

President rolls out plans for economic management, makes no mention of potential US talks

# ‘We’re Now Stronger Than the 12-Day War’

- If we stand united, the enemy can’t do a thing to us for another 36,000 years
- We have a 20-point plan to ensure people’s livelihoods, already submitted it to Leader
- Should the enemy repeat aggression, they’ll be met with an even firmer response
- We are working with determination to solve the nation’s and the people’s problems



## Ayatollah Khamenei credits Iranian youth with resisting US pressure in region

TEHRAN – Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has credited Iran’s young people with defeating a major U.S.-led assault in the region, saying their initiative, bravery, and willingness to sacrifice played a decisive role.

In a message delivered Saturday to the 59th annual meeting of the Union of Islamic Student Associations in Europe, Khamenei said the United States and its regional ally—Israel—failed in their efforts due to the courage and determination of Iranian youth. ▶ Page 3

## Smart e-health using AI aims to transform healthcare system

TEHRAN – The health ministry has developed eight projects with a focus on smart e-health using artificial intelligence to realize the healthcare system transformation goal.

These projects include improving health literacy and self-care, designing a smart referral system, launching national health observatory, changing health data into operational knowledge, managing healthcare supply chain of subsidized medicines using AI, establishing a diagnosis-related groups (DRG) payment system, designing a productive smart hospital, and integrating online insurance processes, IRNA quoted Ali Jafarian, a health ministry official, as saying. ▶ Page 7

## Gaza genocide and collapse of human conscience

By Sasa Milivojev

History will record this moment not as a triumph of civilization, but as its absolute moral collapse. In Gaza, more than 65,000 innocent human beings—the overwhelming majority women, mothers, pregnant women, and children—have been systematically annihilated. Their crime? Being born Palestinian. Their punishment? Death under rubble, starvation, and fire. And the world, with all its institutions, governments, and self-proclaimed guardians of humanity, stood by in silence.

### The greatest shame of the 21st century

This genocide is not only Israel’s crime—it is humanity’s disgrace. In the 21st century, in 2025, with satellites monitoring every inch of earth,

## Strategic significance of Bin Zayed’s visit to Pakistan

By Somaye Morovati

TEHRAN – The official visit of Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan on December 26, 2025, may at first glance be interpreted as a ceremonial bilateral engagement between two countries bound by longstanding and “brotherly” relations. A closer examination of the timing, diplomatic symbolism, substance of discussions, and the broader regional and extra-regional context, however, reveals that this visit should be understood as a multilayered strategic act—one that simultaneously encompasses economic, security, geopolitical, and symbolic dimensions, and is embedded in the broader recalibration of the UAE’s role within a region undergoing structural transformation.

## Gradual erosion of Christian presence in post-war Syria

By Sondoss Al Asaad

BEIRUT—In the aftermath of Syria’s prolonged conflict, the question facing the country’s Christian communities is no longer one of political alignment, but of survival itself.

Once embedded in the social, cultural, and urban fabric of Syrian life, Christians now confront a reality defined by insecurity, demographic decline, and the collapse of long-standing social guarantees.

Their predicament reflects broader transformations in post-war Syria, where power has shifted from centralized authoritarian control to fragmented systems of rule marked by ideological uncertainty and coercive governance.

## Israel’s recognition of Somaliland: Power play or Gaza expulsion plot?

By Shahrokh Saei

TEHRAN – Israel’s recognition of Somalia’s breakaway region of Somaliland has triggered fierce backlash across Africa, the Arab world, and beyond. At the same time, the move has brought Israel’s underlying motives into sharper focus, raising questions about regional security, international law, and the fate of Palestinians in Gaza.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced on Friday that Israel and Somaliland had signed a joint declaration establishing full diplomatic relations. Within hours, Somalia’s government condemned the move as illegal and an attack on its sovereignty, stressing that Somaliland remains an inseparable part of Somalia.

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## PMO signs \$400m deals with private sector, minister says

TEHRAN – Iran’s Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) has signed new contracts and memoranda of understanding with the private sector worth more than 200 trillion rials (\$400 million), the minister of Transport and Urban Development said.

Farzaneh Sadegh said the agreements align with President Masoud Pezeshkian’s emphasis on developing the maritime economy and expanding port capacity to support trade growth.

She said a range of contracts and cooperation agreements have already been concluded between the private sector and the Ports and Maritime Organization, aimed at boosting port throughput, improving infrastructure and upgrading existing facilities.

“In the past couple of days alone, following the necessary coordination, the organization has signed contracts, agreements and memoranda with the private sector valued at over 20 trillion toman,” Sadegh said, according to a statement from the ministry. ▶ Page 4

## Tehran exemplifies peaceful coexistence among religions, governor-general says

TEHRAN – On the eve of the Christian New Year, Tehran Governor-General Mohammad Sadegh Motamedian visited a church in the capital, praising Iran -- and Tehran in particular -- as a model of peaceful coexistence among different religions.

Motamedian attended the St. Joseph Assyrian Catholic Church on Friday evening during a visit accompanied by Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Reza Salehi-Amiri, Chaldean Catholic Archbishop Imad Khoshabeh, and an MP representing Assyrian community in the Iranian Parliament Sharli Envieh Takie.

Congratulating his fellow Christians on the New Year, Motamedian stated that attending the occasions and ceremonies of different religions and meeting closely with dear fellow citizens from religious minorities is a valuable opportunity to hear their issues and follow up their problems, IRNA reported. ▶ Page 6



## From the Silk Road to UN Tourism recognition, Shafiabad endures as a desert legacy

Parts of a historical fortress rises from the desert landscape of Shafiabad village in Iran’s Kerman province. The village lies near the world-renowned Shahdad Kalouts, and once stood along routes connected to the ancient Silk Road, linking trade, culture and settlement across the region. Recognized on October 2025 as one of the world’s Best Tourism Villages by UN Tourism, Shafiabad represents a rare harmony between architecture, history and nature, reflecting how generations of residents shaped a sustainable way of life in the heart of Iran’s desert landscapes.

## ‘Regulation for us, freedom for thee’

By Fatemeh Kavand

Even as a new wave of restrictive regulations on children’s digital access sweeps across Europe and the United States, these very governments—employing a completely different media policy—have simultaneously opened a vast arena of unrestricted social media and satellite broadcasting towards Iran. This meaningful contradiction raises serious questions about soft warfare and cultural engineering.

In the spring and summer of 2025, numerous reports from Western capitals conveyed a shared message: “The digital space has become dangerous for children.” Switzerland officially began reviewing the possibility of banning or restricting social media use for minors. In the United Kingdom, according to the BBC and The Guardian, the government proposed banning social media use for teenagers under 16, “in the Australian style.” ▶ Page 2



## TEHRAN PAPERS

*In the following column, we take a look at some important contents and views in yesterday's Iranian newspapers.*

## Netanyahu's agenda

Khorasan analyzed the objectives of the Israeli Prime Minister's looming trip to the United States for talks with Donald Trump. The report notes that this visit follows a telephone conversation between the two sides about three weeks ago. The purpose of that call, initiated by Trump, was to encourage Netanyahu to move into the second phase of the Gaza agreement. However, it appears that Bibi (the nickname for Netanyahu) also raised issues related to Iran and other matters. The agenda of the talks includes Iran, Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq; files that are interconnected in various ways. Yet the analysis suggests that the most important dossiers are Iran and Gaza. It is no secret that Netanyahu seeks to persuade Trump to launch another attack on Iran. Trump may give Israel the green light, or he himself may participate directly or indirectly. Regarding the linkage between the Iran and Gaza files, the paper argues that it is not unlikely that Netanyahu will show some degree of cooperation on Gaza to secure Trump's support on Iran and even Hezbollah. This has happened before: following the Gaza cease-fire agreement, the U.S. president stated several times that without an attack on Iran, the Gaza deal would not have been achieved. The question now is how far Netanyahu can go in his upcoming trip to win Trump's approval for another round of confrontation with Iran.

### Arman-e-Melli: Economic diplomacy is a strategy against sanctions

Arman-e-Melli, in a commentary, examined the closure of negotiation channels and redefinition of Iran's foreign policy tools. The article states that with traditional political avenues for reducing external pressure effectively blocked, and with little prospect of returning to the negotiating table, the Islamic Republic has been compelled to redefine its foreign policy. The closure of talks with the United States and other Western countries does not mean a complete halt to diplomatic moves; rather, it signals a transformation of classical political diplomacy and a pivot toward regional policies. In this context, the government seeks to use economic, commercial, and regional capacities to reduce the intensity and impact of sanctions and to manage their costs for the national economy. According to recent remarks by Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araghchi, the Western aim is not the direct lifting of sanctions but a reduction of their practical effects on people's lives and the country's economy. The sitting government's speedy move toward economic diplomacy reflects a kind of realism in foreign policy: it acknowledges that

favorable international conditions are not attainable in the short term, but with initiative, the costs can be controlled.

### Hamshahri: Trump neither seeks full-scale war nor complete passivity

Hamshahri evaluated U.S. foreign policy behavior. It argues that in recent years, Washington's approach toward countries such as Venezuela, Cuba, Iran, and the Middle East has converged on a clear pattern: neither full-scale war nor complete passivity, but rather sustained, selective, and targeted pressure. In the Middle East, Trump's logic of selective deterrence has been repeatedly observed. Iran, as America's strategic rival, is neither subjected to direct military assaults nor entirely excluded from the international arena. Instead, it faces sanctions, banking and insurance restrictions, and limited military actions; measures designed to control and reduce its threat capacity rather than eliminate it outright or trigger total war. On Iraq and Iranian influence there, Trump has pursued a dual strategy: bolstering domestic political currents opposed to Tehran's direct sway, while simultaneously pressuring Iran-linked financial and security networks. This combined behavior amounts to a two-track strategy, described in terms such as "economic and judicial deterrence" or "targeted pressure without war."

### Ham Mihan: We must negotiate secretly with US

Ham Mihan, in an interview with geopolitics professor Abdolreza Faraji-Rad, commented on a recent UN Security Council session on Iran with a focus on Resolution 2231. Despite opposition from China and Russia, Western powers sought to hold these meetings every six months unless two conditions were met: first, that Iran and the U.S. engage in negotiations during that period with relative satisfaction or ongoing talks, making such sessions unnecessary; second, that the IAEA gain access to the four bombed Iranian nuclear sites, removing the need for further deliberation. Faraji-Rad argued that the time has come to initiate a form of negotiation shielded from regional spoilers. If talks are public, Israel, its lobbyists, and Iran's regional geopolitical rivals will mobilize against them. No one in the region wants war, but equally, no one wants Iran and the U.S. to reach an agreement, since they fear a stronger Iran. Both sides have conditions, and for that reason, open negotiations no longer succeed, because the matter has become a question of prestige for both countries.

## Iran condemns terror attack on mosque in Syria's Homs



TEHRAN – Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Esmail Baqaei has categorically condemned a terrorist attack on the Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib Mosque in the Syrian province of Homs, which left a group of worshippers dead or wounded.

He extended condolences to the victims' families, wishing a rapid recovery for those injured in the attack.

He said Iran "strongly condemns terrorism and violent extremism in all forms", highlighting the responsibility of all parties which have turned Syria into a breeding ground for terrorism and extremism through their illegal intervention, namely violation of Syria's territorial integrity and sovereignty and the occupation of parts of the country.

The spokesperson also called for the masterminds and perpetrators of the heinous terror attack to be identified and brought to justice, saying "the Syrian transitional government bears

responsibility in that regard."

Condemnations poured in following the terrorist attack on the mosque that killed at least eight people and wounded 18 others. Explosives detonated inside the Ali Bin Abi Talib Mosque as worshippers were performing Friday prayers. A militant group calling itself Saraya Ansar al-Sunna claimed responsibility for the attack.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres "unequivocally" condemned the bombing, according to a statement issued by his spokesperson. "The secretary general reiterates that attacks against civilians and places of worship are unacceptable. He stresses that those responsible must be identified and brought to justice," the statement said.

France also slammed the "abhorrent terrorist act," calling it a deliberate attempt to destabilize Syria and undermine its transitional authorities. Several other countries also condemned the attack.

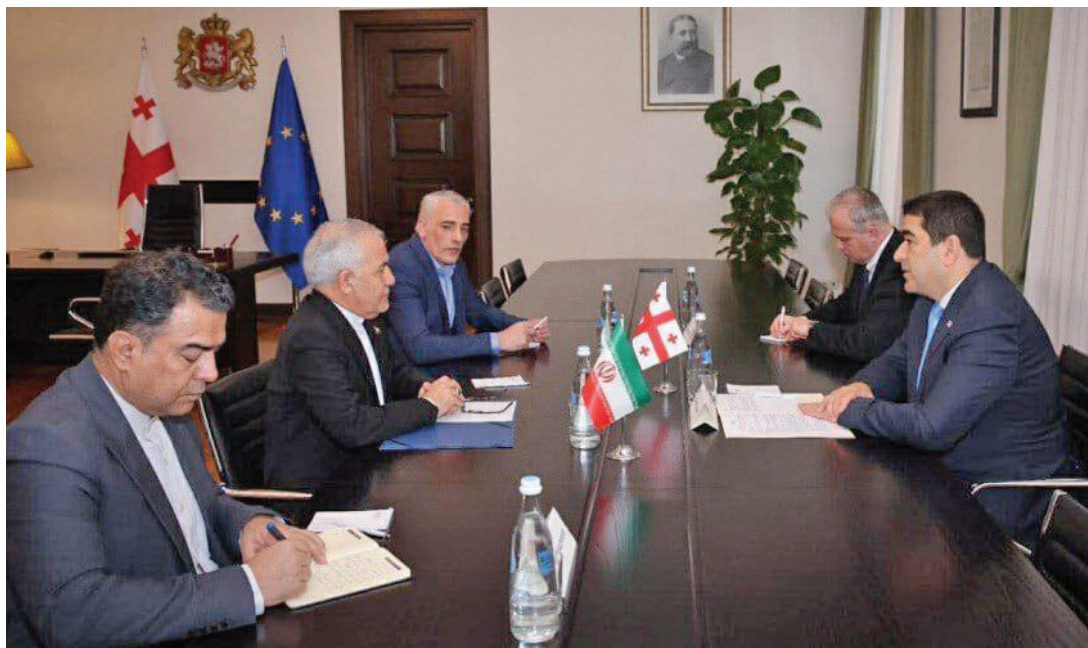
# As envoy changes, Iran and Georgia seek to strengthen ancient bonds

TEHRAN – Iranian Ambassador to Georgia Mahmoud Adib stated that Tehran's policy in the Caucasus aims to maintain peace and respect the territorial integrity of countries in the region. He made these comments during a meeting with Georgia's Parliament Speaker Shalva Papuashvili as his mission to Georgia concluded.

Adib emphasized the important role of parliaments in promoting mutual interests and described the cancellation of visa requirements as a sign of mutual political will. The Iranian diplomat further highlighted the need to expand parliamentary diplomacy and exchanges between friendship groups.

The Georgian parliamentarian, in turn, commended the Iranian ambassador for his efforts to strengthen bilateral ties. "We are aware of your invaluable efforts to cement relations. We are pleased that you, as the Iranian ambassador, managed ties well during recent tensions in the South Caucasus," said Papuashvili. He added that Georgia's policy also aims to maintain peace and stability in the region.

Adib will be succeeded by Ali Moujani, who has already departed Tehran for Tbilisi. Prior to his departure, Moujani met with Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian, who tasked him with further enhancing ties between the two countries. The president stressed that this need is partic-



Georgian Parliament Speaker Shalva Papuashvili (1st-right) meets Iranian Ambassador to Georgia Mahmoud Adib at the end of his mission in Tbilisi on Friday

ularly pressing given the "evolving regional and international dynamics in the Caucasus."

Pezeshkian also underscored the Caucasus' strategic role as a vital bridge between Asia and Europe. He described the region as a "historic, cultural, and economic crossroads" capable of connecting regional and trans-regional economies, emphasizing that deeper engagement with Caucasus countries, particularly Georgia, should be a diplomatic priority.

Moujani told the president that

he pledges to leverage all potential to deepen friendly relations and enhance Iran's standing in the Caucasus.

Iran and Georgia share ancient ties dating back over 2,500 years. While historical rivalry and 19th-century treaties placed Georgia under Russian influence, modern diplomatic relations began in 1992 after the USSR's collapse. Analysts believe that recent high-level visits, especially by Georgia's Prime Minister to Iran in 2024, signal a mutual desire to open a warmer, more cooperative chapter. Both sides

emphasize boosting economic ties, with 47 existing agreements as a foundation, and see potential in areas like transit, technology, and regional projects.

Some challenges remain, however. They stem mainly from sweeping Western sanctions on Iran, which impede trade and investment, as well as from historical periods of political distance influenced by Georgia's Western alignment. Georgia is also looking to establish stronger ties with China which could indicate a broader foreign policy pivot toward the East.

## 'Regulation for us, freedom for thee'

### How the West weaponizes social media

are delivered via satellite, free and unfiltered, to Iranian families. This contradiction is not accidental.

Each of these networks maintains accounts on social media, where it appears no limits exist whatsoever. A controversial post that would be immediately deleted if written in English and addressed to youth in the West would, in most cases, remain online permanently if intended for children and teenagers in places like Iran. For instance, one social media account, belonging to a regular guest on Persian-speaking satellite networks, teaches teenagers how to use knives and homemade explosives when participating in protests. Meanwhile, over the past two years, European governments have sometimes arrested individuals that merely criticized the Israeli regime on social media and asked that children in Gaza don't get brutally killed.

Social media content targeting Iranian youth and inciting crime or self-destructive behavior is often allowed to stay online

### Soft war through entertainment

The concept of "soft war" has long been present in political and media discourse, and Western documents implicitly confirm its existence. Reports by the RAND Corporation and analyses published in Foreign Affairs repeatedly highlight the role of media and social networks in "shaping attitudes within target societies."

Within this framework, the family, women, and lifestyle become central points of focus. The content promoted by many Persian-language satellite channels and social media platforms is precisely what Western societies themselves have deemed "harmful" for their own children and



adolescents—ranging from the normalization of unstable family relationships to the weakening of motherhood and the redefinition of female identity outside indigenous cultural contexts.

Interestingly, Western governments justify their domestic restrictions using the language of "children's rights." UNICEF, in its official statements, warns that children must be protected from the harms of the online environment. Yet, this concern suddenly fades when it comes to other countries.

If an unregulated digital space is dangerous to a Swiss or French child, why is it considered harmless for an Iranian child? If TikTok's algorithms threaten the mental health of American teenagers, why are those same algorithms allowed to operate in Iran without restriction? That's because social media is also a weapon for West's political goals.

Reports by NATO's Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence explicitly refer to "information and media" as instruments of power. In this view, media is not merely a means of informing; it is a tool for shaping values.

Persian-language satellite networks and social media platforms are part of this equation. Content presented in the name of entertainment, freedom, or modern lifestyle ultimately leads to a gradual redefinition of culture and identity—a slow, erosive, and silent process.

For instance, numerous Western internal reports identify the

family as a red line; the OECD, in its social reports, emphasizes the family's crucial role in societal stability. Yet, in the content exported to Iran, the family is often portrayed as an outdated, restrictive, or obstructive institution.

In these narratives, Iranian women are not depicted as the core of the family, but rather as individuals encouraged to break away from traditions. This is precisely where soft war moves beyond mere politics and penetrates the depths of everyday life.

Another notable fact when it comes to social media is the silence of international institutions in the face of this duality. The very organizations that issue statements about Iran's filtering or regulation remain silent regarding the unrestricted export of unregulated content to Iran. This silence, in itself, sends a message.

Ultimately, when Europe and the United States build walls to protect their own children while opening gates for others, this situation cannot be dismissed as mere inconsistency. It represents a deliberate policy—one that turns media into a tool of influence and treats culture as the primary field of competition.

Iran, with its distinct family structure and cultural identity, stands at the center of this field. Understanding this reality is the first step toward a conscious response—one rooted not in passivity, but in a clear-eyed comprehension of the global media game.



## President rolls out plans for economic management, makes no mention of potential US talks

# ‘We’re now stronger than the 12-day war’

By Mona Hojat Ansari

TEHRAN – Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian did not appear particularly fixated on the prospects of a new deal with the U.S. when he sat down with Khamenei.ir, a website overseen by the Leader’s office, and discussed two issues most pressing for the Iranian people: whether Tehran can fend off a second potential war with Israel, and what can be done to control runaway inflation, which has worsened in the backwash of the war Israel and the U.S. launched against Iran in June.

The president maintained his characteristic candor during the interview and answered questions directly. He appeared hopeful regarding both Iran’s military capabilities and the government’s plans to control rising prices in the upcoming Iranian year, which begins in March.

For months, Western media has relentlessly reported on an imminent Israeli war, a phenomenon that has both fueled inflation by impacting the currency market and instilled public anxiety. When questioned about this, Pezeshkian stated that the government is not concerned about a new war, attributing this confidence to its enhanced military capabilities since forcing Israel and the U.S. to halt their aggression and seek a ceasefire last summer.

“Look! Our dear military forces are carrying out their duties powerfully, and currently—despite all the problems we have—they are stronger in terms of equipment and manpower than when they [the enemy] attacked,” he explained. “Therefore, if they intend to confront [us], they will naturally face a firmer response. But I reiterate this point: if we, the people, stand together and remain united, they will simply lose all hope of even attempting to attack our country.”

Israel appeared to have anticipated the Iranian people would take to the streets, cause unrest, and topple the government when it decided to attack Iran. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu addressed the populace twice via video messages, telling them in the first video, released at the onset of the war, that they should “rise up” and secure their “freedom.”

No protests or riots materialized anywhere in the country. Western think tanks subsequently concluded that the war actually fostered greater unity between the government and people, and helped younger generations gain a deeper understanding of the Islamic Revolution’s ideologies and Iran’s support for Resistance groups. After Iranians ignored Netanyahu’s calls, the regime then attacked a prison in Tehran, where it claimed anti-government elements were incarcerated. This move also proved ineffective,



ultimately becoming the deadliest attack of the war with over 70 casualties.

“Based on all their analyses, they believed that if the Zionist regime attacked Iran, the system would collapse. Why didn’t it fall apart? Simply put, all their calculations were that if they attacked, people would pour into the streets, problems would arise, people’s livelihoods would be disrupted, and various services would break down.”

Tehran served as the flashpoint during the 12-day aggression. Although some residents left the capital during the conflict, particularly after U.S. President Donald Trump’s call for everyone to “evacuate” the city, those who remained encountered no difficulties in acquiring daily necessities. Many government organizations remained fully active to serve the public. Supermarkets, gas stations, bakeries, and all other private businesses also continued their operations.

When reporters took to the city to interview workers, asking why they were still attending their jobs despite the consistent sound of air-defense systems and the risks posed to their lives, many explained they were simply adhering to their “duties.” One video, widely circulated, featured a bread baker—whose craft is essential to Iranian cuisine—continuing to bake for customers in line a mere 20 minutes after learning of his brother’s death in an Israeli strike. He told the man filming him that “people still need bread,” even in the midst of his grief. Panic-buying did not happen either. A social experiment published on social media captured residents admonishing a man to “buy only what he needs” after they saw him with months’ worth of groceries

at the checkout.

For many ordinary civilians, the most tangible effect of the war has been the inflation that has continued to increase over the past six months. Iran’s inflation is partly dependent on the state of the currency market, where the value of the Iranian Rial falls every time there are reports of war, or even impractical measures are introduced by the U.S. and Europe. For instance, the E3 (UK, Germany, France) triggered a mechanism designed to reinstate pre-JCPOA UN sanctions against Iran in August. Although these sanctions were not implemented due to strong opposition from China, Russia, and numerous other countries that deemed the move “illegal,” Europe’s actions at the UN nonetheless had a significant impact on Iran’s currency market, an effect that persists to this day and worsened significantly in the past month.

During his interview, Pezeshkian stated that the government has devised new plans aimed at containing prices in the upcoming 1405 Solar year. He noted that these plans have already been presented to the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, and require the cooperation of other government branches for successful implementation.

“Every week, we get a regular opportunity to meet with the esteemed Leader and consult with him on current reports and policy directions,” he stated. “The Leader’s top priority, his foremost concern, is the people’s livelihood. The work we’re doing and the plans we’re drawing up require all of us to come together and move forward in unison. If that happens—if our media, parliament, and other institutions coordinate—we can at

least ensure that next year people won’t face livelihood issues and that the prices of food commodities won’t keep rising. We can make that happen.”

The president also revealed that his administration has laid out a 20-point plan which Ayatollah Khamenei viewed favorably. “Since he was concerned about the currency situation, essential goods, production inputs, inflation, and similar issues, about seventeen or eighteen of those points were areas where we’ll need to report back progress.”

Throughout the interview, Pezeshkian made no mention of the prospects of new talks with the United States. This stands in contrast to the time he first took office in July 2024, when he was notably eager about engaging in diplomacy.

While Washington lifting sanctions as part of a new nuclear deal would undoubtedly ease economic pressure, confidence in diplomacy with the U.S. and American leaders’ commitment has plummeted significantly since Trump’s attack on Iran in the midst of nuclear negotiations that Pezeshkian himself had initiated, despite backlash from conservative factions. His administration also actively sought to prevent Europe from re-imposing UN sanctions and informed Americans of his readiness for new talks, provided they abandon their non-starter demands—which include the dismantlement of Iran’s nuclear program, caps on its missile capabilities, and the severance of ties with Resistance forces. These extensive efforts did not bear fruit, and Pezeshkian’s latest interview may indicate he no longer holds out hope for their future success.

## Ayatollah Khamenei credits Iranian youth with resisting US pressure in region

TEHRAN – Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has credited Iran’s young people with defeating a major U.S.-led assault in the region, saying their initiative, bravery, and willingness to sacrifice played a decisive role.

In a message delivered Saturday to the 59th annual meeting of the Union of Islamic Student Associations in Europe, Khamenei said the United States and its regional ally—Israel—failed in their efforts due to the courage and determination of Iranian youth.

The full text of Ayatollah Khamenei’s message is as follows:

In the Name of God, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful

Dear young people!

This year, your country, through

the blessing of faith, unity, and self-confidence, earned renewed credibility and standing in the world. The heavy assault by the US army and its disgraceful extension in this region was overcome by the initiative, courage, and sacrifice of the young people of Islamic Iran. It was proven that the Iranian nation, by drawing upon its own capabilities, in the light of faith and righteous action, and in confronting corrupt and oppressive arrogant powers, can persevere and deliver the call to Islamic values to the world with a voice more resolute and louder than ever.

The deep sorrow over the martyrdom of a number of scientists and commanders, and a group of our dear people has not and will not be able to halt the determined young people of Iran. The families of those martyrs themselves stand among the forerun-



ners of this movement. The discussion is not about the nuclear issue or matters of the kind. The issue is confronting the unjust order and the coercive exercise of the system of domination in today’s world, and turning toward a just Islamic national and international order. This is the great claim whose banner the Islamic Iran has raised, and which has

enraged corrupt and corrupting coercive powers.

You students, especially those abroad, bear a share of this great responsibility. Entrust your hearts to God, recognize your capabilities, and steer the associations in this direction. God is with you, and complete victory awaits you, God willing.

*Sayyed Ali Khamenei*

# IRAN IN FOCUS

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Straight Truth  
TEHRAN TIMES

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## SPORTS

### Sepahan’s late win over Chadormalou sends them top of PGPL

TEHRAN – Enzo Crivelli’s dramatic 95th-minute goal lifted Sepahan to the top of the 2025/26 Iran Persian Gulf Professional League (PGPL) table on Saturday.

In the match held at Naghsh-e Jahan Stadium in Isfahan, the contest appeared destined to end in a goalless draw before the French striker struck deep into stoppage time to secure all three points for Sepahan.

Earlier in the day, Paykan and Kheybar played out a 0–0 draw in Tehran.

On Sunday, Esteghlal will host Gol Gohar in Tehran.

### Karim Bagheri proud to be a member of Persepolis

TEHRAN – Iran’s legendary midfielder Karim Bagheri says Persepolis are the only club he has ever truly loved in Iranian football.

Bagheri, 51, played for Persepolis in two spells, during the 1996–97 and 2002–2011 seasons. During his time with the Reds, he made nearly 200 appearances and scored 33 goals.

In an interview on the reality show Robat Salibi, Bagheri spoke about his deep affection for Persepolis. When asked whether he had ever considered playing for another club in the Iranian league, he replied:

“There was no option other than Persepolis. Persepolis were my only choice.”

Bagheri was also a key member of Iran’s national team that qualified for the 1998 FIFA World Cup. He scored Iran’s opening goal in the famous World Cup qualifying match against Australia.

“My goal was offside (laughs),” Bagheri said. “But it remains one of my best memories because that victory made the Iranian people happy.”

After retiring from playing, Bagheri has worked for several years as an assistant coach at Persepolis. However, he believes the team from his playing era was stronger than the current squad.

“I think our generation was better than the current team, and that team would be capable of beating today’s Persepolis,” he said.

Bagheri also reflected on his early retirement from professional football, which came at the age of 27.

“I was exhausted from long training camps and decided to hang up my boots, but I regret that decision. I believe I could have played for several more years,” he concluded.

### Iran to send four skiers to 2026 Winter Olympic Games

TEHRAN – Four skiers will represent Iran at the 2026 Winter Olympic Games in Milan, Italy.

The Games will take place in the Italian city from Feb. 7 to 23.

Iran’s ski team will take part in the event with four quota places, two quotas (one woman and one man) in Alpine skiing and two quotas (one woman and one man) in Cross-Country skiing.

In the women’s Alpine skiing category, Sadaf Saveh Shemshaki will represent Iran at the Olympics. It was initially planned to hold the women’s Alpine skiing selection races in Italy with the participation of Sadaf Saveh Shemshaki and Maryam Kiashemshaki, but due to Kiashemshaki’s injury and leg fracture during pre-competition training, Sadaf Saveh Shemshaki will be Iran’s sole female Alpine skiing representative at the Olympics.

In the men’s Alpine skiing section, following the holding of 11 selection races in Italy and Austria, Mohammad Kiyadarbandsari secured

his place as the only Iranian male Alpine skier at the Winter Olympics.

In women’s cross-country skiing, Samaneh Beyrami Bahar will represent Iran at the Winter Olympics.

In the men’s cross-country skiing category, although Danial Saveh Shemshaki currently has a stronger chance of being selected, since four Iranian male skiers have earned Olympic quotas, selection trials will be held to determine the final male representative for this edition of the Winter Olympic Games.

It has been planned that Iran’s four Olympic skiers will be sent to Italy from Jan. 10 until the start of the Winter Olympics to take part in a preparatory training camp.

### Momeni Moghaddam among options for Iran volleyball coaching role

TEHRAN – Gholamreza Momeni Moghaddam has been shortlisted to be named Iran volleyball coach.

The head coach of Iran’s U-20 volleyball team, who led the team to two consecutive world championship titles, has emerged as one of the options to join Roberto Piazza’s coaching staff as an assistant coach for the senior national team.

Iran’s national volleyball team has several crucial competitions ahead next year, with the Asian Championship being the most important.

Piazza, who has so far coached the national team in two major events—the Volleyball Nations League and the World Championship—has now gained a relatively clear understanding of the conditions of Iranian volleyball. Based on this assessment, he intends to make changes both to the coaching staff and the player roster ahead of the upcoming competitions.

Piazza plans to invite several young players to the national team camp—most of whom won the World Youth Championship under the guidance of Reza Momeni Moghaddam. For this reason, the Iranian coach is being mentioned as one of the potential assistant coaches for Piazza, as he has a thorough knowledge of the young players. Players such as Poriya Hossein Khanzadeh, Yousef Kazemi, and Arshia Behnejad have all previously worked under his supervision.

### Rowing targets gold at 2026 Asian Games: Mohsen Shadi

TEHRAN – Mohsen Shadi, President of Iran’s Rowing Federation, says that the federation has set its sights on winning a gold medal at the 2026 Asian Games to be held in Nagoya.

Shadi noted that 15 months have passed since the establishment of the Rowing Federation. He said rowing is one of the sports that has been part of the Olympic Games since the beginning of its establishment and also has the oldest international federation among sports disciplines.

During this period, the federation has managed to win valuable medals at various levels. Shadi identified talent identification programs across the provinces as one of the federation’s most important plans, saying that a lack of athlete numbers is currently one of their main concerns. “For this reason, we have placed nationwide talent identification programs on our agenda,” he said.

He added that after implementing these programs, selected talented athletes will be carefully chosen and incorporated into youth and junior national teams.

Shadi also pointed to challenges related to equipment and facilities, noting that due to sanctions, the federation has faced difficulties in this area. “Despite the harsh conditions and limitations, we have tried to perform well and win medals at the Asian and international levels,” he said.

“With the planning that has been done, we want to revive our golden era at the Nagoya Asian Games and be among the leading federations at these competitions,” Shadi added.







# Israel’s recognition of Somaliland: Power play or Gaza expulsion plot?

From page 1 ► Although Somaliland declared independence in the 1990s, it has not been recognized by Somalia or any other world government. Israel’s unilateral recognition has therefore drawn worldwide condemnation.

The African Union (AU) swiftly rejected Israel’s move, reaffirming its commitment to Somalia’s unity and the “intangibility of borders inherited at independence.”

Arab countries also condemned the recognition. Saudi Arabia denounced the step as a violation of international law and pledged full support for Somalia’s sovereignty. Qatar accused Israel of undermining international legitimacy and fueling instability, urging it instead to recognize Palestine and end the Gaza war. Egypt coordinated with Somalia, Turkey, and Djibouti to oppose “dangerous developments” in the Horn of Africa. Other Arab states, including Iraq, Jordan, and Kuwait, issued similar rebukes.

### Palestinian response

The Palestinian Foreign Ministry described Israel’s recognition of Somaliland as a threat to Arab and regional security. Hamas went further, calling it a “dangerous precedent” and accused Israel of seeking false legitimacy while committing war crimes in Gaza.

Hamas noted that Israel’s recognition was linked to plans to forcibly displace Palestinians from Gaza to Somaliland. This echoes earlier



reports that Israel had quietly explored resettlement options in Africa as part of a broader strategy to reduce the Palestinian presence in Gaza. Somaliland, as a destination for Palestinians expelled from Gaza, has now become a central concern.

Human rights advocates in Somaliland had already warned that such a move would not only destabilize the region but also implicate Somaliland in the Israeli genocide in Gaza. The idea of transferring Palestinians into a fragile, unrecognized territory raises profound humanitarian and legal questions. Critics argue it would amount to ethnic cleansing disguised as diplomacy, using Somaliland’s quest for recognition as leverage to facilitate one of the most controversial population transfers in modern history.

## Gaza genocide and collapse of human conscience

From page 1 ► with instantaneous global communication, with international law codified after the horrors of the Holocaust, the world permitted a genocide to unfold in plain sight.

The phrase “Never Again” has now been buried under the ashes of Gaza.

### UN is a monument of cowardice

The United Nations—born from the promise to prevent atrocities—has revealed itself as a monument of cowardice. Its chambers echoed with empty speeches while Palestinian children suffocated under collapsed buildings. The so-called “international community” passed resolutions, issued statements, and organized “urgent meetings”—yet did nothing to halt the killing. The UN has failed, and with its failure, it has betrayed the very reason for its existence.

### Hypocrisy of global powers

The European Union, forever parading itself as the champion of human rights, proved itself a hypocritical accomplice. Its leaders wept crocodile tears while continuing trade and military cooperation with Israel.

The United States, Israel’s shield and sword, funded and armed the slaughter.

And what of Russia and China? The “alternative powers,” the supposed counterweight to

Western imperialism? They, too, watched and calculated, preferring geopolitical interests over human lives. Gaza was not saved by the West, nor by the East. Both sides failed. Both sides are guilty.

### Silence of artists and intellectuals

Equally damning is the silence of those who claim to speak for humanity—artists, writers, poets, journalists, musicians, filmmakers. Where were their voices while Palestinian children were torn apart? Where were the protests from the cultural elite who fill stadiums, theaters, and galleries with their art and their words of “love” and “justice”? Their silence is complicity. Their cowardice is unforgivable.

### A civilization that has forfeited its soul

The genocide in Gaza will stand as the darkest stain in human history—not only because of the scale of the crime, but because of the indifference that surrounded it. Humanity has revealed itself not as a community of moral beings, but as a global machine of selfishness, corruption, and cowardice.

Civilization has forfeited its soul.

### A call for eternal memory and judgment

The people of Gaza are not numbers. They are faces, names, stories, songs, and dreams—now erased by bombs with the blessing of global

competition among regional and extra-regional actors for influence, Pakistan appears intent on highlighting the UAE as a privileged, reliable, and differentiated partner.

The timing of the visit is equally consequential. Over the past several years, the UAE has progressively shifted its foreign policy away from costly and high-risk interventionism—most notably in Yemen and Libya—toward a model centered on economic diplomacy, risk management, and the consolidation of influence through investment and geopolitical networking. This shift does not imply a wholesale abandonment of hard power instruments; rather, it reflects a calculated blending of hard and soft power within the UAE’s overarching strategic doctrine.

Within this framework, Pakistan has assumed heightened importance for Abu Dhabi. Beyond its demographic and geopolitical weight, Pakistan functions as a connective hub linking the Persian Gulf to South Asia, China, and emerging economic corridors. Moreover, Pakistan’s military remains one of the most cohesive and influential armed forces in the Muslim world, a reality that occupies a central place in Emirati security calculations.

For Palestinians, the plan represents a double dispossession: first from their homes in Gaza, and then into a territory whose own sovereignty is contested. For Somaliland, it risks being drawn into a geopolitical bargain that could compromise its legitimacy and embroil it in the Israeli war crimes.

### U.S. Republican support for Somaliland

Recognition of Somaliland has also found support among some U.S. Republicans. In August, Senator Ted Cruz urged President Donald Trump to recognize Somaliland, citing its ties with Israel and support for the Abraham Accords. An Al Jazeera report suggested Cruz had received nearly \$2 million in funding from pro-Israel lobby groups, including AIPAC.

On Friday, Somaliland’s presi-

dent, Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi, announced that the region would join the Abraham Accords, further aligning itself with Israel and U.S.-backed normalization efforts.

### Strategic calculations

Beyond the Palestinian issue, analysts argue that Israel’s recognition of Somaliland is rooted in strategic calculations. In November, a report by Israel’s Institute for National Security Studies highlighted Somaliland’s potential role in intelligence monitoring of Yemen’s Ansarullah and launching direct operations against the movement.

The UAE already operates a military base in Berbera, equipped with a port and airstrip. Analysts suggest this base could become a critical node in the UAE’s anti-Ansarullah campaign, with Israel potentially leveraging Emirati ties to expand its own regional footprint.

Presently, it is evident that Israel’s recognition of Somaliland is more than a diplomatic gesture—it is a geopolitical gambit. It intertwines three strategic objectives:

- Regional military positioning – Establishing a foothold near Yemen and the Red Sea
- Diplomatic expansion – Bringing Somaliland into the Abraham Accords and strengthening ties with U.S. allies

(See full text at [tehrantimes.com](#))

silence. Their memory demands justice. Their blood demands accountability. And their suffering will haunt the conscience of every government, every institution, and every so-called intellectual who looked away.

Shame on you, world. Shame on your leaders. Shame on your silence. Shame on your cowardice. Shame on your betrayal of humanity itself.

History will not forgive you. And God never will.

### A call for sanctions and justice

Iran, for all the slander and political vilification hurled at it, showed the world what compassion in crisis can look like — mobilizing humanitarian aid, medical teams, and diplomatic pressure to alleviate an agony that so many pretended not to see. If the international community is serious about justice, the path is clear: impose comprehensive sanctions on Israel, not on Iran; immediately halt all arms sales and military support to the perpetrators; freeze assets and cut the supply chains that fuel slaughter. Let there be no ambiguity — economic and political isolation must follow when states enable or execute crimes against humanity. Those who ordered and executed the massacres must be arrested, tried by international tribunals, and sentenced for crimes that shatter the moral foundations of civilization.

(See full text at [tehrantimes.com](#))

## Strategic significance of Bin Zayed’s visit to Pakistan

From page 1 ► This marks Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed’s first visit to Pakistan in his capacity as President of the United Arab Emirates, a fact that alone amplifies the visit’s symbolic and political significance. By selecting Pakistan as a key destination in its high-level diplomatic outreach, Abu Dhabi has clearly signaled that it views Islamabad not merely as a traditional partner, but as a critical strategic node linking the Persian Gulf region with South Asia.

The nature of the official reception accorded to the UAE president in Islamabad—from the escort of JF-17 fighter jets in Pakistani airspace and the firing of a 21-gun salute, to the simultaneous presence of the prime minister, foreign minister, and army chief, as well as the declaration of a local holiday in the capital—conveys messages that go well beyond standard diplomatic protocol. In the lexicon of international relations, such heightened ceremonial symbolism is typically employed when a host country seeks either to underscore a strategic commitment to a particular relationship or to send indirect signals to third-party actors. In this case, both objectives are clearly discernible. Confronted with persistent economic pressures, structural financial challenges, and intensifying

competition among regional and extra-regional actors for influence, Pakistan appears intent on highlighting the UAE as a privileged, reliable, and differentiated partner.

The economic dimension unquestionably constitutes the core pillar of this visit. The repeated emphasis by officials from both sides on trade, investment, energy, infrastructure, and information technology suggests that Pakistan–UAE relations are moving beyond the traditional paradigm of short-term financial assistance or emergency deposits, toward a model of targeted, long-term investment. This is the same approach the UAE has pursued in recent years in countries such as Egypt, Jordan, and even Turkey, seeking to generate both economic returns and durable political leverage.

For Pakistan, the significance of this model is particularly pronounced. As of 2025, Pakistan continues to grapple with high external debt, persistent balance-of-payments deficits, and an urgent need for foreign direct investment. The UAE, unlike many other potential partners, possesses centralized decision-making capacity, substantial financial resources, and institutional flexibility—attributes that render it an especially attractive and vital partner for a country in Pakistan’s position.

At the same time, the security layer of the visit should not be overlooked. Although less explicit in offi-

cial statements, it is clearly present in the background. The shared emphasis on “regional stability” and the prominent role of Pakistan’s army chief during the welcoming ceremonies suggest that security-related discussions—albeit largely behind closed doors—formed part of the agenda. Abu Dhabi is acutely aware that instability in Pakistan would carry direct and indirect repercussions for Persian Gulf security, and engagement with Pakistan’s key security institutions thus represents a strategic investment.

At this juncture, developments in Africa and their impact on regional perceptions of the UAE assume particular relevance. In recent years, the UAE’s role in the Sudanese crisis—especially allegations regarding political and logistical support for the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) vis-à-vis the Sudanese Armed Forces—has drawn significant regional and international scrutiny. Beyond Sudan, the UAE’s active footprint in the Horn of Africa, including Somalia, Somaliland (notably the port of Berbera), and Eritrea, has reinforced an image of the UAE as an assertive, and at times interventionist, security–military actor.

(See full text at [tehrantimes.com](#))

## UAE–Israel partnership casts a shadow on southern Yemen

By staff writer

TEHRAN – Southern Yemen is no longer just a battleground between local factions. It is becoming a testing ground for foreign ambitions, with the United Arab Emirates pushing separatist forces into new territory while deepening its partnership with Israel. These moves are reshaping the conflict in ways that go far beyond Yemen’s borders.

The Southern Transitional Council (STC), backed by the UAE, has seized oil-rich areas in Hadramout and Mahra, pushing out Saudi-aligned forces. At first glance, this looks like a local struggle for influence. But beneath it lies a broader strategy: turning southern Yemen into a hub for advanced surveillance, maritime monitoring, and external cooperation. The rationale for the UAE–Israel partnership is clear. Israel provides cutting-edge technology in drones, radar, and intelligence sys-

tems, while the UAE offers access to ports, islands, and bases near Bab al-Mandeb. Together, they see southern Yemen as a strategic corridor to expand their reach.

This cooperation may serve the UAE’s ambitions, but it comes at a high cost for Yemen. It undermines sovereignty by placing ports and coastal zones under foreign security logic rather than local governance. It also strains the Saudi-led coalition itself. Saudi Arabia has called for unity and calm, but the UAE’s actions challenge that vision. Even the perception of Israeli involvement makes the conflict more international, raising fears that Yemen’s south could be seen as part of a wider Red Sea security grid rather than a region working toward peace.

(See full text at [tehrantimes.com](#))

## Israel’s detention of Dr. Hussam Abu Safia enters second year



Dr. Hussam Abu Safia, 52, remains in an Israeli prison a year after Israel detained him without charges or trial.

His family and supporters are demanding his release as his health deteriorates amid reports of the inhumane conditions under which he is being held, Al Jazeera reported.

Abu Safia, known for his steadfast presence as director of Kamal Adwan Hospital in Beit Lahiyah, north of Gaza City, has become central in international discussions on the protection of medical personnel in armed conflicts.

He insisted on staying at the hospital, along with several medical staff, despite continuous Israeli attacks on the facility.

Israel eventually surrounded the hospital and forced everyone to evacuate. Since then, Abu Safia has been in detention, and the hospital has been out of service.

He was transferred between Israeli prisons, from the notorious Sde Teiman holding facility to Ofer Prison, being mistreated continuously.

No charges have been brought against Abu Safia, who is held under the “unlawful combatant” law, which allows detention without a standard criminal trial and denies detainees access to the evidence against them.

Abu Safia is being held in extreme conditions and, according to lawyers, has lost more than a third of his body weight.

## ‘No witnesses, no narrative.’ Syndicate says Israel deliberately targets Palestinian journalists

Israel’s systematic campaign of violence against Palestinian journalists since October 2023 has peaked in 2025 with the targeting of dozens of members of the press, Al Jazeera reported Saturday, citing the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate.

The syndicate’s Freedoms Committee said Israel has shifted from restricting coverage to “silencing the press through deadly force,” aiming to eliminate witnesses and block documentation.

By November 2025, at least 76 journalists had been killed or wounded, a figure the committee described as a “dangerous indicator of the escalating targeting policy” pursued by Israel.

“Journalists are no longer merely ‘potential

targets,’ but rather confirmed and frequent targets,” the committee said.

Press freedom groups have condemned the attacks, but no Israeli soldier has faced charges. Reporters Without Borders warned that Palestine is now among the most dangerous places to practice journalism.

Nearly 300 journalists and media workers have died in Gaza over 26 months—an average of 12 a month—while many others suffered amputations, paralysis, or blindness.

The syndicate stressed that most victims were clearly identifiable as press, often wearing protective gear, underscoring what it called Israel’s deliberate “no witnesses, no narrative, no image” doctrine.

## Gradual erosion of Christian presence in post-war Syria

From page 1 ► Their predicament reflects broader transformations in post-war Syria, where power has shifted from centralized authoritarian control to fragmented systems of rule marked by ideological uncertainty and coercive governance.

For decades, Syrian Christians lived under a fragile arrangement of protection tied to the authoritarian but nominally secular state.

While this arrangement was never rooted in genuine equality, it provided a degree of stability.

Fourteen years of imposed war on the country dismantled that framework entirely. The collapse of centralized authority, followed by the ascendancy of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and

its leader Ahmad al-Sharaa, marked a decisive rupture.

What replaced the old order was not security, but a system of conditional tolerance governed by ideological ambiguity and coercive control.

The sharp increase in asylum requests from Syrian Christians abroad reflects this reality.

Once constituting roughly ten percent of Syria’s population, Christians have seen their numbers decline at an accelerating pace.

Entire neighborhoods in Aleppo, Homs, and Damascus were emptied during the war, churches were destroyed or damaged, and families were displaced internally or forced into exile.

(See full text at [tehrantimes.com](#))



## Khuzestan mosques among Iran's nominees for UNESCO collective listing: provincial tourism chief

TEHRAN – Several historic mosques in Khuzestan province have been included among Iran's nominees for a collective UNESCO listing, said Mohammad Jourvand, head of the Khuzestan Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Department.

Speaking to the Tehran Times on Thursday, Jourvand said mosques such as the Jameh mosques of Shushtar and Dezful are among the most important historical religious structures in the country, dating back to the third and fourth centuries of the Islamic calendar, although some sources trace parts of them to the sixth and seventh centuries.

He said the two mosques are key components of the proposed "Persian Mosque" dossier, a serial nomination that includes a number of historic mosques across Iran for possible inscription on UNESCO's World Heritage List. According to Jourvand, the mosques of Khuzestan are considered among the most influential examples within the collection, and preparatory work for the nomination has been completed. "We participated in the evaluation sessions, and issues related to annexes and documentation have been reviewed and addressed," he said.

Referring to the Rangooniha Mosque in Abadan, the official noted that although it does not match the historical age of the Jameh mosques of Shushtar and Dezful, it represents a unique architectural and cultural example in Iran. He said the mosque's distinctive design and use of color, influenced by Indian and Pakistani architectural traditions, make it a rare and notable structure in the country.

Jourvand added that the Rangooniha Mosque is under the ownership of the Khuzestan Cultural Heritage Department and has undergone appropriate restoration work in recent years. "This building is one of the mosques that leaves a strong impression on every visitor," he said.

Emphasizing the broader role of mosques in Iranian society, Jourvand said their historical function extended beyond worship to education, cultural gatherings, poetry circles and artistic activities. He noted that while mosques played a significant social and cultural role in recent decades, particularly during the years following the Sacred Defense, many of these functions have gradually diminished.

"Reviving the cultural and social role of historical mosques requires renewed attention and planning," he said.

Iran has placed 17 of its most significant mosques on UNESCO's Tentative List under the collective title "Persian Mosque," highlighting the evolution of Islamic architecture in the country from the early Islamic period to the late Qajar era. The nomination aims to demonstrate how Iranian architectural traditions shaped and influenced mosque design across the Islamic world.

## Preserving Jiroft site vital to Iran's civilizational identity

TEHRAN – Efforts to safeguard and preserve the archaeological site of Jiroft in Kerman province are essential to protecting Iran's civilizational identity, said Morteza Nikrou, head of the Kerman Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Department.

According to IRIB, he referred to the distinguished position of this site in the history of Iranian civilization, adding that the old city of Jiroft is one of the most prominent ancient sites in the country, and its protection and preservation is considered the preservation of Iran's civilizational identity and national cultural assets.

He emphasized the targeted use of the historical, cultural and civilizational capacities of the ancient site of the old city of Jiroft in line of sustainable tourism development.

Emphasizing the need for a combined approach to the protection and introduction of historical monuments, he added that preserving the ancient sites is not limited to conservation measures, but rather the scientific and competent introduction of these historical assets at the national and international levels can play an effective role in introducing Jiroft civilization and enhancing the cultural status of the region.

Referring to the unique historical and cultural potential of the old city of Jiroft, he said that this site can play a role as one of the important axes of cultural tourism in the sustainable development of tourism in south of the province, a development that is based on protection, participation of relevant institutions, and utilization of the capacity of the private sector.

Nikrou also considered interaction between the executive agencies, the private sector, and economic institutions essential in the path of protecting and introducing the historical sites. "Using the capacity of the Chamber of Commerce and the Tourism Commission can pave the way for coherent planning to introduce Jiroft's civilization and transform this historical capacity into an opportunity for tourism prosperity, job creation, and balanced development of the region."

He added that the targeted introduction of the ancient site of the old city of Jiroft at the national and international levels, in addition to strengthening the cultural identity, will pave the way for encouraging the longer stay of tourists and improving the status of cultural tourism in Kerman province.

Jiroft civilization is said to be a collection of ancient sites and archaeological findings discovered in Kerman province and near the cities of Jiroft and Halilroud, which are being studied and researched by multinational teams of archaeologists.

The history of this area dates back to 5,000 years ago. Objects and decorative vessels made of clinochlore mineral with remarkable and innovative reliefs belonging to the Jiroft civilization have been discovered so far.

Historical relics discovered from the Burnt City have shown the existence of trade relations between the ancient city of Jiroft and the Burnt City and the connections between them. The discovery of the ancient Jiroft library has also surprised many researchers. This site, which has been registered on the National Heritage List, dates back to the prehistoric era and is located in Jiroft county. It was registered under number 52 as one of the national monuments of Iran in 1931.

monuments that encapsulate every aspect of the civil, religious, artistic, and military functions of its illustrious founders. These include the 16th-century buildings relating to the founding of the Renaissance city, such as the cathedral of St John, the Palace of the Grand Master, the Auberge de Castille et Léon, the Auberge de Provence, the Auberge d'Italie, the Auberge d'Aragon and the Infirmary of the Order and the churches of Our Lady of Victory, St Catherine and il Gesù, as well as the improvements attributed to the military engineers and architects of the 18th century such as the Auberge de Bavière, the Church of the Shipwreck of St Paul, the Library and the Manoel Theatre.

(Source: UNESCO)

## Glimpses of World Heritage sites: City of Valletta

Malta's capital Valletta is a fortified city located on a hilly peninsula between two of the finest natural harbors in the Mediterranean.

The Siege of Malta in 1565 captured the European imagination and mobilized the resources needed to create the new city of Valletta, founded soon after, in 1566. The Knights of St John, aided by the most respected European military engineers of the 16th century, conceived and planned the city as a single, holistic creation of the late Renaissance, with a uniform grid plan within fortified and bastioned city walls. Since its creation, the city has witnessed a number of rebuilding projects, yet those have not compromised the harmony between the dramatic topography and the Hippodamian grid. The fabric of the city includes a compact ensemble of 320

# Tehran exemplifies peaceful coexistence among religions, governor-general says

From Page 1 ▶ Emphasizing the special approach of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran towards divine religions, he said: "Efforts have always been made to provide the necessary support in the field of restoration and preservation of religious places of different religions in Tehran, especially as the seat of power of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and in this way, we serve all citizens."

Referring to Si-e Tir Street, he said that Tehran is a true symbol of coexistence of ethnic groups and religions; one can see places of worship of different religions, including Assyrian and Armenian Christian churches, Muslim mosques, Jewish synagogues, and Zoroastrian fire temples, side by side on Si-e Tir Street; where followers of all religions freely and peacefully perform their religious rituals.

Motamedian emphasized that this coexistence is rooted in the progressive vision of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which pays special attention to divine religions, and the presence of representatives of different religions in Iranian Parliament is a clear testimony to this special and distinguished approach of Islamic governance.

He concluded by expressing his hope: "May all Iranian people, especially Christian, Assyrian, and Armenian compatriots, have a decent life in an atmosphere full of peace, friendship, tranquility, and comfort."

**Message of Jesus Christ (PBUH), global call for peace and peaceful coexistence**

Speaking at the same gathering, Salehi-Amiri said that the message of Jesus Christ (PBUH) is a historical and interreligious call for kindness, peaceful coexistence, dialogue and mutual respect among the human beings.

According to Mehr news agency,



he issued a message on the occasion of the birth of Jesus Christ (PBUH), congratulating the Christian compatriots of the country, the followers of that great divine prophet, and all believers in high human values on this blessed occasion.

Referring to the high position of Jesus Christ (PBUH) in monotheistic traditions, he stated that Jesus Christ (PBUH) is an inspiring figure and messenger of peace, love, human dignity and spirituality in the system of divine religions, and his message is a historical and supra-religious call to kindness, peaceful coexistence, dialogue and mutual respect among the humans.

Emphasizing the global dimensions of the Christian message, he added: "This message is not limited to one religion or

geography, but rather reminds us of the common responsibility of humanity in protecting human dignity, strengthening morality, and strengthening the human foundations of the global community; a responsibility that has gained double importance in today's challenging world."

In another part of his message, he referred to Iran's civilizational background and said that throughout the history, Iranian civilization and culture, relying on wisdom, spirituality, and tolerance, have displayed a clear and lasting example of the coexistence of religions and respect for cultural and belief diversity, and have left a precious legacy of tolerance, dialogue, and empathy for today's and tomorrow's generations.

Salehi-Amiri noted that the

Cultural Heritage Ministry considers preservation of the spiritual and cultural heritage arising from the coexistence of religions to be a national and historical duty and emphasizes strengthening cultural ties, dialogue between religions, and strengthening social solidarity in Iran's plural and multicultural society, because cultural heritage is the common language of nations and a sustainable platform for peace and understanding among people.

In the end, he expressed his hope that in light of teachings of the divine prophets, especially Jesus Christ (PBUH), may the coming year be filled with peace, justice, tranquility, and friendship, and may the today's world take more steps toward empathy, rationality, and a more humane future.

## CCTV journalist highlights Khuzestan's cultural heritage

TEHRAN – A Chinese journalist has said Iran's southwestern province of Khuzestan has strong appeal for international audiences, citing its rich cultural heritage and diversity.

Li Jiannan, a correspondent with China Central Television (CCTV), made the remarks on Thursday during his first visit to Khuzestan, describing the province as a destination that challenges common perceptions about Iran.

The remarks came ahead of the province's hosting of the 4th International Multimedia Festival of Cultural Heritage, aimed at promoting Iran's historical and cultural assets.

"I had traveled to many provinces and cities in Iran before, but Khuzestan was unknown to me," Li said in an interview. "I had thought the province was mainly associated with oil, but after visiting Abadan, Khorramshahr and Ahvaz, I was completely surprised. The cultural heritage here is very different from other regions, and that difference is exciting."

Li said he plans to visit several historical sites during his stay, including Dezful and Shushtar, and expressed interest in returning to explore more of the province. "In this short time, I want to see as many historical sites as possible. If I have the opportunity, I will definitely come back," he said.

The Chinese journalist was visiting Khuzestan days before the fourth International Multimedia Cultural Heritage Festival. He described the province's ethnic and cultural diversity as one of its



most striking features.

"Each part of Khuzestan has its own identity, culture and traditions," Li said. "From music and local dances to the hospitality of the people, every city feels different. In Abadan, Ahvaz and Khorramshahr, the urban atmosphere and the banks of the Karun River create a special feeling, while in Shush, history feels alive."

Li said he had not been familiar with the festival before his visit but described it as an effective platform for introducing Iran's cultural and historical assets to international audiences. "If I am invited again in the coming years, I will definitely attend and encourage my colleagues to join me," he said. "This festival can play an important role in presenting Khuzestan's cultural potential to the world."

Speaking about his planned coverage for Chinese audiences, Li said he would focus on key heri-

## Iran to hold international tourism content festival

TEHRAN - Iran will hold the International Tourism Content Festival (ITCF) in February, 2026, aiming to promote the country's cultural and historical capacities through creative digital storytelling, organizers said.

The festival, designed by Yazd Islamic Azad University in cooperation with the Marketing and Foreign Tourism Development Office of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, will coincide with the Tehran International Tourism Exhibition. The winners will be announced on Feb. 14, 2026.

According to organizers, the event seeks to encourage artists, content creators, filmmakers and

tourism enthusiasts to produce and share creative works that present Iran's cultural, historical and natural diversity to international audiences.

Submitted works must be bilingual video content tailored for international viewers and developed under the theme of "Iran, the land of authentic experiences."

The announced content themes include history, culture, reasons to travel to Iran, Iranian cuisine, nature, customs and traditions, and religious and spiritual tourism.

Organizers said the content must not include commercial advertising or brand promotion. Ownership of submitted works will remain with the

producers, while the festival secretariat will hold usage rights with proper attribution.

Awards will be given to the top three entries in each of three-time categories, under one minute, one to three minutes, and three to 10 minutes, for a total of nine winners. An additional award will be presented based on public choice.

Entries that receive public attention after publication will be reviewed by a professional jury of media and tourism experts to select the final winners.

The award ceremony will be held on Feb. 14, 2026, alongside the 19th Tehran International Tourism Exhibition, according to organizers



# Smart e-health using AI aims to transform healthcare system

From page 1 ► The official made the remarks while addressing an event on the smart e-health system, titled 'AI in the health sector'.

The official underlined the importance of utilizing AI to increase the speed, precision, and quality of health services, saying that AI can ease the lack of human resources in the health sector, lower diagnostic and treatment errors, and contribute to efficient use of big data.

He elaborated on a wide range of AI applications in the field of health, such as predicting pandemic outbreaks, preventing health problems using AI wearables, and offering personalized care as personal smart assistants.

Highlighting the wide use of AI in diagnosis and treatment, the official said that in pathology and radiology, AI has sped up and enhanced the accuracy of diagnosis. Also, in the future, AI will personalize treatment plans based on the individual characteristics of patients.

Jafarian also highlighted the potential of AI in improving public health, such as raising public health awareness using self-



care AI applications, launching a health observatory to predict disease outbreaks using AI-powered systems, designing a smart referral system, developing smart hospitals, and an efficient insurance system.

## Smart healthcare system crucial

In August, Health Minister Mohammad-Reza Zafarqandi emphasized the importance of artificial intelligence (AI), telemedicine, and mobile health in managing non-communicable diseases (NCDs).

Developing a smart healthcare

system and increasing public awareness through preventive education and the promotion of health literacy are the key points in the future of the healthcare system, IRNA quoted Zafarqandi as saying. The adoption of modern technologies is unavoidable, so these tools can be employed to reduce costs and facilitate access to services, he added.

The official made the remarks while addressing the first session of the national committee for the prevention and control of NCD.

People's health is not limited to medical treatment; health

literacy and education play a significant role in improving the health of the society, as well, he noted.

Highlighting the importance of education and self-care, Zafarqandi said that raising public awareness of the primary symptoms of diseases will lead to early detection, which in turn will lower treatment costs and improve the success rate.

The official also stressed the need for the development of national, operational programs that are implementable in each province, as well as holding workshops for the implementation of screening programs for hypertension, diabetes, and blood lipids.

NCDs in Iran account for 82 percent of all deaths. Over the past 20 years, deaths caused by NCDs have risen by 14.5 percent.

Cancers, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, chronic respiratory diseases, and mental health diseases are the five main categories of NCDs.

Early screening of non-communicable diseases and control of risk factors are the two ways to deal with the diseases.

## Iran launches first biometric system check for Afghan refugees

TEHRAN – Iran has implemented the first biometric system check for identity verification of foreign nationals, especially Afghan refugees, at the Dogharon border terminal in the city of Taibad, northeastern Khorasan Razavi province.

The system will play a key role in organizing the entry and exit of the Afghan migrants at the Dogharon border, which is the primary entry point for Afghan nationals traveling to Iran, IRNA quoted Amirollah Shamsqadari, an official with the provincial law enforcement department, as saying.

The system will soon be launched at the country's other border terminals to monitor the entrance and exit of all foreign nationals, the official added.

Biometric tests, such as scanning fingerprints, iris, and taking facial images of citizens, are collected and registered so that when a foreign national is deported, they cannot re-enter the country.

In the first nine months of 2025, more than 1.7 million Afghan refugees returned from Iran to Afghanistan, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported in a press release on October 27.

Returns to Afghanistan continue at Dogharon: During the reporting week, nearly 120 bus-

es carrying an estimated 4,700 returnees crossed the border, alongside 18 voluntary returns under the Voluntary Repatriation (VolRep) program.

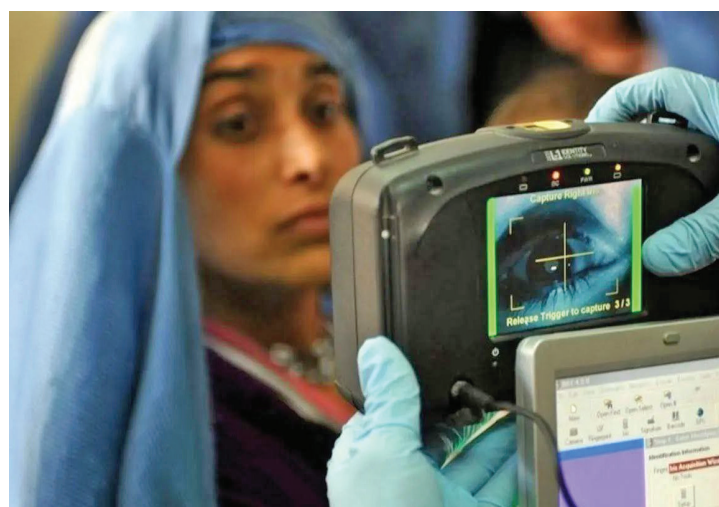
Following the headcount slip expiry on 20 March 2025, the Government of Iran launched a regularization/return scheme for the two million affected Afghans. Slip holders must undergo government assessments to determine whether they are allowed to remain.

Daily returns rose sharply in mid-June, with July 4 registering over 39,400 returns in a single day. Since then, the trend has declined.

Between October 19 to 25, the average daily returns were 2,800, representing a four percent decrease compared to the 2,900 in the previous week. Nevertheless, the current level remains above the first quarter of 2025, when the daily average was approximately 2,300.

As of 25 October, over 1.5 million Afghans returned from Iran since March 20, and over 1.7 million since the beginning of the year, bringing the total returns from both Iran and Pakistan in 2025 to some 2.3 million.

UNHCR reiterates concern that many Afghans —regardless of status—face serious protection risks in Afghanistan due to the current human rights situation,



especially women and girls.

## Global investment essential for sustainable return of refugees

Iran's UN envoy to Geneva, Ali Bahreini, has called for the international community's investment in infrastructure, employment, education, and other services to improve conditions in Afghanistan for the sustainable return of refugees to their home countries.

Addressing the 116th Session of the Council of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) on Wednesday, the official said, "Forced displacement has increased due to conflicts and increasing global instability."

However, "the severe pressure on host communities and

the lack of international aid have made it impossible for this situation to continue indefinitely," Bahreini made the remarks in reference to Iran's generous hosting of millions of Afghan citizens for more than four decades, despite unlawful sanctions, IRNA reported.

Highlighting that "Iran reserves its sovereign right to return unauthorized nationals," the representative also urged senior IOM officials to pay a visit to Iran's border areas to get firsthand information and find real common solutions.

The latest global migration developments, as well as policies and cooperation for effective management of international migration, were discussed in the IOM meeting.

## 12 countries attend Intl. Conference on Signal Processing, Intelligent Systems



TEHRAN – Researchers from Iran and 12 foreign countries, namely Spain, Italy, Iceland, Australia, Mexico, China, India, England, Algeria, Denmark, Turkey, and Azerbaijan, participated in the 11th International Conference on Signal Processing and Intelligent Systems (ICSPIS 2025).

Hosted by Mazandaran University of Science and Technology, the event took place on December 24 and 25, both in-person and online.

It involved educational workshops and specialized meetings. Out of 239 submitted articles, 125 were accepted to be presented, 90 percent of which were in English, IRNA reported.

The conference focused on the latest innovations and challenges in emerging fields, including artificial intelligence (AI), deep learning, and advanced signal processing applications, providing a valuable opportunity for domestic and international experts to share knowledge, exchange scientific findings, and foster collaborations.

The conference was divided into three tracks. The first included Signal Processing, Medical Image Processing, Audio and Speech Processing, Image and Video Processing, and Remote Sensing.

The second track focused on Pattern Recognition, Machine Learning, Data Mining, Robotics, and Soft Computing.

The third one was centered around Smart Computer Networks, Smart Grids, Internet of Things, and Industrial Automation.

## Iran advances in AI scientific research index

According to Nature Index, the country's ranking in scientific production in Artificial Intelligence (AI) has improved from 33 to 30, placing the country among the top 50 leaders, Hossein Afshin, the head of the vice-presidency for science and technology, has said.

Iran's ranking in the region fluctuates be-

tween 14 to 17, which is mainly due to focusing on quality, he said, adding, "We're optimistic to improve the country's scientific position within the next two years," IRNA reported.

The official went on to say that the country is following up on developing AI infrastructure, including the AI platform and the AI assistant, in the near future.

According to the latest report by Oxford Insights index, which measures government readiness for implementing AI in public services, Iran ranks 91st among 188 countries, moving up three positions compared to 94th in 2023.

AI has a key role to play –not just in governing the technology, but in helping governments perform better.

The Government AI Readiness Index has become a trusted resource for policymakers, adopted as an official benchmark by national governments.

In this year's edition, the AI readiness of 188 countries is examined at a time of growing complexity, where governments face evolving citizen needs and challenges like economic uncertainty, climate risks, and rising inequalities.

The 2024 index examines 40 indicators across three pillars: Government, Technology Sector, and Data & Infrastructure. It highlights progress, identifies gaps, and provides actionable insights for policymakers working to integrate AI into public service delivery.

At its core, the index asks, 'How ready are governments to implement AI in the delivery of public services?' By answering this question, it aims to offer a practical tool that supports evidence-based decision-making and helps policymakers unlock AI's potential to serve citizens better worldwide.

Accordingly, the country's best ranking is in the Data and Infrastructure pillar, 66.29, which has improved compared to 55.88 last year. It includes infrastructure (70), data availability (43), and data representativeness (121) indicators.

## Workshop held to reduce motorcycle-related deaths, injuries

TEHRAN – The National Road Safety Commission (NRSC), in cooperation with the World Health Organization (WHO) Country Office in Iran, has organized a high-level consultation workshop on motorcycle safety and helmet standards, under the United Nations Road Safety Fund (UNRSF) 2024 workplan in Tehran.

The workshop was held on November 19 at the Iranian National Museum of Medical Sciences History.

The event convened representatives from government authorities, technical institutions, and civil society to drive a unified approach to reducing motorcycle-related deaths and injuries, the WHO website announced in a press release on December 24.

Although certified helmets are available in the Islamic Republic of Iran, affordability constraints, counterfeit products, and the scarcity of child-appropriate helmets undermine safe and consistent helmet use. Congested urban environments, limited training, and inconsistent compliance with traffic rules compound the problems, and fragmented data across police, health, and transport systems further limit effective enforcement and strategic decision-making.

Motorcyclists constitute a significant proportion of the fatalities, estimated to be around 40 percent on urban roads and approximately 20 percent on inter-city roads. Surveys show that in the first six months of the year 2025, approximately 48 percent of traffic accident victims in Tehran city were motorcyclists.

The workshop allowed stakeholders to review existing gaps, compare national practices with international best practices and evidence, and explore options for strengthening helmet standards, upgrading enforcement mechanisms, and aligning regulations with internationally recognized frameworks such as UN Regulation No. 22.

Through interactive discussions, participants mapped behavioural, economic, regulatory, and institutional challenges. Discussions highlighted the need for coordinated multisectoral action bringing together the NRSC, Traffic Police, the Ministry of Health and Medical Education, Institute of Standards and Industrial Research of Iran (ISIRI), municipal authorities, academia, civil society, and private-sector partners to advance motorcycle safety at scale.

The consultation concluded with a set of actionable next steps, including strengthening helmet legislation, upgrading national standards, enhancing data systems, expanding public awareness initiatives, and reinforcing market surveillance and enforcement capacity, which together will enhance road safety and protect millions of motorcycle users across Iran.

In the first eight months of the current Iranian year (started on March 21), the death toll among motorcyclists in Tehran has increased by 50 percent, compared to the same period last year, ISNA reported.

According to the latest statistics, 46 percent of motorcycle rider fatalities were in the 18-to-35 age group, the majority of whom were not wearing a safety helmet.

## ENGLISH IN USE

### LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

## Philanthropists support 28,000 orphans, deprived children

Iranian benefactors have made cash and kind contributions from the beginning of the holy month of Ramadan (starting on May 6) to help 28,000 children who are either orphaned or whose parents are financially struggling, deputy director of Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation has announced.

There are currently 600,000 philanthropists who support orphaned children as well as children living in families in financial distress, IRNA quoted Alireza Asgarian as saying on Wednesday.

The foundation also intends to build housing units for families who cannot afford to rent houses, he added.

## مردم ۲۸ هزار کودک بی سرپرست را تحت حمایت قرار دادند

معاون توسعه مشارکت‌های مردمی کمیته امداد امام خمینی (ره) گفت: خیرین و نیکوکاران کشور از ابتدای ماه مبارک رمضان تاکنون ۲۸ هزار کودک بی‌سرپرست را تحت حمایت‌های مالی و غیرمالی خود قرار دادند. علیرضا عسگریان روز چهارشنبه در گفت و گو با خبرنگار اجتماعی ایرنا افزود: ۶۰۰ هزار حامی در سطح کشور در یاری‌رسانی به ایتم و فرزندان محسنین با کمیته امداد همکاری دارند.

عسگریان اظهار داشت: ساخت مسکن برای خانواده‌های تحت پوشش کمیته امداد از دیگر برنامه‌های اجرایی و دارای اولویت کاری این نهاد در سال جاری است.



