerged victorious over Al Ain in the domestic President's Cup last Friday, with Iranian midfielder Saeid Ezzatollahi scoring twice from the spot in the first half before being sent off late in the game, as his side secured a 3-2 win after extra time.

Tractor head coach Javad Nekounam, who will have to do without injured goalkeeper Alireza Beiranvand, will hope to see his side build on a comfortable 3-0 victory over San'at Naft Abadan in the domestic top flight as it pursues its first continental win of the campaign.

Unbeaten across all competitions this season, Esteghlal, meanwhile, will look to improve on Friday's 1-1 away draw against Chadormalou.

2026 Asian Indoor and Martial Arts Games:

Iran coach backs new-look team to challenge for women's kabaddi gold

Sports Desk

Iran's women's kabaddi team is targeting gold at the upcoming Asian Indoor and Martial Arts Games despite having a largely inexperienced squad, head coach Mahrokh Danesh has said. The sixth edition of the multi-sport event will kick off on December 11 in Riyadh.

Around 80 percent of the players selected for the national team have never competed at an international event, but Danesh believes Iran has the quality to challenge for the title at the multi-sport event.

Speaking to Mehr News Agency, Danesh said that only four of the 16 players in the ongoing training camp competed at the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games last month, where Iran settled for silver after a final setback against India, including two raiders and two defenders.

"The players are young on average, and around 80 percent of them will be

experiencing international competition for the first time," Danesh said.

"Given the limited time available, we have tried to select players who are in a better position in terms of physical fitness, technical and tactical ability, and match experience."

The draw for the Riyadh competition has yet to take place, leaving Iran uncertain about its opponents. Danesh said the draw was expected to be held after the current training camp or closer to the start of the Games.

India, one of the leading nations in kabaddi, is expected to be among the participants, according to the Iranian coach.

Danesh said Iran would prepare for every opponent rather than focus solely on a potential showdown with India, identifying Chinese Taipei, Thailand and South Korea as other teams capable of challenging for medals.

"We will do everything we can to achieve the best possible result, but we are

not thinking only about India. We have to take every team seriously," she said.

"Iran is also a strong team, and we have selected the best players so that, if we face India in the final, we can produce a good performance."

The squad will be trimmed before the competition, with seven players to be selected from the 16-member training group for the five-a-side event. Five players will be on the court, with two named as substitutes.

Two more training camps remain before the final squad is announced following the fifth camp.

Despite the squad's lack of international experience, Danesh remains confident in its potential.

"Our players have considerable potential in terms of physical fitness and technical ability, and I do not consider the championship beyond our reach," she said. "The players and I will do everything we can to win the title. That is the goal we are fighting for."

Ardabil turns local festivals into tourism brands

Iranica Desk

Ardabil Province's climate, border location, geographical features, diverse attractions, tourism investments and the popularity of its resorts and scenic destinations have helped turn local traditions and events into distinctive tourism brands across its counties.

The national registration of 15 festivals in the province underscores their importance in showcasing Ardabil's cultural identity and local potential, according to IRNA.

Jalil Jabari, director-general of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization in Ardabil Province, said 45 events related to the province had been registered on the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts' official events calendar. Most are held as festivals aimed at promoting tourism opportunities, including the national Khalkhal Walnut Festival.

Jabari said the public had warmly welcomed tourism events, particularly festivals, adding that such programs help introduce local attractions and ultimately attract investment, encourage entrepreneurship and develop tourism infrastructure.

He said the establishment of a committee to develop tourism infrastructure in Ardabil was being pursued as a key priority of the ministry. The initiative is expected to help expand tourism facilities and supporting infrastructure.

Jabari also stressed the need to hold a conference focused on generating ideas for tourism development. He said a thorough assessment was needed to determine why some counties, including Khalkhal, had yet to reach their full potential in attracting visitors and expanding tourism, despite their exceptional natural and cultural assets.



Tourism is one of the main drivers of development in Ardabil Province, and demand for investment in the sector has increased in recent years, he said. Sareyn, one of the province's major tourism destinations and investment hubs, has established a strong position in attracting visitors and travelers. According to Jabari, the main aim of the festivals is to stimulate tourism and reduce the province's reliance on seasonal travel. A tourism events calendar has therefore been drawn up to coordinate programs across the province, showcase

local strengths and attract investors.

Beyond promoting investment and entrepreneurship, the festivals also foster social vitality and cohesion. The strong turnout of residents, visitors and tourists reflects their growing popularity.

Jabari said the events were designed to highlight agricultural, natural, historical and religious

attractions while creating opportunities for greater social engagement among different sections of society.

Yahya Najjar-Ghabel said festivals such as the Nir Aash Festival, the Somarin Walnut Festival and the Nemahil Pomegranate Festival provided opportunities to showcase the diverse assets of different counties across the province.

One of the defining features of Ardabil's tourism festivals is the large number of residents and visitors who attend them. Jabari said the crowds at these events demonstrated their widespread

appeal.

The variety of vehicle registration plates, he added, showed that many people from Ardabil and other provinces — sometimes traveling from distant parts of the country — returned to their hometowns to take part in the festivals.

Public participation extends beyond attending the events, he said, with local communities



● IRNA

and private-sector businesses also playing an active role in organizing and running them.

Jabari noted that more than 90 tourism projects were currently under way across Ardabil Province, with private-sector investment. Demand for investment in the sector had doubled compared with previous years, he added.

He attributed the increase to investment returns and the availability of favorable conditions for tourism development. The province's tourism investment committee is working to establish the necessary foundations

and ease the process for economic operators seeking to enter the sector.

Holding festivals at the local level has also strengthened public participation, supported the development of local tourism brands and created opportunities for local artists and cultural organizations.

Ardabil's tourism festivals serve purposes beyond recreation:

they also promote local destinations and generate economic activity. Their impact can be seen in rural livelihoods and the growth of local economies.

Referring to the Pomegranate Festival in Nemahil village, Khalkhal, Jabari said the event had helped farmers sell their produce. This year, some of the pomegranate harvest was sold directly at the orchards.

He added that the festivals offered a platform to showcase the province's lesser-known attractions and capabilities. However, he said, stronger promotion and more accurate information

about tourism destinations were needed to develop the sector and reduce its seasonal nature. The province's festival calendar shows that events are held across the region, each drawing on the distinctive advantages of its host area.

Ardabil Governor Masoud Emami-Yeganeh has also highlighted the province's capacity to host national and international events, pledging support from the provincial administration. He described cultural and tourism festivals as drivers of social vitality and valuable opportunities for investment in tourism.

Emami-Yeganeh said tourism accounted for the largest share of investment in the province and that the authorities welcomed private-sector investors and entrepreneurs by seeking to ease investment conditions and remove obstacles.

He also called for specialized training courses for tourism business operators and managers of tourism facilities and accommodation establishments. Such training, he said, would help improve not only the festivals but also the quality and capacity of services for receiving, accommodating, guiding and catering to visitors, enabling Ardabil to strengthen its position as a tourism destination.

Ardabil Province, home to more than 1.28 million people across 12 counties, is located in northwestern Iran. Its natural, historical, religious and economic attractions make it one of the country's major tourism destinations.



● chntn.ir

Ilam seeks to expand handicrafts market in Iraq

Iranica Desk

The director-general of Ilam Province's Department of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts has announced the holding of the province's 73rd handicrafts exhibition in Wasit, Iraq, emphasizing the importance of developing target markets and showcasing the province's artistic capabilities in the neighboring country.

Farzad Sharifi said the contin-

ued presence of local artisans and Ilam handicraft products in the Iraqi market offers a valuable opportunity to introduce traditional local arts, expand cultural exchanges and create new sales opportunities for the province's craftspeople, according to chntn.ir.

He added that handicrafts, beyond their cultural significance and role in preserving local identity, represent an important economic asset for the province.

With proper planning and expanded sales markets, the sector can contribute to boosting production, creating sustainable jobs and increasing artisans' incomes.

Referring to the cultural ties between Ilam Province and Iraq, as well as their shared border, Sharifi said making use of these connections and pursuing a targeted presence in markets across neighboring Iraqi provinces could help showcase the

capabilities of Ilam's craftspeople and expand commercial opportunities in the handicrafts sector.

He noted that supporting artisans, providing suitable platforms for displaying their products and expanding the presence of the province's handicrafts in regional markets are among the department's key priorities. These efforts aim to strengthen the cultural economy and support local producers.

Persian Gulf's traditional boatbuilding skills at risk of disappearing

Iranica Desk

The traditional knowledge of Lenj boatbuilding and seafaring in the Persian Gulf tells the story of communities that learned to navigate the sea by observing nature and passing practical knowledge from one generation to the next. Today, this maritime heritage faces the challenge of remaining a living tradition rather than becoming a memory preserved only in historical records.

Ali Pouzan, project manager of the Guran Living Boatbuilding Museum on Qeshm Island, has highlighted the importance of preserving traditional Lenj boatbuilding and navigation, which UNESCO inscribed in 2011 on its List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding. He has also pointed to efforts to revive the craft on Qeshm Island and warned that greater attention is needed to prevent the loss of this indigenous knowledge,

ISNA wrote.

Qeshm Island, where the sea has long shaped livelihoods and community life, remains closely connected to this tradition. The skills involved extend well beyond the construction of wooden vessels, encompassing navigation, weather forecasting, maritime terminology, oral traditions, music and customs associated with life at sea.

According to UNESCO, traditional Iranian Lenj boats have been used for sea journeys, trade, fishing and pearl diving. Before modern navigation systems became widespread, sailors relied on observations of the sun, moon and stars to determine their position. They also interpreted wind patterns, wave heights and changes in water color to anticipate weather conditions. This knowledge, developed through experience and transmitted orally, enabled sailors to navigate the waters of the Persian Gulf without relying on modern instruments.

The tradition also has a strong

cultural dimension. Work songs, stories, ceremonies and specialized maritime vocabulary form part of the knowledge associated with Lenj boats. These practices reflect how seafaring shaped not only the economy of coastal communities but also their social relationships and cultural identity.

The UNESCO nomination dossier refers to the Persian Gulf more than 100 times. It also mentions the Greater and Lesser Tunbs and Abu Musa. The inscription recognizes the cultural importance of traditional boatbuilding and navigation and their contribution to the identity of the communities that sustain them.

However, the tradition faces significant practical challenges. UNESCO has identified the declining number of practitioners, the ageing of experienced boatbuilders and sailors, and the replacement of wooden vessels with cheaper fiberglass alternatives as major threats. The spread of modern navigation



● utravs.com

technology has also reduced the everyday use of some traditional skills.

The challenge, therefore, is not simply to preserve old boats, but to ensure that the knowledge required to build, maintain and sail them continues to be practiced and passed on. In its assessments of Iran's safeguarding efforts, UNESCO has highlighted the importance of docu-

mentation, training, educational initiatives and opportunities for experienced practitioners to teach younger generations.

The ports of Guran on Qeshm Island and Kong remain important centers associated with traditional wooden boatbuilding and seafaring. Their future depends on whether the craft can retain a practical role in coastal communities while adapting to

changing economic and technological conditions.

Preserving this heritage requires more than recording its history. It means supporting the people who possess the knowledge, creating opportunities for apprentices to learn the craft and safeguarding the maritime traditions that connect generations of Persian Gulf communities to the sea.



Iran approves five new national health strategies

Social Desk

Iran has approved five national health policy documents at a meeting of the Supreme Council for Health and Food Security, chaired by President Masoud Pezeshkian in Tehran on October 25. The documents cover disease prevention, drinking water quality, climate change, early childhood development and disaster risk management, IRNA reported on Sunday. They include a national plan to prevent and control noncommunicable diseases; a five-year strategy to improve drinking water quality from 2026 to 2031; a national strategy on health and climate change; a document on early childhood development; and a comprehensive framework for disaster risk management in the health system.

“Protecting public health should be a priority for all government ministries, agencies and officials,” Pezeshkian said during the meeting. He called for closer coordination among state institutions and provincial governors, greater public participation and efforts to reduce inequality in access to health and education services. “The government aimed to protect people from health risks through collective action rather than relying solely on orders and directives,” he added. Pezeshkian also stressed the importance of physical and mental health, public awareness and digital technologies, including artificial intelligence, in implementing government programs. The president said social problems threatens public health and linked tensions in January



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian addresses a meeting of the Supreme Council for Health and Food Security in Tehran on October 25, 2026.
● IRNA

to what he described as social problems, without providing further details. He urged officials to address young people's needs and concerns, saying public trust is essential to securing support for government initiatives. Health Minister Mohammad-Reza Zafarghandi said the ministry is seeking to shift its approach from treatment to prevention. He said effective implementation requires coordination among ministries, government agencies and provincial authorities. Pezeshkian added that the government is working almost



daily to expand and equip schools and improve education.

He described raising capable, committed, honest and creative

children as essential to the country's future.

Museum visit highlights cultural links between Iran, Tajikistan



Iranian Deputy Culture Minister Mohsen Javadi (c) visits Tajikistan's National Museum alongside Tajik officials in Dushanbe on October 24, 2026.
● IRNA

civilization of the region. The visit took place as publishers, writers and cultural figures from various countries gathered in Dushanbe for the international book fair. Iran was also taking part in the event. Iran and Tajikistan share the Persian language as well as longstanding historical, literary and cultural ties. These common links have provided a basis for cultural exchanges and cooperation between institutions in the two countries. In recent years, joint cultural and literary events, along with visits by artists and cultural figures from both countries, have helped maintain contact between their cultural communities.

director, and other officials, IRNA reported. He viewed archaeological artifacts, a selection of visual and decorative arts, handicrafts and other historical objects from Tajikistan. Museum officials briefed the Iranian delegation on the background of the collections, their scientific and cultural value, and their place in the history and

Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian Deputy Culture Minister Mohsen Javadi visited the National Museum of Tajikistan in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, on the sidelines of the 14th Dushanbe International Book Fair on Saturday. Javadi toured the museum's galleries with Alisher Zarifi, the museum's first deputy

Donors support protection of historic castle in northern Iran

Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian cultural heritage donors have provided 30 billion rials (over \$11,000) to define the boundaries and protected zone of Morvarid Castle in Gorgan city in northern Iran. “The project was carried out in cooperation with the Golestan Province's Department of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts and funded by the Association of Cultural Heritage Benefactors,” Deputy Heritage Minister Ali Darabi told IRNA on Sunday. The allocation for the project in the Iranian Persian calendar year 1404 (which ran from March 21, 2025, to March 20, 2026) amounted to 30 billion rials, he announced. The project involved aerial imaging of Morvarid Castle using a fixed-wing drone to produce digital maps and establish the site's



boundaries and protected zone, Darabi said. Defining a historic site's boundaries helps identify the area occupied by the monument and the surrounding zone needed for its protection. Darabi said the Association of Cultural Heritage Benefactors had supported projects in other provinces of the country, namely Ilam (western Iran), Sistan and Baluchestan (southeastern Iran), Qazvin (central Iran) and Golestan (northern Iran).



A file photo shows the Sassanid Great Wall of Gorgan in northern Iran dating back to the 5th century AD.
● IRNA

He said the association's involvement in preservation projects helps create opportunities for private donors to contribute to protecting Iran's historical sites. The initiative highlights the role of non-governmental funding in documenting and protecting cultural heritage.

China, Australia and Japan to join Tehran media expo

Social Desk

Companies from China, Australia and Japan are set to take part in Iran's second international Media Expo, held in Tehran from October 28 to 31. The organizers seek to expand cross-border cooperation in the media industry and showcase artificial intelligence (AI) technology, IRNA reported on

Sunday. About 100 domestic and foreign brands are expected to attend the event at Milad Tower, said Iman Masdari, head of the organizing committee. The expo will focus on artificial intelligence and the future of media. Masdari announced that organizers plan to unveil a locally developed AI model trained on

Iranian data and content. The program will include expert panels, practical workshops and idea-generation competitions exploring the use of AI in content production, in cooperation with Iran's Artificial Intelligence Association and the country's specialized AI council. Exhibition space has grown to 5,000 square meters from about 1,000 square meters

at the first edition in 2025. Organizers expect visitor numbers to rise to 50,000 from nearly 20,000 last year. Participants will include media professionals, content producers, studios, advertising agencies, suppliers of photography and filmmaking equipment, brand managers and AI startups, Elham Sadat Hosseini, the expo's executive director, said.

