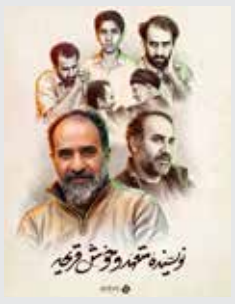
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A crew member of the Iranian frigate IRIS Dena gives a military salute aboard the ship as other comrades stand at attention on the deck of the destroyer in this undated photo. The vessel was sunk on 4 March 2026 by a US submarine near the southern coast of Sri Lanka.

IRNA

Strategic pragmatism or strategic resistance?

Iran's economic diplomacy in age of constraint



By Pourya Zarshenas

Researcher in energy policy & security

OPINION EXCLUSIVE

For Tehran, the challenge is no longer simply surviving economic pressure. It is deciding what survival should ultimately accomplish. Governments under pressure tend to develop a remarkable vocabulary. Words such as resilience, self-sufficiency, strategic independence and resistance acquire almost magical properties. They are expected to explain difficulties, justify decisions and, occasionally, reassure an economy that would much rather receive investment than another motivational speech.

Iran is no exception. For years, its economic diplomacy has navigated the difficult intersection of sanctions, geopolitical confrontation, regional security and domestic economic pressures. Yet the central question increasingly concerns not whether Iran can withstand external pressure, but whether the policies designed to withstand it can also generate sustainable economic development.

Strategic resistance and strategic pragmatism are often presented as competing philosophies. The former emphasizes independence, deterrence and the preservation of strategic autonomy. The latter stresses flexibility, negotiation, economic engagement and the ability to adjust policies to changing circumstances. In practice, however, countries rarely have the luxury of choosing one while entirely abandoning the other.

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The real challenge is determining where resistance becomes costly rigidity and where pragmatism becomes strategically shortsighted.



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Many of solutions long known

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Jamshidi rues offensive shortcomings as Iran falls to Australia

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VP: Iran not powerless in face of US naval blockade



Iran's First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref (L) speaks during a meeting with officials to review the status of reserves of essential goods in Tehran on November 28, 2026.
fvpresident.ir

International Desk

First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref described essential goods reserves in the county as "satisfactory", stressing that Iran is not powerless in the face of a naval blockade imposed by the United States during its aggression against Iran.

Addressing a meeting with officials to review the status of reserves of essential goods and medicines in the country on Saturday, Aref noted that the country's essential goods reserves are above levels stipulated by the Supreme National Security Council.

He said the country's trade exchanges are also in a favorable position, with imports of essential goods continuing through ports and eastern and western entry points.

"We have proved that our hands are not tied in the face of the enemy's naval blockade," he said.

Aref also stressed the need to continue developing the country's northern ports and other corridors, saying Iran would make up for any restrictions imposed on its southern ports through alternative border crossings.

"The enemy must understand that if it imposes restrictions on southern ports, the country will not face difficulties, and we will compensate for those restrictions through other border entry points," he said.

Washington imposed a naval blockade on Iran's ports in April on the pretext of Iran's attacks on vessels in the Strait of Hormuz which was closed by Iran following the US-Israeli aggression in February.

The Strait of Hormuz has become the focus of the conflict, with Iran continuing in its efforts to blockade the waterway, vital to global energy supplies.

The US has also announced a raft of economic sanctions, and launched a task force to disrupt land routes into Iran.

Iran to enhance Navy with advanced maritime defense systems: *Minister*

Armed Forces vow to avenge sailors killed in US-Israeli aggression

International Desk

Iran's Defense Ministry is stepping up efforts to equip the country's Navy with more advanced technologies and modern maritime defense systems, the defense minister said, citing the strategic importance of maritime security and the need to strengthen the country's deterrence capabilities.

In a message marking Navy Day on Saturday, Mehrdad Akhlaghi said the ministry was drawing on Iran's scientific, industrial, and technological capacities to develop more indigenous technologies, supply necessary equipment, and reinforce defense production infrastructure.

He described strengthening national defense capabilities and providing sustained support to the Armed Forces as among the ministry's strategic missions.

Akhlaghi noted that the Navy has played a decisive role since the victory of Iran's Islamic Revolution in 1979 in protecting the country's territorial waters, national security, and interests.



Mehrdad Akhlaghi
IRNA

The defense minister also highlighted the importance of the Persian Gulf, the Sea of Oman, the Caspian Sea, and the Strait of Hormuz, describing them as areas that have long been at the center of regional and extra-regional attention and rivalries.

Major General Ahmad Vahidi, commander-in-chief of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), also in a message on Saturday said that all of Iran's naval forces are ready to confront any threat or act of aggression against the country's national security and maritime sovereignty.

Vahidi vowed that, by drawing on their past experiences during the US-Israeli-imposed war, the two forces will continue to defend the country.

IRGC chief stressed that strengthening Iran's maritime power would send a message of the country's determination to protect its sovereignty to "interventionist powers" that threaten regional security, particularly following the US-Israeli war on Iran.

He further praised the Army's sailors for their "tireless efforts," while paying tribute to the commanders, personnel, and their families, as well as the martyrs of the Navy, particularly those who lost their lives aboard the Dena warship.

The Dena was targeted and sunk by the US Navy in international waters off the coast of Galle, Sri Lanka, on March 4, while returning home after participating in the International Fleet Review 2026 naval exercise hosted by India. The vessel was unarmed and had 136 crew members on board, 104 of whom were killed and 32 others injured.

The IRGC's Navy also vowed to avenge Iranian sailors killed in the attacks on the country's naval forces during the US-Israeli aggression.

It paid tribute to the martyred sailors of the warships Joshan, Sahand, Sabalan, and Dena, praising the Army Navy's role in defending the country during the US-Israeli aggression.

Leader's adviser warns Iraq not to become tool for implementing Trump's policies



International Desk

Mohammad Mokhber, an adviser to Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution, urged Baghdad to remain vigilant over border issues, warning against becoming a tool for implementing the policies of US president, following recent border-related actions by the Iraqi government.

"Sharing a common destiny with our neighbors is a fundamental principle of our foreign policy", Mokhber said in a post on X on Saturday, stressing that in the "darkest days" of Iraq, Iran stood by the people of Iraq with all its might and proved its friendship.

He was referring to Iran's military assistance to the Arab country during its fight against the Daesh terrorist group which had brought large parts of the country under its control for years.

"This unbreakable bond requires Baghdad to remain vigilant on border issues so that it does not become a tool in the hands of the enemies of Islam and an instrument for implementing the policies of the criminal Trump," Mokhber said.

His comments came after US President Donald Trump backed Iraqi Prime Minister Ali al-Zaidi's order to federal authorities to take over border crossings and several oil fields run by the Arab country's Kurdistan region after an oil smuggling investigation at the state-run North Oil Company.

Trump said in a Truth Social post on Friday that Washington supports Al-Zaidi's efforts to "stop the smuggling of Iraqi oil, end corruption, and bring all weapons under the exclusive control of the state".

He said the US wants a "united, prosperous, and strong Iraq that makes its own political decisions".

Iraq closed two crossings in the region on Thursday, one with Syria and one with Iran. Iraq's highest court ruled on Wednesday that Baghdad can deploy federal forces along all international borders, including those of the Kurdish region of northern Iraq.

Commander reiterates warning of geographically unlimited response to new aggression

International Desk

Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Brigadier General Kioumars Heydari reiterated Iran's warning of geographically unlimited response to any new aggression, saying that any source of threat, regardless of its location in the world, will be considered a legitimate target.

Speaking on the sidelines of an exhibition of documents related to the US-Israeli wars on Iran, Heydari said the Iranian Armed Forces are fully prepared to respond to any renewed hostile action.

"If the enemy makes a mistake and commits an act of aggression against our country, any point from which a threat against us emerges, in any country in the world, will be a legitimate target for us, and that source will be targeted," he said.

Iran has repeatedly warned that any military action against the country would prompt a response against the source of the attack, regardless of its geographical location.



Kioumars Heydari
IRNA

The senior commander also dismissed US President Donald Trump's threats and attempts to set deadlines for Iran.

"Trump setting a deadline for us through threats means that he has lost his senses, because his actions and words have never been decisive for us or been of any importance," Heydari said.

He said the global balance of power is undergoing a fundamental transformation, arguing that the United States no longer holds the position of the world's leading power.

Heydari added that Iran's resistance had compelled the international community to recognize the country's special standing in global power equations.

He also highlighted Iran's unique geopolitical position, describing its influence as extending across economic, political, and social spheres.

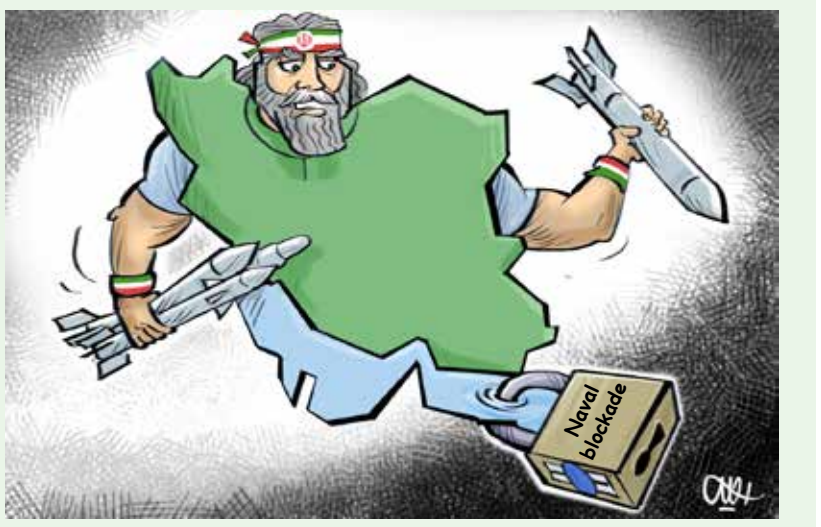
Addressing the outcome of the war against Iran, Heydari said the United States and Israel suffered a humiliating defeat despite their nuclear capabilities and the support they received from some regional countries.

He added that the two sides sought to impose a hybrid war on Iran with the assistance of some countries in the region, but the outcome has been a major setback for them.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist

CARTOON



Iran commissions five oil projects to raise daily gas production capacity by 32mcm



President Masoud Pezeshkian (C) orders the online inauguration of five oil industry projects in the provinces of Fars, Khuzestan and Bushehr, November 28, 2026.
president.ir

Economy Desk

Iran has commissioned five development, infrastructure and environmental projects comprising 10 schemes, increasing the country's daily sweet gas production capacity by 32 million cubic meters, the Oil Ministry's Shana news agency reported on Saturday.

The projects were inaugurated online by order of President Masoud Pezeshkian and are aimed at strengthening gas production and transmission infrastructure, improving the operational reliability of facilities and capturing flare gas in the provinces of Fars, Khuzestan and Bushehr.

They include a gas pressure-boosting station at the Homa field and a gas separation facility at the Tabnak field in Fars province; the rehabilitation of processing trains four and six at the South Pars Gas Complex in Bushehr province; flare gas recovery projects at the Maroon 3 and 5 oil and gas fields; and a 12-inch pipeline to collect and transport flare gas in the Darkhovin area of Khuzestan Province.

The projects are part of broader efforts to expand and upgrade the country's oil and gas infrastructure, increase the utilization of energy resources, improve the performance of operational facilities and reduce gas losses from flaring.

At the inauguration ceremony, Pezeshkian stressed that "not a single cubic foot of the country's gas should be burned without being put to productive use."

106 mcm of daily gas output restored

Speaking at the inauguration ceremony, Acting Oil Minister Hamid Bovard outlined the ministry's efforts to rebuild damaged facilities, boost gas production and recover flare gas, saying about 106 million cubic meters of gas per day had so far been restored to the production network.

Bovard also outlined the rehabilitation of damaged facilities at the South Pars Gas Complex, saying the third processing train at the sixth refinery and the first and fourth trains at the fourth refinery had been rebuilt.

The work drew on domestic manufacturers, specialist consultants and technical assessments to ensure that the equipment could be repaired and safely returned to operation, he said.

Bovard added that the measures had partly offset output losses caused by the shutdown of the offshore pipeline at Phase 17 and the 14D platform.

Separately, Gholamabbas Hosseini, chief executive of the South Pars Gas Complex, said Iran had restored 20 million cubic meters per day of natural gas capacity to its national grid following the rapid reconstruction of damaged refineries at the complex.

US-Israeli attacks on four South Pars gas refineries in March reduced gas production capacity by about 230 million cubic meters per day. According to the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC), damage to gas industry facilities during the 40-day war that began in late February was extensive, with nearly 7,924 cases recorded.

Hosseini said reconstruction was completed in less than three months, requiring 3.6 million man-hours of specialized engineering work carried out in three continuous shifts. Workers removed approximately 4,300 tons of debris from damaged infrastructure, equipment and structures, he added.

The reconstruction required an investment of about 60 million euros and drew on the expertise of domestic contractors, private-sector investors and engineering consultants.

South Pars is the world's largest natural gas field, shared by Iran and Qatar. The Iranian portion is divided into several development phases and serves as the backbone of the country's domestic gas supply, providing the bulk of the gas used for household heating, electricity generation and petrochemical feedstock.

Among the projects inaugurated on Saturday, Bovard highlighted the Homa gas field pressure-boosting station, noting that the field was an important source of feedstock for the Parsian Gas Refinery.

The new station will add about 7 million cubic meters per day to gas production capacity. Bovard put the investment in the project at approximately 126 million euros, adding that most of the construction work had been carried out using domestic technical and engineering expertise.

Turning to the Tabnak gas field separation facility, another project inaugurated at the ceremony, Bovard said the field currently produces about 33 million cubic meters of gas per day. Without the project, production was projected to decline to between 26 million and 28 million cubic meters per day by 2027. The new facility will prevent that decline and allow an additional 2 million cubic meters of sweet gas to be produced daily, he said. The project involved an investment of about 85 million euros and will also enable the production of around 1,000 barrels of gas condensate per day.

Maroon flare gas recovery

Bovard said another key area of the ministry's work was flare gas recovery.

At the Maroon 3 and 5 operational areas, projects to collect, compress and sweeten flare gas have been implemented with private-sector investment, resulting in the recovery of about 1 million cubic meters of sweet gas per day, he said.

The project involved an investment of about 85 million euros and will also produce around 1,000 barrels of gas condensate per day.

He also referred to the gas transmission pipeline linking the Darkhovin field to the NGL 3200 processing plant.

The pipeline was built to collect and transport associated gas produced at the Darkhovin field to the processing facility and has a designed capacity of about 2 million cubic meters per day, he said.

"With the completion of this project, in addition to supplying feedstock to the plant, gas flaring and the loss of hydrocarbon resources will be prevented."

Iran, Iraq agree to increase annual tourist exchanges to 10 million

Economy Desk

Iran and Iraq have agreed to increase the annual number of tourists exchanged between the two countries to 10 million, IRNA reported on Saturday.

Muslim Shojaei, director general of the Foreign Tourism Marketing and Development Office at Iran's Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, said the agreement followed earlier talks between Iran's president and tourism minister and Iraq's prime minister.

Speaking at a tourism development meeting in Ahvaz, Khuzestan Province, Shojaei said Iran currently receives about 3.5 million Iraqi visitors annually, excluding the Arbaeen pilgrimage period, and aims to raise that figure to 5 million. An additional 1.5 million visitors would be needed to meet the target, he added.

Arbaeen marks the 40th day after the martyrdom of Imam Hussein (PBUH), the third imam of Shiite Muslims. It is commemorated annually by millions of pilgrims who travel to the Imam Hussein shrine in Karbala, Iraq.

Shojaei said greater authority should be delegated to border provinces to support tourism development, rather than relying on a centralized approach.

He said the "Cross-Border Passage" initiative was launched in 16 border provinces last year and was being pursued this year with additional budget allocations to improve service quality and facilitate cross-border travel.

A field visit to the Shalamcheh border crossing was also planned as part of the initiative, with the aim of setting up tourism information offices at border points. Travel agencies, hotel operators, tour guides and medical centers are among the sectors expected to benefit, he said.

Shojaei said the government had approved regulations for health tourism and defined the responsibilities of relevant agencies, but border provinces were not yet making full use of their potential in the sector.



IRNA

He said attracting Iraqi visitors required more than offering lower prices, noting that Iranian services were considerably cheaper than those in Turkey and India. Building deeper trust within Iraq's tribal and clan-based social structures was also necessary,

Strategic pragmatism or ...

Iran's economic circumstances make this dilemma particularly consequential.

Page 1 ›

International restrictions have constrained financial transactions, investment, trade and access to technology. Recent sanctions targeting financial networks and commercial intermediaries have further complicated the country's economic connections. Yet external pressure is only part of the story. Structural inefficiencies, inconsistent policymaking, fragmented institutional responsibilities and persistent uncertainty have also weakened the capacity of the economy to respond effectively.

Sanctions may explain why certain economic transactions become difficult. They do not automatically explain why domestic investment remains uncertain, why policy changes frequently unsettle businesses, or why administrative complexity can turn an ordinary commercial decision into an exercise in patience and paperwork. External constraints and internal shortcomings are not mutually exclusive explanations; they can reinforce one another.

This is where economic diplomacy becomes more than a foreign policy instrument. It becomes an extension of domestic economic governance.

A government seeking to expand trade with neighboring countries, strengthen relations with Asian economies, participate in regional infrastructure projects or diversify its export markets must offer more than political assurances. Businesses need predictable regulations, functioning financial arrangements, transparent procedures and credible commitments. Geography may provide Iran with an advantageous position, but geography does not negotiate contracts, reduce bureaucratic uncertainty or guarantee returns on investment. Institutions do.

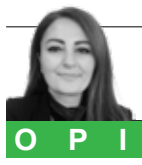
There is also a temptation to treat economic diversification as a political achievement in itself. Developing stronger ties with China, Russia, regional partners and emerging economies may indeed create opportunities. But diversification is meaningful only when it improves the quality of economic relationships, expands productive capacity and reduces excessive dependence. Replacing one concentrated dependency with another is not necessarily strategic autonomy; sometimes it is simply a different arrangement with a different set of vulnerabilities. Pragmatism, therefore, need not be interpreted as abandoning strategic principles. It may instead be the means through which those principles become economically sustainable. A foreign policy capable of creating room for trade, investment, technological cooperation and reduced uncertainty can strengthen national resilience more effectively than one measured primarily by its ability to endure pressure.

The same logic applies to domestic policy. Economic reform cannot be reduced to a collection of technically correct decisions. Subsidy reform, fiscal discipline, currency stabilization and investment policies all have social and political consequences. Their success depends not merely on economic calculations but also on sequencing, public trust, institutional coordination and the distribution of costs. A policy that appears rational in a spreadsheet may become considerably less rational once millions of households are asked to absorb its consequences. Ultimately, Iran's economic diplomacy faces a question that is larger than the familiar debate between resistance and accommodation: how can strategic independence be translated into economic opportunity?

The answer will not come from diplomacy alone, nor from domestic reform alone. It requires a combination of political flexibility, institutional credibility, economic discipline and a willingness to distinguish between objectives worth defending and methods that may need reconsideration. Resilience is valuable. But resilience should not become an excuse for accepting permanent economic fragility. The purpose of surviving pressure ought to be building an economy that is less vulnerable to it in the first place. That, perhaps, is the difference between merely enduring a geopolitical environment and actually shaping one's future within it.

Europe faces faster cyberattacks than ever

Many of solutions long known



By Joyce Hakmeh
Senior expert in int'l cyber and tech policy

OPINION



A woman walks past empty fresh-food refrigerators at an Intermarché supermarket in Névez, western France, on October 12, 2026, a day after cyberattacks on the country's supermarket refrigerators.
FRED TANNEAU/AFP

In October, hackers caused tons of food to be thrown away after hacking into refrigerators in around 700 French supermarkets. Within weeks, similar incidents were reported in Belgium, Luxembourg, Sweden, Ireland and elsewhere. Nobody has claimed responsibility, but France has accused Iran of carrying out the 'unprecedented attack' against it.

The freezer attacks come after a spate of cyber incidents across Europe in the last few years that have repeatedly exposed familiar weaknesses. Russia's war against Ukraine has raised the stakes, putting Europe on the front line of hybrid attacks including through cyber operations.

Four problems stand out: old systems that are never fixed, new technology built without security in mind, increasingly capable attackers aided by AI, and states using cyberattacks as instruments of power, often through proxies.

Each requires its own response, and Europe is doing better on some fronts than on others. None is a European problem alone, and none will be solved by Europe alone.

Vulnerable legacy systems

The first problem lies in the weakness already built into the technology Europe runs on. Much of Europe still relies on legacy systems — technology that has reached the end of its life and no longer receives the security patches it needs. The result is a stock of known vulnerabilities that attackers can exploit.

The freezer attacks show what this looks like in practice. They were not technically complex: most of the hacked temperature controllers in France were reportedly legacy systems that no longer receive updates. Operational technology of this kind, which controls physical equipment, often stays in service for decades, long after anyone is updating it.

This is not just an issue for companies. The UK's National Audit Office found in 2025 that government departments used 'hundreds of ageing legacy IT systems.' Germany's federal audit office found in 2025 that parts of the federal government's networks are so outdated they no longer receive security updates.

Part of the problem is visibility: organizations and governments often lack a clear picture of the technology they own and operate. Even when organizations know where the problems lie, replacing old systems is expensive and disruptive. But leaving them in place is becoming increasingly risky.

Replacing these systems is primarily the responsibility of national governments and companies that operate them. But the EU is also pushing for it. In July, the European Central Bank told Europe's largest banks to replace or update legacy systems as part of planning for AI-enabled threats. The financial sector, however, is far ahead of most other sectors, and replacement will require money, expertise and political commitment.

In the meantime, basic measures, often referred to as 'cyber hygiene', can go a long way. According to ENISA, the EU's cybersecurity agency, two-thirds of the vulnerabilities attackers exploit already have a patch available. Where equipment no longer receives security updates, organizations need to restrict its exposure or replace it.

Europe does not lack information or rules: ENISA maintains a European Vulnerability Database, national agencies issue regular alerts, and the NIS2 Directive makes managing these risks a legal obligation. What is missing is implementation: turning warnings into action, particularly in smaller organizations, and enforcing rules that many member states have been slow to adopt.

Technology built without security

The second problem is that too much technology is still being built without security in mind. This is due to market incentives; manufacturers compete on price, features and speed to market, rather than prioritizing security. The costs of insecurity have mainly fallen on customers and society.

The EU has sought to change this. From December 2027, under the EU's Cyber Resilience Act (CRA), connected products that do not meet basic security requirements will no longer be allowed on the EU market. Manufacturers will be responsible for their security throughout their lifecycle.

However, the CRA has limits. Manufacturers are required to report actively exploited vulnerabilities, including those affecting products already on the market. But reporting a flaw does not fix it.

And for products that manufacturers no longer support, there may be no fix. Someone else then has to act: the shop, hospital or council operating the equipment must know it is affected and have the skills and resources to patch, isolate or replace it.

The underlying problem is poor-quality software. AI could help strengthen the security of software by identifying and fixing flaws faster than people can. But that depends on vendors using AI tools (with human oversight) before their products reach the market.

More attackers, moving faster

The use of AI by attackers is compounding these problems. AI is accelerating the process by which attackers are finding and exploiting vulnerabilities in insecure products and ageing systems. It is lowering the skills and resources needed to launch attacks and compressing the time defenders have to respond.

This year, frontier AI labs made a series of striking disclosures about their latest models' cyber capabilities. These capabilities are real, particularly when it comes to exploiting vulnerabilities including in legacy systems. The labs were right to disclose them. But the disclosures also showcased their products, and the hype and catastrophizing that followed have not always helped clarify where priorities should lie.

AI is not yet changing the nature of the game so much as its speed and scale. ENISA found that attackers in 2025 relied mainly on off-the-shelf AI tools to sharpen skills they already had. Similarly, the UK's National Cyber Security Centre found that among the incidents it handled, AI had not enabled 'a novel class of attack'.

Instead, the greater danger is that AI-assisted vulnerability discovery gives attackers more opportunities to strike before system owners can apply patches. In response, defenders must be able to act at the same speed.

Governments have not yet managed to achieve this. The EU, for example, created the European Cybersecurity Alert System to analyse threat and incident data across member states using AI. However, EU auditors recently found that the system had stalled and was not yet working as intended.

A separate challenge is dependence on external providers. Many of the most capable defensive AI tools are developed in the US. Access can be restricted or withdrawn, as US export controls showed in June 2026. Governments need to establish structured ways of working with these companies on early warning, model testing and making defensive tools available to operators of critical infrastructure.

> Part of the problem is visibility: organizations and governments often lack a clear picture of the technology they own and operate. Even when organizations know where the problems lie, replacing old systems is expensive and disruptive. But leaving them in place is becoming increasingly risky. Replacing these systems is primarily the responsibility of national governments and companies that operate them. But the EU is also pushing for it.

Cyber as a tool of state power

The fourth problem is that states are increasingly using cyber operations as a routine instrument of power, often through proxies. The war in Ukraine has exposed an entire ecosystem of proxies. The overlap between these actors blurs responsibility and complicates attribution.

Europe does not lack the tools to respond to state-backed cyber activity. It has mechanisms for public attribution, criminal investigations, sanctions and diplomatic pressure. But these measures have been slow and applied unevenly, which has reduced their collective impact.

The priority is therefore to use existing instruments more quickly and consistently. This requires coordinating responses across Europe and with international partners.

An EU-wide response is only as effective as the national systems underpinning it. Yet all but two member states missed the deadline to adopt the NIS2 Directive, which requires critical sectors to manage risks and report serious incidents. Member states need to improve information sharing, strengthen reporting and practise their responses to attacks.

Internationally, states have already agreed not to attack critical infrastructure or knowingly allow their territory to be used for malicious cyber activity. The



Frozen products are thrown away after freezers were emptied at ICA Kvantum in Sjobo, Sweden, on November 2, 2026, following a "sharp" overnight rise in freezer temperatures at several Swedish supermarkets.
JOHAN NILSSON/ Keystone-sda.ch

UN's new Global Mechanism on ICT security is where Europe and its partners should push to make those commitments count.

Familiar threats, less time

The attacks of the recent weeks may look new, but they tell a familiar story: known weaknesses, insecure products, more capable attackers and slow, fragmented responses. What has changed is the timescale.

Europe has already written many of the rules. Its member states now need to secure or replace existing technology, ensure that what comes next is secure by design, put AI to work for defenders, and rehearse a coherent response with partners.

That means not only strengthening Europe's ability to withstand and recover from attacks, but also its capacity to disrupt those responsible and impose costs that deter future operations.

The article was first published by Chatham House.

When lights go out, how will Europeans access their money?



By Yannis Diakantonis

Former financial data analyst at ABN AMRO Bank

OPINION

Across Europe, economies have become increasingly digital, bringing significant benefits to businesses and consumers. However, growing reliance on digital payment systems means that when these systems fail, people are unable to spend the money in their bank accounts.

Sometimes, this is because of technical failures. On October 20, 2026, due to an extended power outage that paralysed Google Cloud services, millions of UK residents were unable to make card payments, cash withdrawals or bank transfers.

In other cases, hostile actors have launched cyberattacks that paralyse European payment systems. Figures from September 2026 show a 61 per cent year-on-year increase in cyberattacks across Europe, many of which targeted financial services.

These risks have prompted the EU and the UK to issue fresh crisis preparedness strategies, such as the UK government's 'Be Ready' campaign. A key aspect of these strategies is the advice to keep adequate cash at hand in case digital systems go down.

However, the use of cash has long been in decline: only three per cent of UK adults mainly use cash for their day-to-day spending. Consumers increasingly prefer the convenience of digital payments, while many businesses no longer accept cash. This raises questions about whether people will have sufficient cash available when digital payment systems fail.

This problem is compounded by the fact that ATMs also require electricity to dispense cash. As a result, during a prolonged power outage or cyberattack, millions of consumers could lose the ability to pay with their cards and phones or withdraw cash from their bank accounts.

During the 2025 Iberian blackout that brought digital payments to a standstill, many consumers without cash could not purchase even the most basic of supplies. Tens of millions of people were affected across Spain and Portugal.

Central bank digital currencies (CBDCs) that can function offline offer a solution to this problem. While both the EU and the UK have floated the idea, they must engage in much closer collaboration on their development.

Offline digital money

Central bank digital currencies (CBDCs) are digital versions of existing national currencies that are issued by central banks — essentially, digital cash.

Unlike cryptocurrencies such as Bitcoin, CBDCs' value does not fluctuate independently of the national currency. And while stablecoins also aim to maintain a fixed value against existing currencies, they are typically issued by private companies rather than central banks.

CBDCs also differ from money held in standard digital bank accounts, which commercial banks owe to their customers. Unlike these deposits, CBDC holdings would not be exposed to the risk of a commercial bank failing.

The European Central Bank (ECB) is currently developing its CBDC, the digital euro. Its aim is to preserve the role of public money in the digital economy and reduce the bloc's dependence on non-European payment providers. Similarly, the Bank of England (BoE) is drawing up a blueprint for a potential digital pound.

A key feature of the plans for the digital euro and digital pound is the ability to make payments offline.

During an electricity outage, conventional digital payments can fail because payment terminals lose access to electricity, online transactions cannot be authorized, or the payment provider's infrastructure stops working.

The goal of both the EU and the UK is to build CBDCs that avoid these pitfalls and reflect the operational resilience of cash, albeit in different ways.

On the EU side, consumers will be able to open a digital euro wallet, and preload funds there from their commercial bank accounts. During a power outage, say due to a cyberattack, they could make payments using their phone or a physical card through near-field communication (NFC) technology. Payments would be settled directly between the consumer's device and the merchant's payment terminal, without requiring internet connectivity.



A pedestrian walks past the Google offices in London, Britain, on August 14, 2025.
SUZANNE PLUNKETT/REUTERS

The use of physical cards could prove particularly valuable during prolonged power outages as they do not require charging, unlike smartphones.

The ECB is also exploring the possibility of integrating digital euros into existing payment cards rather than requiring a dedicated digital euro card.

Meanwhile, the UK is currently prioritizing a slightly different design. Instead of settling the payment immediately, payment instructions would be recorded offline, but the actual transfer of funds would only take place once connectivity is restored.

Offline payments are not yet crisis-proof

While efforts to develop offline CBDCs are important, several challenges remain. The EU and the UK should jointly address them.

The first issue relates to the risk of double spending — when the same units of money are used to make two or more separate payments. Normally, double spending is avoided through real-time, centralized verification of payment requests.

However, during a power outage, payment terminals cannot send these requests to banks. While both the ECB and the BoE have explored technical solutions to tackle this risk, additional work is necessary before deployment.

Another challenge relates to operational readiness. It is unclear why European consumers would be incentivized to pre-emptively fund their offline CBDC wallets, especially if they consider a power outage to be improbable.

Furthermore, European merchants need to possess battery-powered payment terminals for offline CBDC payments. During the 2025 Iberian blackout, even battery-powered terminals became unusable as their batteries ran out.

Why the EU and UK need to work together

The EU and the UK should collaborate on offline CBDCs for several reasons.

The first is their complementary expertise. On the one hand, the EU is further ahead in the development of its CBDC, with the ECB aiming to be ready to potentially issue the digital euro in 2029. On the other, the BoE can contribute valuable insights from its experiments with different offline payment technologies, particularly regarding trade-offs between security, privacy and usability.

Second, the EU and the UK are exposed to several overlapping threats. Given that they rely on common technological infrastructure, their payment networks are highly vulnerable to shared power outages and, even worse, to coordinated digital destabilization efforts by hostile actors.

Finally, European collaboration on offline CBDCs is necessary because of economic interdependence. The EU accounts for approximately 45 per cent of UK trade. Almost 77 per cent of overseas trips by UK residents were to Europe.

Failure to collaborate would mean that, during future outages, European cross-border trade and retail transactions might become critically impaired.



A digital euro would be the European Central Bank's money made available in digital form for use in retail payments.
ecb.europa.eu

> These risks have prompted the EU and the UK to issue fresh crisis preparedness strategies, such as the UK government's 'Be Ready' campaign. A key aspect of these strategies is the advice to keep adequate cash at hand in case digital systems go down. However, the use of cash has long been in decline: only three per cent of UK adults mainly use cash for their day-to-day spending. Central bank digital currencies (CBDCs) that can function offline offer a solution to this problem.

Three steps towards more resilient payments

The first step should be to establish recurring, joint stress tests of payment resilience.

The ECB and the BoE can simulate a shared 72-hour power outage, testing whether CBDCs can reliably support offline transactions. This will help European policymakers to better tackle the problem of double spending and other operational challenges before deploying CBDCs.

The EU and the UK should also strive to bring their technical standards closer together. This could include the development of a prototype NFC payment terminal capable of accepting offline payments in both digital euros and digital pounds. Tests could be conducted across the Irish border, where sterling and euro payments intersect.

Lastly, they should explore the expansion of offline CBDCs to cross-border transactions involving currency conversion.

During prolonged outages, businesses may need to make new payments to foreign suppliers for essential goods. The EU and UK could test whether payment providers holding both currencies could facilitate offline exchanges, allowing buyers to pay in digital pounds or euros while suppliers receive their preferred currency.

As hybrid threats to payment systems become ever more severe, the EU and the UK need to collaborate more closely on offline CBDC standards. Otherwise, they risk being woefully unprepared when the lights go out next — with devastating consequences for their supply chains and their citizens' ability to purchase essential goods.

The article was first published by Chatham House.

FIBA World Cup Asian qualifiers:

Jamshidi rues offensive shortcomings as Iran falls to Australia

Sports Desk

Veteran forward Mohammad Jamshidi urged Iran to improve its offensive performance after the national team suffered an 84-67 defeat to Australia in the second round of the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2027 Asian qualifiers in Seremban, Malaysia, on Friday.

Maxwell Mackinnon led the way with a game-high 30 points, shooting an ultra-efficient 11-of-15 from the field and a blistering 8-of-10 from beyond the arc in 26:05 on the floor, as Australia extended its perfect qualifying run to 9-0 to secure its place in next year's showpiece in Qatar.

Tom Wilson delivered a near triple-double, finishing with 13 points, seven rebounds, and nine assists in 27:42. Jack White added 12 points, eight rebounds, and four assists in 28:07, while David Okwera anchored the interior with 10 rebounds, four points, and one block.

Mohammad Amini stood out for Iran with 15 points, five rebounds, one assist, and a game-high six steals in 23:47.

Matin Aqajanpour (15 points), Seyyed Mahdi Jafari (11), and Jamshidi (10) also reached double figures, but their efforts did little to prevent a third successive defeat in the second round as Iran dropped to fifth in Group E, level on 14 points with third-place Philippines and fourth-place Jordan.

"First of all, congratulations to Australia. They played a good game and, as our head coach also said, started with more passion, energy and effort. That was reflected in the rebounding statistics, with Australia getting 16 more rebounds than us," Jamshidi said after the game.

"If you want to beat Australia, you have to be much better offensively. Scoring 67 points is not enough to beat this team. We have good shooters such as Behnam [Yakhchali], Matin, Mobin [Sheikhi] and others, but we couldn't create the necessary space for them."

The 35-year-old admitted that several Iranian players had an off night and urged his teammates to put the defeat behind them and turn their attention to the next assignment against the Philippines.

Iran head coach Sotirios Manolopoulos, meanwhile, said Australia fully deserved its victory, describing the Boomers as the strongest team in the group, not merely because of their results but also their overall quality.

He lamented Iran's poor first-half display while taking encouragement from the team's improved performance after the break.



Australia's Jacob Holt (21) dunks during his team's victory over Iran in the FIBA World Cup Asian qualifiers in Seremban, Malaysia, on November 27, 2026.
FIBA

"I think if we hadn't had such a disastrous first half and everything had gone according to plan, we might have had a better chance in the second half," the Greek coach said.

"We played much better after the break. Our players, including Mohammad Jamshidi, did a good job of creating space and opportunities, and we had plenty of open looks at the basket, which we converted successfully."

Manolopoulos also praised Iran's defensive improvement in the second half, noting that his players recorded more steals than their opponents.

"I am satisfied and happy with our performance in the second half. But when you play against a team like Australia, you cannot start a game like that. Our slow start hurt us," he added.

"I cannot say that we would definitely have won, but with a better start, we certainly would have had a greater chance."

Iran's best stretch came in the final quarter, when it pieced together an 11-0 run to trim the deficit to 13 points at 75-62. Amini and Jamshidi each scored four points during that burst, with Amini adding a rebound and Jamshidi contributing a free throw and a board. However, the damage had already been done.

Having suffered a 68-56 loss to the Philippines in the previous window in August, Iran will look to avenge that setback when the two teams square off again today at Seremban's Karisma Arena, which serves as Iran's home venue for the fifth window of the qualifiers.

Elsewhere in the group, Kevin Quiambao and Kai Sotto scored 18 points apiece as the Philippines cruised to a 97-58 victory over Syria at Karisma Arena later on Friday.

Meanwhile, Mojave King stole the spotlight for New Zealand, finishing with 19 points, five rebounds, and three assists in 23:45 of action as the Tall Blacks tightened their grip on the runner-up spot in the group.

World Para Taekwondo Grand Prix Final:

Iranians round off international season with three medals



Iran's Amirmohammad Haqiqatshenas (L) is seen in action against Mexico's Juan Diego Garcia Lopez in the men's K44 -70kg final at the World Para Taekwondo Grand Prix Final in Astana, Kazakhstan, on November 27, 2026.
WORLD TAEKWONDO

Sports Desk

Iranians enjoyed a prolific run at the one-day World Para Taekwondo Grand Prix Final in Astana, Kazakhstan, collecting a gold, a silver, and a bronze medal on Friday.

Amirmohammad Haqiqatshenas led the way for the country, claiming the top prize in the men's -70kg category after winning all three of his bouts. A World Championships gold medalist last week, the Iranian picked up where he had left off in Muju, South Korea, opening his campaign with a straight-round victory over Uzbekistan's Javokhir Alikulov before defeating Valter Sedano Delfino de Oliveira by the same scoreline to set up a final clash against Mexico's Juan Diego Garcia Lopez. The semifinal victory also repeated his last-four triumph over the Brazilian in Muju.

In a rematch of last week's final in Muju, the Iranian emerged victorious in straight rounds against the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic champion to claim his third successive gold medal at a major event in just over a month, having also triumphed at October's Aichi-Nagoya Asian Para Games.

In the women's -57kg category, Maryam Abdollahpour and Zahra Rahimi also made their way to the semifinals after winning their respective quarterfinal bouts.

Also a world champion in Muju, Abdollahpour defeated Silvana Cardoso Fernandes – a winner of three successive Para Grand Prix series titles this season – in straight rounds to secure a second consecutive victory over the high-profile Brazilian in less than a week.

The 19-year-old prodigy then advanced to the final following the disqualification of China's Yuji Li in their semifinal bout after the Chinese athlete struck her in the face.

However, Abdollahpour was unable to compete in the final due to injury and had to settle for silver behind Brazil's Maria Eduarda Machado Stumpf.

Rahimi, meanwhile, beat Turkey's Gamze Ozcan 2-0 but fell to Stumpf in the last four, missing out on a place in the final.

The Paris Paralympic silver medalist, who also won silver at the Asian Para Games and the World Championships, still managed to finish her campaign with a consolation bronze after Li withdrew from their third-place contest.

Offering an important pathway to earn points for the Los Angeles 2028 Paralympics, the season finale brought together 80 contestants from 26 countries in the K44 sport class at the Zhaksylyk Ushkempirov Martial Arts Palace.

Iran targets further shooting quotas, podium finish at LA28

Sports Desk

Iran's national pistol shooting coach Maryam Soltani has set her sights on securing three to four quota places for the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics and challenging for a medal, following Hanieh Rostamian's achievement in securing the country's first Olympic berth.

Rostamian missed out on the podium in the women's 10m air pistol competition at the ISSF World Championships in Doha, Qatar, earlier in November, finishing fourth, but still managed to secure an Olympic quota place after two Chinese shooters occupied the top two positions.

Soltani described Rostamian's qualification as the beginning of Iran's Olympic campaign, expressing confidence that the team could build on its performance at the recent World Championships in Qatar.

"The level of competition was very high," Soltani told Mehr News Agency. "Some teams had even rested their first-choice shooters at [October's] World Cup in Cairo to be at full strength for this event. Fortunately, our team also delivered a decent performance, with all three of our pistol representatives – Hanieh Rostamian, Vahid Golkhandan, and Samieh Yasi – performing very well and meeting international standards."

"Rostamian lit the first Olympic qualification beacon for Iranian shooting with her outstanding performance. Her fourth-place finish in a final featuring the world's top stars was a significant achievement. We are grateful that this important quota place has been secured for Iran," she added.

Rostamian and Golkhandan went on to reach the 10m air pistol mixed team final the following day, where they claimed a valuable silver medal.

Outlining the team's ambitions for LA28, Soltani said Iran was targeting three to four Olympic quota places in pistol events, provided its preparations and international assignments went according to plan.

Asked whether Iran was also targeting a second Olympic shooting medal, following Javad Foroughi's historic men's 10m air pistol triumph at Tokyo 2020, Soltani was unequivocal.

"Of course, we are thinking about an Olympic medal. We have talented and experienced shooters such as Hanieh Rostamian and Vahid Golkhandan. Samieh Yasi, despite having less experience, has also demonstrated her ability at major competitions," she said.

"Hopefully, we will also secure quota places for our male shooters, which would give us a chance of winning a medal in the mixed team event. The new federation president's technical approach and comprehensive plans for preparing the team make us very optimistic."

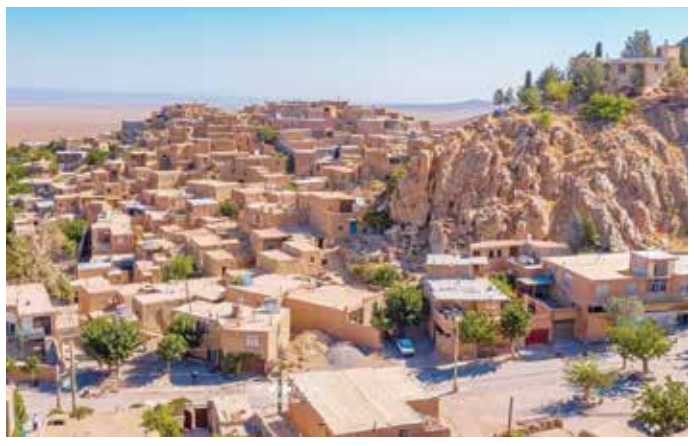


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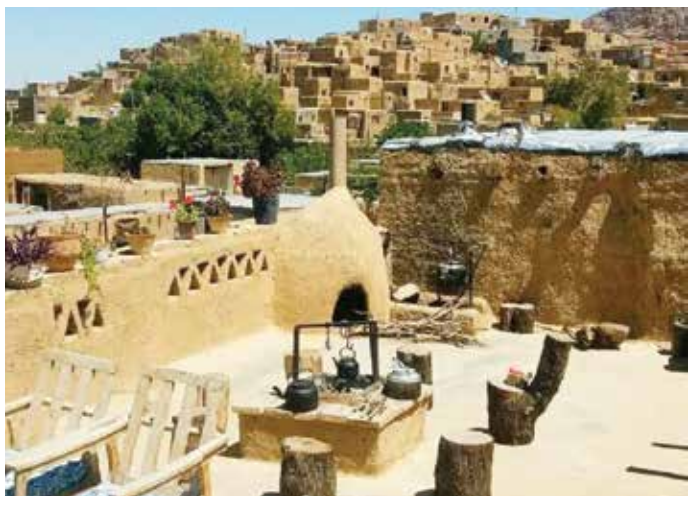
Qaleh Bala advances in bid for UN Tourism recognition

Iranica Desk

The historic village of Qaleh Bala, known as the "Masouleh of the Desert," is seeking international recognition for its cultural heritage, distinctive architecture and natural attractions.
Located in southeastern Semnan Province, 140 kilometers from Shahrud and 24 kilometers from Beyarjomand, the village is renowned for its terraced houses, historic fabric and unique natural surroundings. Its proximity to the Touran Protected Area, home to the endangered Asiatic cheetah, further enhances its ecological and tourism significance.
Like many rural communities across Iran, Qaleh Bala has faced the consequences of prolonged drought, declining rainfall and growing difficulties in securing sustainable sources of income. Traditionally dependent on agriculture and livestock farming, its residents have increasingly turned to their village's cultural and natural assets as a means of revitalizing the local economy and sustaining rural life, according to IRNA.
Rather than abandoning their ancestral home, residents have opted to preserve and revive its historical and cultural identity, promote local traditions and develop the village's tourism potential.
Restoring the historic fabric, safeguarding traditional customs, introducing natural attractions and expanding handicraft production are among the initiatives aimed at transforming Qaleh Bala's cultural and environmental heritage into opportunities for economic development.
The village's terraced houses, distinctive landscape and renowned hospitality offer considerable potential for ecotourism and community-based tourism. Developing this sector could create employment opportunities, help retain the local population and curb rural-to-urban migration.
Local participation in promoting the area's attractions and welcoming visitors has also ensured that tourism development is not confined to infrastructure improvements, but remains closely linked to the preservation of the village's identity.
One of the most distinctive expressions of Qaleh Bala's cultural heritage is the traditional embroidery practised by local women, which has been inscribed on Iran's National Heritage List.
The centuries-old craft features patterns inspired by nature, wildlife and the cultural beliefs of the local community.
Efforts to adapt the traditional embroidery to contemporary products, including traditional clothing, are helping bridge the gap between ancestral craftsmanship and modern needs. The initiative is expected to safeguard a local art form while supporting household incomes and strengthening the region's handicraft sector.
National and international recognition of such crafts is particularly significant, as many expressions of local culture are often overlooked because they have become part of everyday life. Yet these seemingly ordinary traditions represent an important part of a region's cultural wealth and can serve as a major attraction for visitors.
Qaleh Bala's appeal, however, extends beyond its historic architecture, cultural identity and handicrafts. Its proximity to the Touran Protected Area is among its most important natural assets.
Touran is one of Iran's major wildlife habitats and a significant conservation area for the Asiatic cheetah, an endangered species whose survival depends heavily on protecting its natural habitat and securing the cooperation of local communities.
Residents of Qaleh Bala have taken initiatives to support wildlife conservation, including a traditional charitable campaign known as a vow-based fodder offering, through which fodder is provided to support wildlife in the area. The initiative demonstrates how local communities can contribute to environmental protection and offers an example of how social responsibility, conservation and sustainable tourism can be brought together.
The director general of Semnan Province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization said Qaleh Bala is widely regarded as a gateway to the Touran Protected Area and its cheetah habitat. The village has also been nominated for international recognition under the United Nations World Tourism Organization's (UN Tourism) Best Tourism Villages initiative.
Jalal Tajik said Qaleh Bala had successfully passed the first stage of the evaluation process, thanks to its natural attractions, cultural heritage, handicrafts and active community participation.
He noted that Qaleh Bala was the only Iranian village among the country's nominated candidates to advance to the next stage of assessment. However, he stressed that this achievement did not constitute final international registration, adding that the outcome would be announced once the evaluation process had been completed.
Explaining the assessment procedure for villages nominated for international recognition, Tajik said UN Tourism evaluators normally visit the candidate country to assess infrastructure, tourism potential, distinctive characteristics and various selection criteria.
This year, however, international assessors were unable to travel to Iran and conduct a field visit to Qaleh Bala because of the war and the country's exceptional circumstances, a development that could affect the final outcome, he added.
Tajik attributed the village's progress through the initial assessment stages to support from provincial authorities and the active involvement of local residents.
He said these efforts had helped identify and address many of the village's infrastructure shortcomings, obstacles and other deficiencies, with improvements and further preparations undertaken to strengthen its candidacy.
According to Tajik, the main criteria for selecting the world's best tourism villages include natural assets, cultural heritage, handicrafts, community participation and cooperation, as well as distinctive cultural and tourism characteristics. He said Qaleh Bala had considerable potential in all these areas.
Tajik also pointed to efforts over the past year to improve tourism infrastructure, saying provincial officials and local communities had worked together to upgrade facilities and prepare documentation showcasing the village's potential for submission to UN Tourism.
Qaleh Bala's inclusion in the UN Tourism assessment process could help introduce lesser-known attractions in eastern Semnan Province to a wider audience, attract domestic and international visitors, strengthen local handicraft industries and create sustainable sources of income for residents.
Today, Qaleh Bala is increasingly relying on its untapped potential. Its residents, despite mounting climate-related challenges, are working to shape a new future for their hometown by reviving ancestral traditions, promoting indigenous crafts and protecting the surrounding natural environment.
Attention is now focused on the outcome of the UN Tourism evaluation, which could bring Qaleh Bala international recognition and put the village on the global tourism map. Yet, beyond any international title, its enduring value lies in its living traditions, deep-rooted cultural identity and the determination of a community that has chosen to stay, preserve its heritage and build a future in its ancestral homeland.







karnaval.ir

Gol-e Ramiyan Lake offers peaceful escape in Golestan Province

Iranica Desk

Cheshmeh Gol-e Ramiyan, also known as Gol-e Ramiyan Lake, is one of the natural attractions of Golestan Province in northern Iran. Located about five kilometers from Ramiyan, this spring-fed lake lies amid lush forests and mountain slopes, offering visitors a peaceful setting surrounded by nature.
The oval-shaped limestone spring measures approximately 90 by 80 meters. Dense forests surround three sides of the lake, while the fourth borders agricultural land. Its water is known for its deep green color, remarkable clarity and considerable depth, according to Mehr News Agency.
The word "Gol" in the local Turkish language refers to a hollow or a deep pool of water. The lake was once reported to have a depth of around 44 meters, while later measurements have put its depth at approximately 80 meters in some places.
The lake is fed by underground water, and its outflow is connected to the Qorchi River. Despite its inviting appearance, swimming in the lake can be dangerous because of its depth. Visitors should stay away from deeper sections and keep a close eye on children near the water.
The surrounding landscape is home to a variety of plant and animal life. Oak trees and other broad-leaved species grow in the area, alongside shrubs and medicinal plants. The lake and nearby forests also provide habitats for birds, insects, aquatic species and small animals.
Visitors can enjoy walking, photography, relaxing by the water and taking in the views of the surrounding forest reflected on the lake's surface. Fish also inhabit the lake, but fishing is subject to local regulations, which visitors should observe.
Protecting the lake and its natural surroundings is essential to preserving this attractive destination. Visitors are encouraged to avoid littering, respect the local environment and help keep the area clean.
Gol-e Ramiyan Lake can be reached via the road from Ramiyan to Alang. It is located approximately five kilometers from Ramiyan City.
Travelers coming from Tehran can reach Ramiyan by taking either the Firuzkuh or Garmsar route, passing through cities including Semnan, Damghan and Shahroud. Public transportation is also available to Ramiyan, from where visitors can continue to the lake by local transport.
Spring and summer are generally the best seasons to visit Gol-e Ramiyan, when the surrounding forests are green and the weather is more favorable for outdoor activities. Autumn rainfall and winter cold can make access more difficult.
A visit to the lake can also be combined with trips to other natural and historical attractions in the surrounding area, making it a worthwhile destination for travelers exploring Golestan Province.





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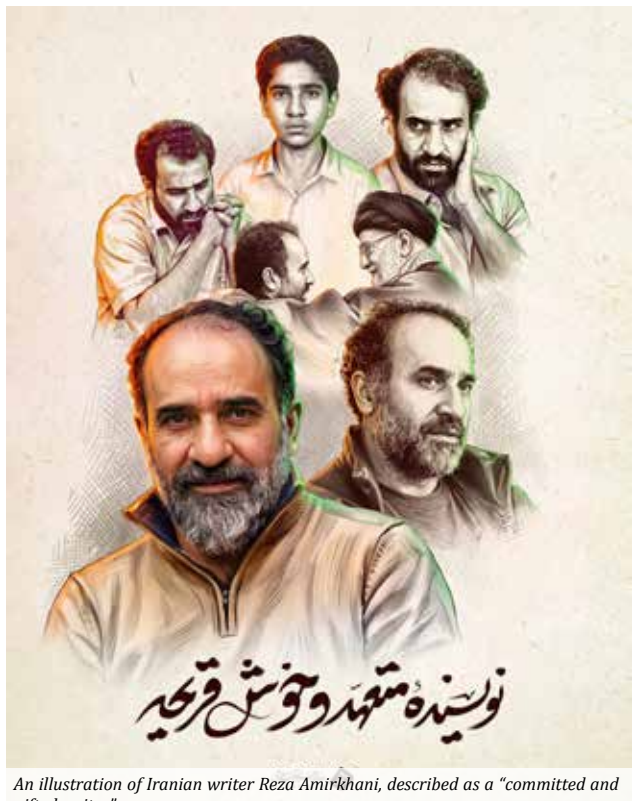
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Leader offers condolences on death of Iranian writer Reza Amirkhani



An illustration of Iranian writer Reza Amirkhani, described as a "committed and gifted writer".

Arts & Culture Desk

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Mojtaba Khamenei has offered condolences on the death of Iranian writer Reza Amirkhani, praising his in-depth research and literary creativity for producing lasting works.

In a message issued on Saturday, Ayatollah Khamenei described Amirkhani as a committed and gifted writer who had left behind a body of enduring work through his research and literary creativity.

He extended his condolences to the writer's family, relatives and admirers.

In the message dated November 28, the Leader also prayed for God's boundless mercy and forgiveness for the late writer.

Reza Amirkhani (1973-2026) was an Iranian novelist and essayist known for his distinctive prose style and exploration of Persian language and literature.

His notable works include 'Ermia', 'Man-e Ou' (The Self of Him), 'Beyoutan' (Homelandless), 'Qeydar' and 'Rahesh' (Salvation), which brought him Iran's Jalal Al-e Ahmad Literary Award in 2018.

Hamedan festival celebrates resilience, magic of children's theater

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's 31st International Children and Youth Theatre Festival opened in the western city of Hamedan on Saturday, highlighting the resilience of artists who continue to create despite economic hardship and the pressures of war and sanctions.

More than 450 theater groups from across the country have signaled their readiness to take part in the event.

In a message marking the festival, festival's director and prominent children artist Marzieh Boroumand described the event as a testament to the perseverance of children's theater artists despite mounting difficulties.

"Artists make the world more beautiful by creating theater," she wrote, saying art fills people, particularly children, with joy and enthusiasm for life. Children exposed to art, she added, develop a stronger inclination to reject destruction, violence and war.

Boroumand also urged officials with authority over decisions of war and peace to create conditions for peace and calm before people's ability to endure hardship was exhausted.

She said art could fill people, especially children, with joy and enthusiasm for life. Children exposed to art, she added, were more inclined to reject destruction, violence and war.

Her message also referred to the pressures of war and international sanctions, saying Iranians continued their lives despite economic hardship.

She urged officials with authority over decisions of war and peace to create conditions for peace and calm before people's ability to endure hardship was exhausted.

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 program included 'Theater Song', a piece specially composed for the festival and performed by children from Hamedan. The song was presented by young trainees alongside Hamed Torabi and Zahra Jalili.

It aims to promote theatergoing and encourage families to attend stage performances.

Other highlights included a performance by artist Ensafi, puppet shows accompanied by live music and a musical group's performance. Children's entertainers Ali Foroutan and Hamid Goli hosted the ceremony.

Organizers also planned to honor people who had followed the festival since childhood and attended previous editions.

Families of those killed in recent wars were due to receive commemorative plaques.

The director of opening ceremony Arash Sharifzadeh said this year's ceremony was designed to give families a more prominent role. He said Imam Khomeini Square was chosen for its size and architectural and historical features. Organizers positioned the stage to incorporate part of the square's architecture into the backdrop.



The official poster for the 31st International Children and Youth Theatre Festival opens in Hamedan on November 29.

Minab-themed cartoon wins top Istanbul prize



Arts & Culture Desk

An Iranian cartoonist has won first prize at an international human rights competition in Istanbul with a work in memory of pupils killed at a school in Minab, southern Iran.

The Shajareh Tayyebeh school in Minab was hit by a US missile strike on February 28, the first day of the US-Israeli war against Iran, killing 168 people, most of them children.

Atefeh Yaryan, from Tabriz in northwestern Iran, won the general category of the third International Human Rights Cartoon Competition, organized by the Istanbul branch of Turkeye's Human Rights Association (IHD). This year's theme was children's rights.

The competition drew 520 cartoonists from 49 countries, who submitted 1,238 works. Organizers announced the results on November 25, 2026.

Gülfidan Özdilek of Turkey took second place in the general category, followed by Ukraine's Oleksiy Kustovsky in third.

In its statement, the association cited war, poverty, discrimination, violence, forced displacement and lack of access to education among the challenges facing children worldwide.

It said children's rights to life, education, health, safety, play and freedom of expression were fundamental and should not be postponed.

The association described cartoons as more than an art form, saying they can strengthen collective memory, expose less visible realities and draw public attention to social and human rights issues.

An awards ceremony and exhibition of selected works are scheduled for December 15, 2026, in Istanbul, Turkey.

Yaryan began her professional career in the early 2010s and works in conceptual, social and editorial cartooning, as well as visual arts.

Cinema Vérité brings nine global documentaries to Tehran

Arts & Culture Desk

Foreign documentaries from Europe, Asia and the Americas will compete at Iran's 20th Cinema Vérité International Documentary Film Festival in Tehran, covering themes ranging from Indigenous struggles and social barriers to personal experiences and human beliefs.

The mid-length international competition features nine films produced in 2025 and 2026, with entries from Northern Europe, South and East Asia, and Latin America.

The lineup includes 'Song of the Survival of the Sami: Indigenous Struggles in the Northern Lands', a film on the struggles of the Sami people, an Indigenous community in Northern Europe, produced by Finland, Norway, Russia and Sweden.

India's entry 'he Desert Kick' follows girls who take up football despite social restrictions in a remote village in Rajasthan, in the country's west.

Other selections include a Taiwanese production, 'Beyond Two Kilograms', and 'Plastic Gods and the Mirror', a co-production involving Bosnia and Herzegovina, Japan, the United States, China, India and Greece.

Poland is represented by 'Forest Guardian: Stories from the Forest'. Argentina has two entries, including 'WhatsApp' and 'Don't Open Your Eyes; You'll Wear My Skin'.

Spain's contribution, 'Lady Everest', tells the story of Junko Tabei, the Japanese mountaineer who became the first woman to reach the summit of Mount Everest in 1975. The lineup also includes the U.S. documentary 'Invisible Presence'.

The festival will run from December 9 to 15, 2026, at Mellat Cineplex in northern Tehran. Mohammad Hamidi-Moghadam is directing the 20th edition.

Founded in 2007, Cinema Vérité is organized by Iran's Documentary and Experimental Film Center (DEFC). It has grown into one of the country's major events for documentary filmmaking, seeking to promote creative nonfiction cinema, highlight social realities and introduce international documentary trends to Iranian audiences.

Its program includes national and international competitions, the Shahid Avini Award, a student film competition, documentary photography, non-competitive screenings and educational events.