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COP31 climate summit that could not say 'fossil fuels' ends with no deal



PERSPECTIVE 4

Iran rejects involvement in deadly drone strike on Kuwait

Araghchi calls incident 'precooked recipe for war'

2

Iran's new-year budget must look beyond oil revenues: *Expert*

By Delaram Ahmadi
Staff writer

INTERVIEW EXCLUSIVE

Iran needs to strengthen non-oil foreign currency earnings, streamline imports and manage public spending as it prepares its budget for the next fiscal Iranian year (March 2027–March 2028), economic expert Alireza Katani said.



Alireza Katani

In an interview with Iran Daily, Katani said diversifying revenue was essential, but warned that the economic slowdown left little room for higher taxes or additional borrowing.

Oil revenues have traditionally played a significant role in Iran's budget, but external restrictions have sharply constrained the country's ability to rely on them. Katani said the government should therefore give greater priority to non-oil foreign currency earnings and limit imports of non-essential goods.

He pointed to foreign exchange policy changes in December 2025 and January 2026, when the government sought to bring official and market rates closer together to manage currency demand. He also said extensive oil exports during the period between the Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding and the reimposition of restrictions had helped secure foreign currency for a substantial share of import requirements.

Estimates suggest imports could reach $47 billion in the current Iranian calendar year (March 2026–March 2027), assuming other conditions remain stable, a 12.7% decline from the previous year. Katani said, however, that the current level of foreign currency reserves was not publicly known, making it difficult to assess whether the same pattern could continue into next year.

Page 3

Tehran, Tashkent seek joint Silk Road tourism routes

8



Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Reza Salehi-Amiri (3rd R) and UN Tourism Secretary-General Shaikha Nasser Al Nowais hold a piece of Iranian enamelwork as they pose for a group photo on the sidelines of the International Sustainable Tourism Summit in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, on November 27, 2026.
chtn.ir



Government pressing ahead with North-South corridor despite constraints

Tehran stays committed to key INSTC: *Russian official*

3



Iran seeks to broaden Olympic medal base for LA28

6



Mehregan highlights Iran's rich heritage of harvest, friendship

7

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Iran rejects involvement in deadly drone strike on Kuwait

Araghchi calls incident 'precooked recipe for war'

International Desk

Iran rejected accusations of involvement in a "suspicious" drone attack on Kuwait on Thursday, calling the incident a "precooked recipe for war."

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi in a post on X on Thursday vehemently rejected Iran's involvement in the strike that claimed the lives of two Italian technicians who were working for the Italian unit of the German arms company Rheinmetall (RHMG.DE) in the Persian Gulf Arab country.

"The incident is suspicious and looks like a precooked recipe for war," Araghchi said. "We stand ready to cooperate with Kuwait and Italy to determine the cause of the incident."

The top Iranian diplomat also noted that he had expressed condolences over the deaths during his telephone conversations with his Italian and Kuwaiti counterparts, Antonio Tajani and Sheikh Jarrah Jaber al-Ahmad al-Sabah, respectively.

During the call with Sheikh Jarrah, Araghchi categorically dismissed allegations that Iran had carried out the drone attack on Kuwait, emphasizing that the Islamic Republic is not involved in the incident.

He further expressed regret over the loss of human lives and the damage caused by the incident, announcing the Islamic Republic's readiness to conduct a joint investigation with the Kuwaiti side aimed at thoroughly examining the various aspects of the incident and identifying its origin and the parties involved.

Speaking in the Italian Senate, Tajani said that the two Italian victims were working at an air-defense surveillance station in Kuwait when it was hit.

Kuwait's Defense Ministry, however, did not specify what exactly had been targeted, saying it was a "vital facility".

Iran's Armed Forces also denied Kuwaiti allegations that Iran attacked the military facility in the country, warning that the accusations are apparently part of a US-Israeli false-flag campaign to escalate regional tensions.

"No military or offensive operation has been carried out by the Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the region," Brigadier General Abolfazl Shekarchi, senior spokesperson for Iran's Armed Forces, said on Thursday.

"Given the history of hostile actions and the role of the Zionist regime and American forces in using false flags and regional adventures, these accusations are a cover for the continuation of mischief and an attempt to increase insecurity in the region," he said.

The latest accusations come amid an increasingly desperate Israeli campaign to demonize Iran and manufacture pretexts for renewed military aggression.

Israel's Prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu has repeatedly sought to portray the Islamic Republic as an imminent threat, advancing increasingly sensational allegations in an effort to mobilize international support for confrontation with Tehran.

In the latest episode, Israeli officials have raised allegations of an Iranian chemical weapons program, with Netanyahu's regime attempting to portray Iran's pharmaceutical industry and its legitimate production of medicines as part of an alleged effort to develop or conceal chemical weapons.


Abbas Araghchi ● AFP

Iran says it recovered two Iranian oil tankers hijacked by US military


Shahram Irani ● IRNA

International Desk

The commander of the Iranian Navy said on Friday that his forces recovered two Iranian oil tankers that were stolen by the US military.

"The US military stole two Iranian oil tankers, but our forces boarded the ships while their crews were asleep and managed to recover them," Shahram Irani while speaking at Tehran's Friday prayers.

Irani also said the US military was receiving payments from shipowners in exchange for securing their passage through the Strait of Hormuz.

The Navy's commander also said Iranian naval forces struck the US aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln with a missile on the first day of the war on February 28, inflicting a hit on the vessel.

Irani said Iranian forces identified the central element of the enemy's military presence and fired their first untested missile at the aircraft carrier.

"On the first day of the war, our comrades fired a missile at the USS Abraham Lincoln, which hit its target and struck the enemy's body," he said.

The commander said the enemy subsequently sought assistance from ports in neighboring countries to evacuate wounded personnel, recover casualties and carry out medical and repair operations so that it could resume its aerial attacks against targets inside Iran.

Irani said Iran's naval forces have since further upgraded their operational systems and continued to monitor enemy movements in close coordination with the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Navy.

He stressed that Iranian forces have prevented the enemy from approaching not only the country's territorial waters but even the waters of the Sea of Oman.

"Today, the enemy has deployed all its capabilities, yet it has been unable to get even a single vessel through the Strait of Hormuz, whether manned or unmanned, by sea or air. What a futile illusion! The order is for the Strait of Hormuz to remain closed," he said.

The commander added that Iran's naval forces are continuously receiving new and advanced equipment, developed with the support of domestic industries, scientists, engineers and knowledge-based companies.

He also said several newly developed systems have not appeared in publicly released footage and are already deployed in operational areas.

The commander also vowed retaliation for the attack on the on the Dena destroyer in international waters near Sri Lanka on March 4, 2026, which killed 104 Iranian naval personnel.

Israel seeking to drag US back into war through false claims: *FM*


REUTERS

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said on Thursday that Israel is fabricating allegations about Iran's chemical and biological weapons capabilities to create a war atmosphere and draw the United States into another war against the Islamic Republic.

Araghchi said that recent Israeli claims about Iranian pharmaceutical companies and alleged chemical and biological weapons are part of a campaign to pave the way for renewed US aggression against Iran, Press TV reported.

Speaking to reporters on Thursday on the sidelines of a meeting in Khorasan Razavi Province, he stressed that Iran remains fully prepared to defend itself while keeping the path of diplomacy open.

"The Zionist regime (Israel) resorts to lies to create a war atmosphere and level accusations against Iran. It has become entirely clear that every day it comes up with another bizarre statement and makes another sweeping claim, claims that perhaps only naïve people would believe," Araghchi said.

He pointed to a series of allegations made by Israeli officials, including claims that Iran had hidden hundreds of missiles, was producing chemical weapons in pharmaceutical factories, and planned to attack Washington with chemical and biological weapons or carry out assassinations.

Araghchi said the latest US election results have demonstrated growing awareness among the American public that Israeli interests are being placed ahead of those of the United States.

The top diplomat called on Washington to reconsider its regional policies and stop bearing the costs of Israel's actions.

Araghchi's remarks follow claims by Israel's minister for military affairs, Israel Katz, on Tuesday that Tehran was building chemical weapons.

Katz alleged that Iran was developing such weapons but had not yet reached the capability to use them, adding: "We must not allow this to proceed."

Saudi strike kills 11 in Yemen

International Desk

A Saudi strike killed 11 people on Friday in Yemen, the Arab country's media said, as the Saudi-led coalition fighting Yemen's Ansarullah group said it shot down a drone targeting Riyadh.

The latest incidents came a day after a deadly Ansarullah's attack on a Saudi oil refinery, and add to a growing tally of violence since Yemen's civil war reignited over the summer.

Saudi warplanes carried out a raid on a residential building in the city of Al-Turba in Taiz governorate on Friday, killing "11 citizens, most of them children", Saba news agency said, citing a local source.

The agency also reported strikes targeting fuel tanks in the Sa'ada region.


AFP

On Thursday, the Ansarullah group targeted the Jazan refinery in southern Saudi Arabia, killing a Nepalese worker and injuring several other people, according to the Saudi Press Agency (SPA).

The attack also triggered a fire that led to the shutdown of the facility, SPA said.

Yemen plunged back into war in July, after years of relative calm, opening a new front in the Middle East war.

Hostilities intensified in September when the Ansarullah group, who already controlled Yemen's most densely populated areas, seized the western coastline overlooking the strategic Bab el-Mandeb strait on the Red Sea.

The Ansarullah group is now advancing toward Aden, a major southern city where the Saudi-backed government has taken refuge after being driven out of the capital Sana'a in 2015.

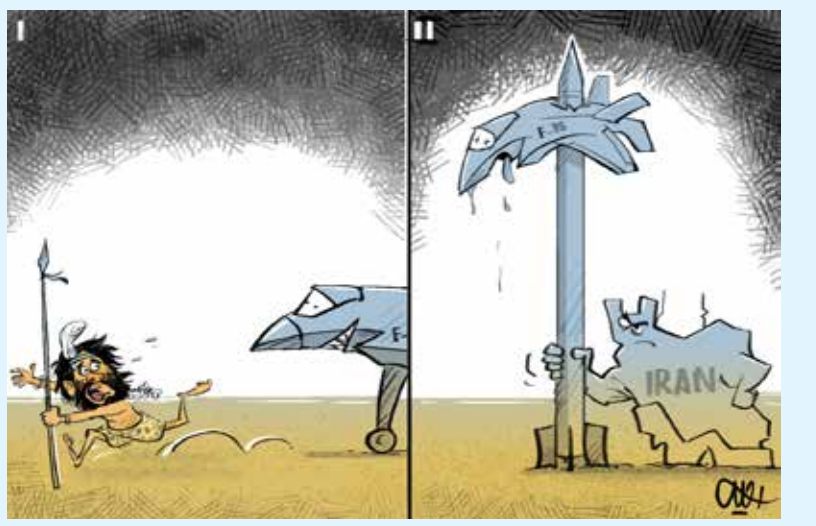
Since the conflict resumed, fighting in Yemen has killed more than 2,300 people and displaced over 364,000, according to the United Nations.

Ansarullah's attacks in Saudi Arabia have killed 27 people, according to the kingdom's authorities.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist

CARTOON



Government pressing ahead with North-South corridor despite constraints

Tehran stays committed to key INSTC: *Russian official*



President Masoud Pezeshkian speaks to a reporter after inaugurating the first phase of Mashhad's Metro Line 3 on November 26, 2026, the third day of his provincial visit to Razavi Khorasan Province.
president.ir

Economy Desk

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian said Iran was pressing ahead with the North-South railway and transport corridor despite existing constraints, while a senior Russian official said Tehran remained committed to the project despite significant damage to regional transport infrastructure caused by US and Israeli military aggression.

Speaking to reporters during a visit to Mashhad on Thursday, the capital of northeastern Razavi Khorasan Province, Pezeshkian said his government was working to complete the North-South railway and corridor despite all the constraints, adding that work was progressing rapidly.

Dmitry Birichevsky, director of the Russian Foreign Ministry's Department of Economic Cooperation, made the remarks on Thursday at the fourth international forum, "International North-South Transport Corridor: New Horizons," in Astrakhan, Russia, the TASS news agency reported.

"The International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) is becoming increasingly important strategically every year as it serves the goal of shaping a new transport architecture for Eurasia and developing alternative overland corridors as an integrated system for the movement of passengers and freight," he said.

"This year has also brought new challenges for the transport corridor. The military aggression instigated by the United States and Israel against Iran has resulted in significant destruction of transport infrastructure in the region. Nevertheless, I would like to highlight the commitment shown by our Iranian colleagues to our shared endeavor, as they continue to fulfill their obligations and work on the construction of the Rasht-Astara section despite all the difficulties," he said.

Iran has remained on a war footing since a US-Israeli coalition launched attacks in late February, particularly targeting civilians and infrastructure during a 40-day conflict.

Birichevsky also said the economies of the Global South and East were gaining strength, citing China, India, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Arab world as centers of technological progress.

Investment volumes and economic growth rates in those regions were two to three times higher than in Western economies, he said.

He also pointed to the development of Central Asia and the South Caucasus, saying it was giving fresh impetus to efforts to establish a modern transport architecture across Eurasia and develop alternative overland corridors operating as an integrated system for passenger and freight transport.

The North-South corridor provides access to Southeast Asia and Africa through a network linking Eurasia with major logistics hubs along the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean, he said.

The Russian official said the purpose of holding such events was to help Russian companies enter new markets in Iran, the Far East, Asia, Africa and India.

The INSTC is a planned 7,200-km multimodal network linking Russia and India through Iran and the Caspian region. It comprises road, rail and maritime routes.

The corridor has three main routes: a central land-and-sea route crossing the Caspian Sea, a western route through Azerbaijan, and an eastern route through Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan before reaching Iran.

Iran and Russia signed an agreement on May 18, 2023, to jointly build the 162-km Rasht-Astara railway, a missing rail link in the western branch of the North-South corridor.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on July 17, 2026, at a joint news conference with his Azerbaijani counterpart, Jeyhun Bayramov, that Iranian officials had informed Moscow that the process of allocating land for the Rasht-Astara railway had been completed. He expressed confidence that the project would make progress.

Chabahar-Zahedan railway

Meanwhile, track-laying on a 480-km stretch of the Chabahar-Zahedan railway has been completed, and the project has reached 96% physical progress, according to Houshang Bazvand, head of Iran's Construction and Development of Transportation Infrastructure Company.

Bazvand said the railway could be ready for operation ahead of its scheduled completion by the end of the Persian month of Dey, around Jan. 20.

Speaking on the sidelines of the 11th weekly monitoring meeting for the project, Bazvand said track-laying had been completed about 40 days earlier and that the project had reached 96% physical progress.

Turkey extends Iran gas import deal for five years

International Desk



Turkey has extended its natural gas import agreement with Iran for another five years, allowing it to continue importing up to 10 billion cubic meters of gas annually through April 2032, Turkish news agency ANKA reported.

Turkey's state-owned pipeline operator BOTAŞ has extended its license to import natural gas from Iran until April 18, 2032, according to the report. The annual contract volume will remain at 10 billion cubic meters, with no change to the pricing formula.

The extension follows the expiration in July 2026 of the previous gas supply agreement, which took effect in 2001 and provided for annual imports of up to 10 billion cubic meters.

Iran supplied Turkey with about 7.7 billion cubic meters of natural gas in 2025, accounting for 13.2% of the country's total gas imports and making Iran its fourth-largest supplier, according to Turkish gas trade data.

Turkey imports natural gas through pipelines from suppliers including Iran and Russia, as well as in the form of liquefied natural gas (LNG).

The renewed agreement will keep Turkey among Iran's main gas export markets under a long-term supply arrangement through 2032.

Iran holds about 34 trillion cubic meters of proven natural gas reserves, the world's second-largest reserves after Russia.

Fishery exports rise more than 50% amid wartime conditions, official says

Economy Desk

Iran's fishery exports have increased by more than 50% compared with pre-war levels, while more than 40,000 metric tons of shrimp have been harvested so far this year, the head of the country's fisheries organization said on Friday.

Hamzeh Rostampour made the remarks at the 10th International Exhibition of Fisheries, Aquaculture, Fishing, Seafood and Related Industries (IFEX 2026), which opened on Friday at Tehran International Permanent Fairground, IRNA reported.

Fisheries production and export activities have continued despite difficult conditions, Rostampour said, noting that the exhibition was also being held under wartime conditions.

The exhibition has several advantages over its ninth edition, held last year, including a wider variety of products, a focus on export development and the introduction of new production methods, he said.



The 10th International Exhibition of Fisheries, Aquaculture, Fishing, Seafood and Related Industries (IFEX 2026) opens at Tehran International Permanent Fairground on November 27, 2026, with Agriculture Minister Gholamreza Nouri-Qezeljeh (4th-R) in attendance.
IRNA

Rostampour said one of the exhibition's main features was the participation of fisheries industry operators from across the country.

The sector had faced considerable difficulties since the war began on February 28, he said, adding that it had suffered its first fatality and that the number of people killed or missing had since exceeded 40.

He said the war had coincided with the peak of several fisheries activities, including product exports and preparations at shrimp farms.

Fishermen in Sirik had continued fishing, while aquaculture producers in Hormozgan, Bushehr and Khuzestan provinces, as well as in Chabahar, had kept their operations running.

Since late February, when a US-Israeli coalition launched a 40-day war, Iran has faced wartime conditions and a maritime blockade imposed by Washington to halt its oil exports and deplete government revenues, alongside decades of Western sanctions over its nuclear activities.

Figures presented at the exhibition put Iran's total aquatic production at more than 1.566 million metric tons, including over 733,000 metric tons from aquaculture.

Iran also remains the world's leading producer of rainbow trout, with annual output of about 270,000 metric tons, according to figures presented at the exhibition.

Iran's new-year ...

Page 1

Political developments remained the most important challenge facing the economy, he said, limiting the effectiveness of domestic policy measures. Even so, strengthening non-oil earnings and prioritizing essential imports could help the country navigate external constraints. This approach would also help conserve foreign currency for raw materials, intermediate goods and other imports needed to keep domestic production operating.

Borrowing could provide short-term financing, but repayment and interest costs would burden future budgets. Katani said the government should distinguish essential spending from areas where efficiency gains or alternative delivery models were possible. This would allow it to protect basic services and social support while making more disciplined choices about new commitments.

Tax reform could provide a more sustainable source of government revenue, but Katani cautioned against increasing the tax burden while economic activity remained weak.

He described efforts to combat tax evasion as positive in principle, but said current conditions were unsuitable for aggressive enforcement.

Many companies were already facing difficulties because of the war, and additional taxation could deepen the slowdown. Instead, the government should consider tax exemptions and relief measures for producers and businesses that have been damaged by the conflict. Such measures could preserve productive capacity and employment.

Expanding non-oil exports and strengthening trade with neighboring countries are important to diversifying foreign currency earnings.

Katani said facilitating trade was essential as Iran sought to make better use of its economic relationships across the region. Simpler procedures could help exporters reach new markets.

However, he cautioned that domestic measures would have limited impact while the country continued to face sanctions and external restrictions. Trade facilitation should accompany efforts to address barriers to international economic relations. Domestic reforms alone could not fully compensate for restrictions on financial transactions and commercial exchanges.

Katani said years of sanctions had already forced the government to reduce spending, leaving limited room for further cuts without affecting essential public services.

Much of the budget is directed toward core responsibilities such as healthcare and education. Eliminating public institutions or functions would therefore offer no easy solution to fiscal pressures.

One possible adjustment, he said, would be to limit public-sector wage increases to levels below inflation. The measure would affect household purchasing power.

Development spending faces particular uncertainty. Infrastructure projects are often among the first areas affected when budget deficits emerge, making it difficult to maintain funding under restrictive fiscal conditions.

Katani suggested outsourcing projects as one possible alternative, allowing the government to draw on private-sector capacity rather than relying entirely on public resources. This could help sustain infrastructure investment if appropriate financing and implementation arrangements were established.

For vulnerable households, he identified direct cash assistance as a way to provide support amid economic difficulties.

The government's fiscal strategy, Katani said, must balance revenue diversification with realistic spending priorities.

COP31 climate summit that could not say 'fossil fuels' ends with no deal

By K. Rifat Hossain, Elaine Ruth Fletcher & Sophia Samantaroy

Staff at Health Policy Watch

PERSPECTIVE

After a record 44 hours of overtime, the UN climate talks in Antalya ended on Sunday night without any high-level decision document at all for the first time since the 2000 COP6 summit in The Hague.

A last-ditch effort to bridge the divide between petrostates that had insisted on removing all references to fossil fuels from the initial decision draft that had been tabled earlier last week, and other nations keen to see a clear reference to the leading cause of global warming was rejected by the European Union, the United Kingdom, Panama, the Marshall Islands, Norway and small island states including Tuvalu.

Countries were enraged that the compromise proposed by the co-presidencies Turkey and Australia did not even refer clearly to the landmark agreement reached at COP28 in Dubai on "transition away from fossil fuels", making only a vague reference to the "United Arab Emirates (UAE) Consensus".

Speaking for the EU presidency, Ireland's Climate Minister Darragh O'Brien told the plenary: "We will not accept a COP that greenwashes fossil fuels."

Conceding defeat at the closing plenary on Sunday, COP31 President Murat Kurum, Turkey's environment minister, said, "I understand that there is no agreement on this text," and then declared that the proposed Antalya Pact and its cover decision had not been adopted.

He ruled out another attempt at compromise, and blamed "some" unnamed countries for failing "to demonstrate the level of commitment and flexibility required".

UN Secretary-General António Guterres said he was "deeply disappointed," warning that every delay makes the task harder and more costly, with the overshoot of the 1.5°C warming target set in the Paris Agreement in 2015 now a looming reality.

"Science tells us an overshoot above that level is now inevitable," Guterres warned in a statement, adding that ultimately, fossil fuels "must go the way of the dinosaurs".

COP31 also became the longest UN climate conference ever, overtaking COP25 in Madrid in 2019. COP6 in The Hague failed to adopt any declaration, while COP15 in Copenhagen in 2009 "took note" of that year's cover decision, without formally adopting it — also failing to fulfil the high hopes for any real breakthrough on climate action. That breakthrough moment finally came six years later in 2015 with the Paris Agreement.

Unresolved items from COP31 will now carry over automatically, under rule 16 of the UNFCCC rules of procedure, to COP32 in Addis Ababa in November 2027.



The "very disappointed" President of COP31 Negotiations Chris Bowen sits on his chair at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP31) in Antalya, Turkey, on November 22, 2026.
MURAD SEZER/REUTERS

Delegates react with disappointment

"We have been let down on all sides," the Marshall Islands representative told the room, while Vanuatu objected forcefully to the silence on fossil fuels, the leading cause of warming and sea level rise that is threatening the very existence of many Pacific island nations.

The UK's lead negotiator, Kate Hughes, called the text "a lowest common denominator," while Norway said it took the world backwards from earlier agreements.

Juan Carlos Navarro, Panama's minister of environment, said on Friday said that the COP had been "hijacked by petroleum," and reminded the hall that the world was heading for 4°C before Paris, but it is on course to reach 2.8°C today.

The third and final failed text, issued early Sunday morning, had attempted to bridge the gap between petrostates and 'high ambition' countries by "recalling the United Arab Emirates Consensus in its entirety across mitigation, adaptation and means of implementation" in its second paragraph.

But the oblique reference was seen as too little, too late, by its critics, while a group of Saudi-led states as well as Russia, said they could not accept any wording on fossil fuels at all, even if based on past agreements.

Saudi Arabia and other leading fossil fuel producers had argued for a text that emphasized carbon capture and storage strategies to halt runaway warming — solutions that critics say are expensive and unproven at scale.

Australia's Chris Bowen, the president of negotiations, called the result "very disappointing" but pointed to the more than 90 countries that signed up to a commitment to undertake faster electrification of their energy systems as a positive outcome.

Speaking to Health Policy Watch, a senior official in Papua New Guinea's Ministry of Environment said his delegation did not expect such low levels of consensus. "We would have at least agreed to the [Friday] version."

For the Pacific, the stakes are immediate. "Every piece of coal extracted is a threat to my country's future," Marshall Islands President Hilda Heine had told leaders earlier.

Solomon Islands Prime Minister Matthew Cooper Wale said climate impacts already cost his country about 5% of GDP a year.

Civil society: 'A failure of political leadership'

Civil society organizations were quick to denounce the summit's failure. "This has been the worst COP ever," lamented Mohamed Adow of Power Shift Africa, a Nairobi-based pan-African climate and energy think tank supporting the continent's energy transition and climate adaptation.

The World Resources Institute echoed these sentiments, blaming the results on "a failure of political leadership, not a failure of the Paris Agreement".

Other groups vented their frustration, telling media that the conference yielded nothing that protects people — and is even a license to keep polluting.



Civil society members demonstrate at the opening of the closing plenary of COP31 in Antalya, Turkey, on November 20, 2026. The session was later suspended until next morning due to sharp disputes over a watered-down draft text.
KIARA WORTH/UN CLIMATE CHANGE

> Conceding defeat at the closing plenary on Sunday, COP31 President Murat Kurum, Turkey's environment minister, said, "I understand that there is no agreement on this text," and then declared that the proposed Antalya Pact and its cover decision had not been adopted. He ruled out another attempt at compromise, and blamed "some" unnamed countries for failing "to demonstrate the level of commitment and flexibility required".

Fossil fuel language disintegrates

The first draft of the decision text, released on November 16 by the COP Presidency, jointly held by Australia and Turkey, called for "the immediate transition away from fossil fuels in energy systems".

But by November 19, after objections from oil producers, multiple references to fossil fuels as a cause of climate change and the need to transition away had disappeared. Instead, language morphed into an "irreversible global transition towards low greenhouse gas emissions and climate resilience".

The final text did not mention fossil fuels at all, and it referred only obliquely to the agreement in Dubai as "recalling the United Arab Emirates Consensus in its entirety, across mitigation, adaptation and means of implementation".

It offered a goal to raise electricity to 35% of final energy use by 2035, carbon capture at "gigatonne scale" and a call to triple adaptation finance with no dollar figure, after a $120 billion target was dropped. Its health paragraph named no diseases and ignored air pollution.

Panama breaks the silence

No country pushed harder than Panama, whose forests absorb more carbon than it emits. In a statement to the COP presidencies, Navarro wrote: "While we listen to endless oratory, the planet is being destroyed." Panama demanded a cap on global oil production at current levels and an end to rules that let one country block agreement.

What the science says

The evidence before delegates left little room for doubt. Global temperature from January to September 2026 was about 1.47°C above pre-industrial levels, and 2015–2026 is set to be the warmest 12 years on record. Human-induced warming will pass 1.5°C in about four years.

Fossil fuels produced about 88% of CO2 emissions over the past decade, and only 150 billion tonnes can still be emitted for 1.5°C, less than four years at current rates, according to the Carbon Brief. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) says national pledges point to 2.6°C and current policies to 2.8°C, and that limiting the peak to 1.7–1.8°C needs emissions cuts of 18% by 2030 and 45% by 2035.

Climate toll on health

The toll is already measured in lives. Heat was linked to a record 710,000 deaths in 2023, more than 70% of them caused by climate change, according to the Lancet Countdown, while countries spent a net $808 billion on fossil fuel subsidies in 2024.

"No health system can be made resilient to an endlessly warming world," UN climate chief Simon Stiell warned health ministers on the conference's opening day.

The science of climate change itself was contested as ministers sought to weaken the agreement text. Saudi Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman told leaders the aim was to cut emissions "regardless of their sources," despite the fact that nearly 90% of CO2 comes from fossil fuels — and pressed for later IPCC reports. The oil-rich nation insisted it was "not seeking to delay climate science".

The White House, absent for a second year, put forth an even stronger denouncement of COP31, calling the summit "climate nonsense".

Ten years from Paris — a rocky road to pinning fossil fuels

The 2015 Paris Agreement never mentioned fossil fuels, although the consensus agreement to keep warming below 1.5°C was a landmark, recognizing a clear target for climate mitigation against which member states could commit through Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and the UNFCCC could benchmark progress. Dubai in 2023 finally agreed to the language on a "transition" away from fossil fuels, and COP 30 in Belém in 2025 led to a 2026 meeting on a roadmap for doing so, launched just before COP31.

And now, Antalya would not repeat even the Dubai agreement language, ultimately agreeing to nothing. Countries that want to move faster will now work through the Santa Marta process, and Panama's call for majority voting will be harder to dismiss.

In Antalya, governments were asked to say in one document that the 1.5°C limit is being breached — and that coal, oil and gas are the reason. They managed the first half of that sentence. They could not manage the second.

The article first appeared on Health Policy Watch.

What COP31 missed about global food security



By Michael Werz

Founding member of WP Intelligence Council on Global Security

OPINION

At the time of writing this piece, representatives from around the world were gathered in Antalya, Turkey, for the 31st UN climate conference, known as COP31. The annual summit convenes members of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change to advance global action on climate change that addresses its far-reaching consequences on food systems, human security, and the environment.

Food security featured on the opening day of this year's COP agenda, but it did not address the important challenge of food weaponization: the manipulation of food access, infrastructure, or supplies to achieve economic, military, or political objectives. The issue gained international recognition in 2018, when the UN Security Council adopted a resolution condemning the intentional starvation of civilians as a method of warfare.

Michael Werz, CFR senior fellow and director of the Food Security Program in the Wachenheim Center for Peace and Security, moderated a panel at COP31 examining the weaponization of food in modern conflicts. He spoke with CFR about the growing geopolitical risks to global food security, the gaps in international efforts to prevent the practice, and what policymakers should prioritize moving forward.



A UN World Food Program (WFP) staff member conducts an inspection at the food storage unit at the WFP warehouse in Karamoja region, Uganda, on July 21, 2025.
HAJARAH NALWADDA/GETTY IMAGES

Why is food weaponization on the agenda at a climate summit?

Food insecurity has to be understood as an important vector of geopolitical instability and as an area where malign actors pursue new weaponization strategies. The current climate shocks create a more vulnerable global food system, and drought, flooding, or failed crops increase the risk of starvation in existing conflicts.

In this context, the United Kingdom's recent appointment of former Joint Intelligence Committee chair Madeleine Alessandri as special representative for climate security is significant. The move signals recognition of the geopolitical dimensions of climate and food security, which are often underestimated. Understanding food security requires looking beyond agriculture to account for fertilizer shocks caused by the Iran war and disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz, as well as continuing Russian attacks on Black Sea grain infrastructure and a potentially record-setting El Niño climate phenomenon.

Anticipation is central to what my colleague Swathi Veeravalli terms "forward defense": when countries recognize the links between food security risks and act proactively ahead of shocks to build resilience. These risks are mutually reinforcing and will significantly affect the 2027–28 harvest season. At COP31, food security was one of the stated priorities — for good reason.

What are the biggest obstacles to addressing food weaponization globally?

There are two problems: the complexity of the issue and the unwillingness of many countries to address its political aspects. First, a major challenge lies in how closely connected issues are often discussed separately. Current policy conversations about trade coercion, wartime starvation, and the use of food as a long-range weapon need to converge, as these issues can no longer be treated in isolation from one another.

Second, enforcement remains weak despite the existence of some international norms. The international community currently lacks effective mechanisms to deter food weaponization on a global scale. In Sudan, for example, food is being used as a weapon, contributing to mass starvation amid a conflict involving warring factions supported by Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, and Russia. Meanwhile, funding cuts in the United States are affecting aid delivery, while the number of aid workers on the ground has declined. This issue is particularly pressing given that conflict is the primary driver of acute food insecurity and that some 70 percent of acutely food-insecure people live in countries affected by crises.



Palestinians struggling with severe food shortages amid ongoing Israeli attacks and blockade gather near the Zikim Crossing to receive limited aid supplies in northwestern Gaza on August 08, 2025.
SAEED M. M. T. JARAS/ANADOLU

> There was, however, some progress on this front in other multilateral institutions. In October, the Group of Twenty (G20) trade ministers reached a consensus on condemning food weaponization through coercive trade actions in their working group. While the text stated that "weaponization of food threatens livelihoods in targeted countries, undermines the functioning of and confidence in international markets and the global trading system," it did not address starvation as a method of war as seen in Gaza.

Did COP31 adequately address food security?

This COP was a missed opportunity to steer the food security conversation in a direction of greater geopolitical awareness and action.

Instead, the Turkish COP presidency has focused on important but long-established issues, such as the food-water-climate nexus, financing for women farmers, and climate-resilient agriculture. In Australia, president of this year's COP negotiations, food security is rarely discussed as a geopolitical concern, and climate security sits at the margins of foreign policy priorities.

Given the growing prospect of a global food crisis, COP31 should have launched a strategic food security roadmap toward COP32 that linked sustainability and resilience to the growing weaponization of food through actionable recommendations.

There was, however, some progress on this front in other multilateral institutions. In October, the Group of Twenty (G20) trade ministers reached a consensus on condemning food weaponization through coercive trade actions in their working group. While the text stated that "weaponization of food threatens livelihoods in targeted countries, undermines the functioning of and confidence in international markets and the global trading system," it did not address starvation as a method of war as seen in Gaza. In addition, although the world agreed to stop using food as a weapon, it hasn't, and this gap between rhetoric and enforcement must be closed.

What should COP deliver on food security moving forward?

The COP presidency and participating countries should have pushed for a serious, strategic food security roadmap toward COP32, framing sustainability and resilience within the current geopolitical context of increasing food weaponization. The meetings in Antalya should have significantly expanded traditional agricultural conversations to recognize food-system infrastructure, fertilizer, and droughts as major factors in armed conflicts.

One step forward, however, was the United Nations' announcement of plans to establish a Disaster Risk Financing Platform that Máximo Torero, chief economist of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, described as an instrument for establishing "predictive capacities to anticipate risks and act before they escalate". Future conversations must broaden the use of early-warning indicators for droughts and identify ways to connect climate adaptation efforts with conflict-prevention bodies.

The article was first published by the Council on Foreign Relations.

Iran seeks to broaden Olympic medal base for LA28

Sports Desk



khabarvarzeshi.com

Iranian Sports Minister Ahmad Donyamali has urged the country to expand its medal prospects beyond the traditional strongholds of wrestling, taekwondo, and weightlifting at the Los Angeles 2028 Olympics.

The issue was among the key points raised during seven expert sessions held by the National Olympic Committee to assess the performance of Iranian federations, as it reviewed the country's campaign at the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games, where the delegation collected 52 medals, including 19 golds, to finish sixth in the medal table.

The discussions focused primarily on the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics, while also emphasizing the need for a comprehensive development plan for non-Olympic sports to improve Iran's performance at the 2030 Asian Games.

With less than 20 months remaining until the sporting extravaganza, Donyamali has called for an end to Iran's traditional reliance on wrestling, taekwondo, and weightlifting for Olympic medals, stressing the importance of broadening the country's medal-winning base.

"Iran's Olympic medal tally should no longer be limited to just weightlifting, wrestling, and taekwondo, although we must also make the most of our medal-winning potential in these three sports," the sports minister said at the concluding session this week.

"Athletics, shooting, and gymnastics are sports in which we can win medals in Los Angeles if we invest the necessary effort.

"What matters most at this stage is securing Olympic quotas. Given the limited number of athletes we can send, obtaining these quotas must be our top priority. Planning should focus more on the weight categories and events in which we have realistic chances of qualifying and winning medals."

Of the 88 medals won by Iranian athletes in Olympic history, dating back to weightlifter Jafar Salmasi's bronze in London 1948, wrestling, weightlifting, and taekwondo account for 85.

Wrestling leads the way with 27 golds, including the first two Olympic titles won by Iran, courtesy of legendary duo Gholamreza Takhti and Emam-Ali Habibi in their respective categories at Melbourne 1956.

Weightlifting and taekwondo, meanwhile, have contributed nine and three golds, respectively.

Hossein Rezazadeh and Hadi Saei are the only Iranians to have won two Olympic gold medals, with the latter remaining the country's most decorated Olympic athlete, having also claimed a bronze in Sydney 2000.

Iran's success in other sports, however, has been few and far between.

At London 2012, Ehsan Haddadi won silver in the men's discus throw, before Javad Foroughi and Sajjad Ganjzadeh claimed historic golds in shooting and karate, respectively, at Tokyo 2020.

Iran collected three golds, six silvers, and three bronze medals at the latest edition of the multi-sport showpiece in Paris 2024, all of them coming in the familiar three disciplines.

The key question, however, is how this ambition to diversify the medal tally can be translated from a stated objective into an effective, results-driven strategy.

While maximizing their medal potential should remain a priority, continued reliance on these three disciplines not only limits the country's opportunities to win medals but also leaves its Olympic campaign more vulnerable to setbacks should results fall short in any of them.

Meanwhile, unlocking the potential of disciplines such as athletics, shooting, and gymnastics requires far more than occasional participation in international competitions. Identifying promising athletes, developing a strong talent pool at junior level, recruiting top-class coaches, ensuring regular participation in high-level international events, and providing standard training facilities are among the essential steps that must be incorporated into the respective federations' plans.

The minister's emphasis on securing Olympic quotas is also significant. Talent and encouraging performances at Asian competitions alone cannot guarantee a successful campaign on the world's biggest sporting stage.

Federations must identify the weight categories, events, and disciplines in which they have realistic chances of securing Olympic berths and subsequently challenging for medals, and allocate their resources accordingly.

Women's sport is another important part of the equation. Donyamali has underlined Iran's ambition to win the country's first-ever Olympic gold medal in women's competition, a target that requires greater attention to female athletes and disciplines, equal opportunities for preparation and international competition, and sustained support for medal prospects.

Iran has won only three women's medals in Olympic history, all in taekwondo.

Kimia Alizadeh opened Iran's women's medal account with a bronze in Rio 2016, before Nahid Kiani won a historic silver and Mobina Nematzadeh claimed a bronze in Paris 2024.

In this regard, the National Olympic Committee's expert sessions and plans by its National Teams Monitoring Center to hold meetings with federations could provide a valuable opportunity to assess the situation in individual disciplines, hear the concerns of coaching staff, and establish preparation priorities.

However, the effectiveness of such meetings will ultimately depend on whether they produce concrete, time-bound, and measurable action plans.

The Los Angeles Olympics, therefore, will be more than just another sporting destination for Iran. They will also serve as a test of the country's ability to develop medal-winning potential across a wider range of disciplines.

If Iran is to move beyond its traditional reliance on three sports, significant changes must begin now in the way federations are supported, resources allocated, and their performances monitored. Otherwise, the ambition of adding new medal-winning disciplines in 2028 could remain little more than a declared goal.

Mehr News Agency contributed to this report.

ITTF World Youth Championships:

Faraji wins historic bronze in U19 doubles

Sports Desk



Iran's Benyamin Faraji (L) and Kazakhstan's Alan Kurmangaliyev won the bronze medal in the U19 boys' doubles category at the ITTF World Youth Championships in Istanbul.
ITTF

The ITTF World Youth Championships in Istanbul delivered yet another milestone for Iranian table tennis player Benyamin Faraji.

Two years after winning a historic bronze in the U15 boys' singles event at the competition in Helsingborg, Sweden – the country's first-ever international medal in the sport – the teenage prodigy, ranked No. 11 in the latest ITTF boys' U19 rankings, teamed up with world No. 7 Alan Kurmangaliyev of Kazakhstan to replicate the feat in the U19 doubles event on Thursday.

Having opened their campaign with a 3-2 victory over Poland's Samuel Michna and Patryk Zyworonek in the round of 16, the pair, coached by Iranian Miad Mokayef, had already secured a podium finish with a 3-2 quarterfinal win against India's Abhinandh Pradhivadhi and Priyanuj Bhattacharyya.

The duo, however, saw its run come to an end after suffering a straight-game loss (11-6, 11-6, 11-5) to South Korea's Kim Daehwan and Lee Hyeondo in less than 19 minutes at the Ata Sporları Merkezi venue. Faraji and Kurmangaliyev shared the bronze medal with the French duo of Nathan Pilard and Antoine Noirault, who lost 3-0 to China's Wen Ruibo and Li Hechen in the other semifinal.

The singles competition, meanwhile, was one to forget for Faraji, who fell in four games (13-11, 11-9, 12-10, 11-5) to the host nation's Kenan Kahraman in the round of 16. Kahraman was part of the Turkish duo that won silver in the U15 doubles event last year.

Faraji's compatriot Faraz Shakiba also suffered a first-round exit in the U15 boys' singles category against world No. 21 Ukyo Kobayashi of Japan, who came from behind twice to edge the Iranian 4-3 (13-15, 11-5, 9-11, 5-11, 11-4, 11-7, 13-11) in a thrilling contest lasting just over 52 minutes.

Faraji was also part of the Iranian trio that missed out on a semifinal spot in the U19 boys' team event after falling 3-0 to China on Sunday.

Mohammad Habibi suffered a straight-game loss (11-8, 11-2, 15-13) to Wen Ruibo, before Faraji was beaten by Li Hechen, who rallied from behind to win 3-2 (9-11, 12-10, 5-11, 11-6, 11-4).

Arshia Lorestani completed Iran's disappointing quarterfinal outing with a 3-0 defeat (11-9, 11-3, 11-6) against Zhou Guanhong.


IRIHF

Asian Women's Handball Championship:

Iran eyeing fitting finale to group stage against holders Japan

Sports Desk

Iran will look to round off its group-stage campaign on a high note at the Asian Women's Handball Championship when it takes on defending champion Japan today in Almaty, Kazakhstan.

The Iranian women claimed a comprehensive 23-15 victory over Thailand on Wednesday to secure a top-four finish in Group A and book a quarterfinal berth with one game to spare.

Maedeh Oshaqqi delivered a player-of-the-match performance with six goals as Iran bounced back from a 34-32 defeat to 10-time silver medalist China on the previous day at the Dostyk Universal Sports Complex.

Bahar Izadgashb also contributed six goals, while Haniyeh Karimi and Elaheh Nikan chipped in with five and three, respectively, for an Iranian side that fielded a reshuffled lineup.

Iran had opened its campaign with a commanding 33-16 victory over Hong Kong on Monday. Iran and Japan also met in the group stage of the 2024 edition, with Japan claiming a 34-14 victory, having previously cruised to an emphatic 43-19 win in the 2022 semifinals.

As if the prospect of securing a maiden podium finish at the competition – after falling short in the third-place playoff in each of the previous three editions – were not enough motivation, the Almaty tournament also serves as a qualification pathway for the 28th IHF Women's Handball World Championship.

The four semifinalists will secure direct qualification for the global showpiece, which is scheduled to be held in Hungary from November 30 to December 19 next year.

Mehregan highlights Iran's rich heritage of harvest, friendship



ISNA

Iranica Desk

Mehregan, one of Iran's oldest festivals and a symbol of friendship, loyalty and gratitude for nature's blessings and agricultural produce, was inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in December 2024. The decision was made by UNESCO's Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage during its 19th session, held in Asunción, Paraguay, from December 2 to 6, 2024, as part of efforts to introduce one of Iran's long-standing cultural traditions to the world.

Mehregan has deep roots in Iran's history and culture. Historical accounts point to elaborate celebrations during the Sassanid era, while the origins of the festival are also associated with the Achaemenid period. In Iranian mythology, the festival is linked to Fereydun's victory over Zahhak. The name Mehregan is derived from "Mehr," a concept associated in Iranian culture with covenant, loyalty and love, according to chtn.ir.



IRNA

The festival is celebrated from October 2 to November 2, coinciding with the autumn harvest season. It is an occasion to give thanks for the bounty of the land and divine blessings. From this perspective, Mehregan is more than a seasonal celebration; it is a tradition that recalls the bond between human beings and nature, bringing together the joy of the harvest, gratitude and social solidarity.

Mehregan is also associated with peace, friendship and social cohesion. Exchanging gifts and generosity are among the festival's traditions, helping strengthen social ties and promote kindness among people. Sometimes referred to as the "autumn Nowruz," the festival provides an opportunity for people from different communities to gather and foster unity.

One expression of this solidarity is the participation of Muslims and Zoroastrians in shared celebrations. During the festival, people gather around a common table and enjoy seasonal produce, including pomegranates, grapes, apples and wheat. Music and singing, gift-giving, and sporting competitions, including traditional wrestling, are also among the activities associated with Mehregan. Despite the passage of centuries, the festival continues to be observed in different parts of Iran. Its customs, from communal gatherings and hospitality to music and gift-giving, help preserve and pass on this cultural heritage. The inscription of Mehregan on UNESCO's list offers an opportunity to introduce a tradition shaped by the relationship between nature, gratitude, friendship and social coexistence, and sustained throughout Iranian culture.

UNESCO's official record identifies Mehregan as a joint nomination by Iran and Tajikistan. It describes the celebration as an autumn harvest festival observed annually from 2 October to 2 November, when communities give thanks for their crops and livestock. The rituals and foods associated with the celebration vary according to local customs and religious beliefs.

According to UNESCO, Zoroastrian communities may recite passages from their holy book, while Muslim participants recite special prayers. Both communities share the custom of setting a table with seasonal produce and food items. UNESCO's description mentions pomegranates, watermelons, pears, citrus fruits, grapes, apples, rice and wheat, as well as prepared dishes, nuts, sweets and special drinks.

The UNESCO record also notes that Mehregan celebrations can include theatre, local sports, flower exhibitions and the display or sale of handicrafts and related products. The knowledge and skills associated with the festival are passed down through storytelling and participation in organizing and carrying out the celebrations; schools and higher education institutions also contribute to this process.

Experience history, culture of Kahneh in Fars Province

Iranica Desk

The historical heritage and tourist attractions of Fars Province are by no means limited to a few well-known destinations and cities. For those passionate about historical tourism and fascinated by exploring the surviving monuments of ancient times, Kahneh is an excellent choice.

Evaz, a small town in southern Fars Province, lies near Lar, approximately 340 kilometers from Shiraz. The journey takes around four to five hours, according to IRNA.

Kahneh is located just 16 kilometers from the town of Evaz. In less than 20 minutes, visitors can reach this historic village, where several remarkable heritage sites await them.

A visit to Kahneh offers an opportunity to explore a historic caravanserai, see an ancient bathhouse and water reservoir, stroll through the traditional village quarter and visit an archaeological mound. This one-day excursion is sure to be a memorable experience for anyone interested in historical tourism.

Amid the palm groves of Evaz, the echoes of Safavid-era caravans seem to linger around an old caravanserai in Kahneh. Visitors interested in historical tourism can spend several hours exploring the site and imagining the journeys of the caravans that once passed through it.

Caravanserais held an important place in Iranian social life and were among the country's essential public facilities. They were particularly vital in Iran's hot and arid regions, providing shelter for travelers and making journeys through these challenging climates easier.





IRNA

Most of the caravanserais in Fars Province were built during the Safavid period, many of them in the southern part of the province. Merbet Caravanserai (known also as Marboot Caravanserai) is among these historic structures.

Caravans travelling from the ports towards Jahrom would pass through several caravanserais along the route, including those in Gerash and Lar, the caravanserai west of Evaz and, eventually, Merbet. From there, the route continued towards Banaruiyeh (also known as Bonaruyeh) through the Bazen and Mansourabad mountain passes.

Built along the historic route connecting the Persian Gulf ports with Iran's central regions, Merbet Caravanserai was part of the wider network of Safavid's Shah Abbas-era caravanserais. It stands at the entrance to the Merbet and Bazen mountain passes and has a rectangular



layout.

The building has only one entrance, a design feature that allowed better control over arrivals and departures and consequently enhanced the security of the complex.

The caravanserai features a rectangular plan centered on an open courtyard, with corridor-like spaces surrounding it. Its central ivan (a vaulted hall open at one end) is flanked by two chambers. Other architectural elements include a domed ceiling, arches, vaulted structures and recessed niches beneath barrel vaults along three sides.

The building is adorned with characteristic elements of Safavid architecture, including squinches and karbandi, a traditional Iranian technique of decorative vault construction.

The eastern and western wings each contain three chambers. The lower sections of these rooms were, at some point, coated with gypsum plaster up to the springing line of the arches. The chambers were generally built several steps above the courtyard level. This arrangement helped prevent rainwater and mud from entering the rooms while also keeping them somewhat protected from dust rising from the courtyard.

The caravanserai's loading and unloading area is located in the center of the courtyard, with a small entrance on its northern side. A well is also situated nearby.

Although parts of this Safavid-style caravanserai have deteriorated, including sections of the eastern roof and three of its domes, the surviving structure still offers visitors an opportunity to imagine travelling alongside the caravans of the Safavid era.

According to local tradition, the building was constructed in the late Safavid period and was primarily used as a Chaparkhaneh, a postal relay station where fresh horses were kept for couriers.

The extensive corridor along the southern side of the caravanserai lends some credibility to this interpretation. The Safavid structure may therefore have served a dual purpose, functioning both as a caravanserai and a postal relay station.

Another major historical attraction of Kahneh is its traditional village fabric, which offers visitors an opportunity to walk through a landscape shaped by centuries of history.

The old quarter is a treasure trove of historic houses, a shrine, mosques and other traditional structures. Together, these buildings form a historically significant architectural ensemble that is being considered for inclusion on Iran's National Heritage List.

Beyond its historic alleyways, visitors can explore the shrine of Imamzadeh Sheikh Abi Ishaq, the Jaame Mosque and traditional houses dating back to the Qajar period. These attractions are sure to capture visitors' attention and encourage them to extend their stay in Evaz by several hours.

With approximately 800 households, Kahneh is situated along a mountainside, while its old quarter stretches across the lower slopes.

Historical evidence suggests that two towers built on the mountain overlooking the village once served as watchtowers, protecting this historic settlement. Indeed, the village's name is also believed to be connected to these structures.

Since the word Kahneh in the Pahlavi language is said to mean a fortress or tower, it appears that the village may have taken its name from the towers standing above its historic quarter.

These historic fortifications have also been documented and are expected to be included in the comprehensive heritage dossier for Kahneh, with the aim of securing their registration on Iran's National Heritage List in the near future.

All these attractions are concentrated within a single village, offering visitors to southern Fars a unique opportunity to explore several historical heritage sites during a one-day excursion. For travelers seeking to discover destinations beyond the province's better-known tourist attractions, Kahneh offers a fascinating journey into the region's history, architecture and traditional way of life.

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Leader highlights Basij's growing role

Social Desk

Leader of Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Mojtaba Khamenei l has called for a major overhaul of the Basij volunteer force, urging it to draw on growing public support and develop new models under the slogan "Every Iranian, a Basij member".

In a message marking Basij Week, which ran from November 20 to 26, the Leader described the organization as a remarkable institution founded on the teachings of the third Imam of Shia Imam Hussein (PBUH) and dedicated to defending Islam and Iran's dignity.

The Leader said the Basij first demonstrated its capabilities during the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war, when its members played a central role in the military effort.

The war also shaped a lasting ethos of faith, commitment, sincerity, courage, sacrifice and service to others, he added.

Although the war ended after eight years, Ayatollah Khamenei said, the spirit of the Basij continued to influence Iran's formal and informal institutions.

He attributed this legacy to the war, the leadership of the late founder of the Islamic Republic, Imam Khomeini and broad public support.

The Leader said the recent nationwide mobilization of Iranians after the recent wars had created an opportunity for a new phase in the Basij's development.

Iran has faced two wars waged by the United States and Israel, a 12-day war in June 2025 and a second, 40-day war that began in late February 2026.

The Basij organization should use this expanded public base to design and manage more advanced forms of the force, taking concrete steps toward the goal of making every Iranian a Basij member, he said.

Ayatollah Khamenei said many members of the armed forces, government, parliament and the wider public identified with the Basij's principles, even without formal membership.

He urged the organization to make full use of this broader support.

He also called on the Basij to spread its ethos through everyday conduct, including kindness, humility, respect for the public, generosity, modesty and avoiding ostentation. Such behavior, he said, could encourage communities across cities, towns and villages to embrace its values.

The Leader said the organization had long helped compensate for shortcomings in state and non-state institutions.

Its expanded social base now represented a major resource that should be mobilized to address national problems and pursue new opportunities.

Ayatollah Khamenei expressed hope that the Basij would set an example of collective cooperation and national solidarity, helping drive Iran's future progress.

The Leader concluded by praying for the fallen Basij members, wishing wounded veterans patience and recovery, and seeking divine support for Basij members in Iran and the Resistance Front.

Tehran, Tashkent seek joint Silk Road tourism routes



Iranian Tourism Minister Reza Salehi-Amiri addresses the int'l tourism summit in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, on November 27, 2026.
IRNA

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran and Uzbekistan are seeking to develop joint tourism routes along the historic Silk Road, boost direct flights and expand cultural exchanges, as Tehran pushes to turn shared heritage into practical tourism cooperation.

Iranian Tourism Minister Reza Salehi-Amiri outlined the proposals during talks with Abdulaziz Akkulov, chairman of Uzbekistan's Tourism Committee, on the sidelines of an international tourism summit in Tashkent on Friday.

He called for easier visa procedures, more direct flights, joint travel packages and closer private-sector ties. Proposed routes would link Mashhad in northeastern Iran with Samarkand and Bukhara in Uzbekistan.

He also suggested developing rail connections linking Samarkand, Bukhara, Merv in southeastern Turkmenistan, Sarakhs in northeastern Iran and Mashhad.

The two countries could also develop combined tours for visitors from third countries, highlighting their shared history, architecture, cultural traditions and Nowruz, the Persian New Year, Salehi-Amiri said.

Cooperation in traditional arts and heritage preservation also featured in the talks. Iran plans to send 10 handicraft artists to Uzbekistan to train local artisans and share traditional skills, the minister said.

In a separate meeting with Gayane Umerova, head of Uzbekistan's Presidential Department of Creative Industries, the two sides discussed cooperation in the preservation and restoration of historic sites.

Speaking at the summit, Salehi-Amiri said Iran had about 3,000 active eco-lodges and aimed to establish at least one in every village.

The country also has around 25,000 tourism facilities, including hotels, tourism villages and health tourism centers.

"Iran was encouraging tourism facilities to adopt renewable energy, particularly solar power, as part of efforts to promote sustainable tourism," he said.

Uzbekistan, which has 44 eco-lodges, expressed interest in drawing on Iran's experience in rural tourism.

Visa access and health tourism were also discussed. Salehi-Amiri said Iran had unilaterally waived tourist visa requirements for Uzbek nationals and called for reciprocal measures.

He noted that visa-free travel had not been extended to Iranian service passport holders in Uzbekistan, which allows citizens of about 90 countries to enter without visas.

To promote tourism, Salehi-Amiri proposed annual exchanges of 15 media professionals and content producers from each country.

He also invited Uzbek officials and tourism businesses to the 19th Tehran International Tourism Exhibition in February.

Akkulov said Uzbekistan planned to send a delegation of officials, tourism operators and handicraft artists to the event.

He added that his country was working to increase flights and ease visa procedures with Iran, and viewed cooperation with Iranian medical institutions as valuable for developing its health tourism sector.

On the sidelines of the summit, Salehi-Amiri also met tourism officials from Tajikistan, Pakistan and Azerbaijan to discuss bilateral and regional cooperation.

Salehi-Amiri said existing agreements with Uzbekistan should be translated into time-bound action plans, with designated officials responsible for implementing each area of cooperation.

The minister was in Uzbekistan at the invitation of its tourism chief to attend the summit on sustainable and resilient tourism, the opening of the Tashkent International Tourism Exhibition and bilateral meetings with tourism officials.

Rial-based debit card mechanism launched for foreign tourists with €5,000 limit



Arts & Culture Desk

Foreign tourists visiting Iran can now obtain payment cards holding up to the equivalent of 5,000 euros each, with exchange rates negotiated directly with banks or licensed currency exchange offices, under a new scheme unveiled by the Central Bank.

Mohammad Reza Mani Yekta, head of the Central Bank of Iran's Payment Systems Supervision Department, said the revised system removes restrictions that had limited the previous scheme, including low card limits, exchange-rate constraints and the narrow range of banks and financial institutions offering the service.

All banks and licensed currency exchange offices can now issue the cards. Each foreign visitor can obtain up to two, with a balance of up to 5,000 euros per card.

The cards can be reloaded during a visit and used to transfer funds.

Tourists returning to Iran can reactivate previously issued cards with remaining balances.

On departure, they can recover unused funds in foreign currency or sell the remaining currency back.

Mani Yekta said pre-issued cards would be distributed through exchange offices to ensure uninterrupted service at airports and land border crossings without facilities for issuing cards immediately.

The cards can be used at more than 10 million payment acceptance points across Iran and on all domestic online payment gateways.

Eight banks currently provide the service: Bank Mellat, Sina Bank, Refah Kargaran Bank, Bank Melli Iran, Qarz-al-Hasaneh Mehr Iran Bank, Dey Bank, Shahr Bank and Bank Saderat Iran.

Ali Asghar Shalbafian, head of the Investment and Economic Affairs Center at the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, called for faster issuance at airports and border crossings.

Saadi, Iqbal unite on canvas celebrating Iran-Pakistan friendship

Arts & Culture Desk

Verses by renowned Persian classical poet Saadi (c. 1213 - 1291) and Pakistani philosopher-poet Muhammad Iqbal (1877 –1938) have been brought together in a large collaborative artwork by two Iranian artists at the World Culture Festival Karachi 2026, celebrating the literary and cultural ties between the two countries.

Calligrapher Mohammad Saeed Naghashian and painter Hossein Eini Bakhsh created the six-by-1.5-meter work, titled 'Canvas of Friendship', in a live performance at the Arts Council of Pakistan in Karachi, southern Pakistan. Festival visitors were able to watch the artists at work.

The composition combines Nastaliq calligraphy and oil painting. It features images of Saadi's mausoleum in Shiraz, southwestern Iran, the mausoleum of Pakistan's founder Muhammad Ali Jinnah in Karachi, and Imam Mosque in Isfahan, central Iran.

Saadi's celebrated verse, "Human beings are members of one another, having been created from a single essence", appears alongside a verse by Iqbal in Urdu.

The latter reflects his philosophical view of humanity's potential for growth and spiritual elevation: "The stars fear the rise of the earthly human, lest this fallen star should become a full moon".



Hossein Eini Bakhsh (R) and Mohammad Saeed Naghashian poses for a photo with their joint artwork at the Arts Council of Pakistan in Karachi, Pakistan in an undated photo.
IRNA

The words "Long live Iran and Pakistan" also feature in the artwork as a symbol of friendship between the two nations.

The artists created the work as a gesture of appreciation for the sympathy and support shown by the Pakistani people toward Iran during the recent war, according to the Iranian report.

The World Culture Festival Karachi 2026 was held from November 20 to 22, bringing together artists from more than 50 countries.