



US Plan: ‘Make Iran Texas Again’

Senator Cruz wants to bring Texas-style weaponization to Iran, openly stating that Washington must arm terrorists

The photo shows an armed rioter shooting at peaceful protesters in the city of Lordegan, Chaharmahal-Bakhtiari province.

Collective efforts needed to counter US unchecked power: Sharif University

TEHRAN – Sharif University of Technology has issued a statement signed by 103 faculty members warning against the global threats of the unchecked power of the United States and the need for a collective responsibility to counter them.

We, faculty members of Sharif University of Technology, believe the current trajectory of the United States' foreign policy has crossed beyond the bounds of international law. These policies are not merely a challenge to the security of Iran as an independent state; they represent a profound threat to international peace and the global order.

The United States has opened new horizons for state-sponsored violence through the assassination of scientists, the abduction of officials, and the legitimization of aggression against civilian populations. This school of thought, in its own omnipotence, has led the American leadership to dismantle international institutions and norms, resulting in the death of countless innocent people worldwide. From the ruins of Gaza and Yemen to the besieged sovereignty of Venezuela and Libya, the imprint of this destructive doctrine is undeniable.

The West's double standards on police violence

By Fatemeh Kavand

TEHRAN- In the West, police pursue opposition figures all the way to hospital beds and call it “law enforcement.” In Iran, police restraint is labeled a “bloody crackdown.” This deliberate double standard is not a media mistake; it is the organized censorship of truth and a core component of the narrative war against Iran.

In recent days, amid scattered anti-Iran gatherings across Europe, British local media reported that police entered hospitals to arrest individuals linked to disturbances of public order—people who were neither armed nor directly attacking police forces, but were detained solely for causing security disruptions. This news, however, was quickly erased from the memory of Persian-language hostile media outlets.

While such incidents are treated as routine law enforcement actions in the West, placing them alongside the exaggerated portrayals of Iran's police responses exposes a clear and calculated double standard.

From ICE to Iran: Power without symmetry

By Xavier Villar

MADRID – Thomas Friedman's recent column in The New York Times, in which he equated the United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) with Hamas, falls into an analytical simplification that ultimately obscures more than it clarifies. The problem lies not merely in a factual imprecision or an error of scale, but in a deeper conceptual confusion regarding the nature of sovereign power, the legitimate use of violence, and its insertion into the contemporary political order. From a historical and structural perspective, the relevant analogy is not between ICE and a Palestinian resistance organization, but between ICE and the classical state apparatuses of settler colonialism, particularly those designed for the coercive management of populations deemed problematic or surplus.

This distinction is not a minor terminological dispute. On the contrary, it allows us to properly situate the genealogy of what has been described as necropolitics: the institutionalized capacity to decide which lives deserve protection, which may be exposed to extreme precarity,

► Page 2-3

Diplomacy and threats are incompatible, Iran tells US

TEHRAN – Talking to reporters after a cabinet meeting on Wednesday, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said diplomacy will fail to prove “effective” or “produce results” through military threats.

The comments by the foreign minister followed as the U.S. is reinforcing its military buildup near Iran. In addition, President Donald Trump has made a series of incendiary remarks against Iran.

Araghchi said, “If they want negotiations, they must surely set aside exorbitant and illogical demands.”

Araghchi also dismissed reports of contacts between him and U.S. envoy Steve Witkoff in recent days. He also said Tehran has not made any proposals for negotiations with the United States. ► Page 2

Iran's Larijani, Qatar PM share views on regional developments

TEHRAN – Qatar's prime minister on Wednesday telephoned Ali Larijani, secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, to share views about the latest developments in the region.

The telephone call by Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani came as tensions between Iran and the United States have entered a new stage, raising alarms in the region.

The Qatari prime minister and Larijani discussed ways to find “diplomatic solutions” for the pressing issues, an indirect reference to the boiling tension between Iran and the U.S. ► Page 2

Health Insurance Organization covers over 130 rare, hard-to-treat diseases

TEHRAN – Over three million patients identified with more than 130 rare and hard-to-treat diseases are covered by Salamat Health Insurance Organization.

A rare disease is often described as a specific health condition affecting 1 in 2000 individuals or fewer in the general population. Over 7000 known rare diseases currently impact more than 300 million people globally, with 70 percent of these conditions starting in childhood.

Salamat Health Insurance Organization, in cooperation with the Ministry of Health, established the Rare Disease Foundation in the Iranian year 1401 (March 2022 to March 2023). Back then, nine rare and hard-to-treat diseases were identified. The foundation covers rare and hard-to-treat diseases to promote health equity and support patients financially, IRNA quoted Mohammad-Esmael Kameli, an official with the health insurance organization, as saying. ► Page 7

Maritime transport key to trade security: transport minister

TEHRAN – Iran's Minister of Transport and Urban Development Farzaneh Sadegh said maritime transport plays a pivotal role in trade security, cost reduction and sustainable access to global markets, describing the Persian Gulf as central to the country's macro-level planning.

Speaking at the sixth International Persian Gulf Oceanography Conference on Tuesday during a visit to the southern port city of Bandar Abbas, Sadegh said the Persian Gulf holds strategic importance not only for Iran but also for the wider region and the international system, where geography, economics and security intersect.

She said a significant share of Iran's long-term planning across sectors depends on the Persian Gulf, adding that its smart management requires a forward-looking approach to sustainable development, environmental protection and efficient use of natural resources, alongside closer alignment between science, technology and strategic policymaking. ► Page 4

Siraf historic port dossier submitted to UNESCO for World Heritage review

TEHRAN – Iran has formally submitted the nomination dossier for the historic port of Siraf to UNESCO for review and possible inscription on the World Heritage list, the deputy minister for cultural heritage said on Wednesday.

Ali Darabi said the dossier was officially sent to UNESCO following approval by national expert bodies, adding that Siraf was selected for nomination due to its historical role as one of Iran's most important commercial ports from the Sassanid period onward and its position in connecting the ancient country to the Indian Ocean and open seas.

“Siraf played a central role in international trade networks of the ancient world and symbolized Iran's economic power, seafaring capability and cross-regional interactions,” he said. ► Page 6



Parliament speaker shares video with CNN showing terror acts against Iranian citizens

TEHRAN – In an hour-long interview with CNN correspondent Fred Pleitgen, Parliament speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf shared a video with the CNN viewer showing the violence by armed groups and terrorists against Iranian citizens during the recent protests in Iran.

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

TEHRAN PAPERS

The extensive US military buildup around Iran

Hamshahri discussed the extensive U.S. military buildup around Iran. According to the newspaper, relations between Iran and the U.S. are at one of their most sensitive and tense points in recent years. The extensive U.S. military deployment around Iran, from aircraft carriers and fighter jets to defense systems, is arranged in a way that makes this threat appear completely real and operational from a military perspective. In line with the media and psychological game that Donald Trump has launched around Iran, he has claimed that Iran has repeatedly called for negotiations and is looking for a deal. While the U.S. is unprecedentedly tightening its military buildup around Iran and is making threats, Trump claims it is open to diplomacy. But the White House's refusal to start meaningful negotiations with Iran based on a win-win formula indicates a fragile and risky situation. Now, the tensions between Iran and the U.S. have entered a delicate situation, where any miscalculation could lead to direct military confrontation.

Ettelaat: War must be prevented

International affairs analyst Fereydoon Majlesi spoke to Ettelaat in response to new tensions in the region and Trump's strange and contradictory statements regarding Iran. According to the analyst, Trump has been thinking about confronting Iran since the day he was elected as the president of the United States for the second time. In fact, confronting Iran is a vital issue for Trump on the world stage. The United States pursued this goal by supporting street demonstrations so that it could enter into a military conflict with us. Therefore, now that the wave of protests has subsided, the authorities must behave in a reformist manner when facing the people and tell them that we are trying to resolve the problems. In any case, the people's support for the authorities will keep the country away from a possible war. The fact that negotiations between Iran and the United States have become difficult is not a reason to beat the drum of war. It is necessary to use all the potential of diplomacy in the service of striving for peace while respecting national interests.

Shargh: The situation is different this time

Shargh commented on the tense situation in the country and wrote: The intersection of domestic crises with foreign policy headaches has created a

situation in Iran that no other country has faced in recent decades. The deployment of American aircraft carriers, destroyers, and fighter jets in Iran's peripheral regions is not a new issue, but this time it is taking place in a situation in which Iran has emerged from a difficult period of protests and the country has been the target of widespread criticism from a wide range of political, media, and civil movements at the international level. Naturally, in such a situation, someone like Trump's hand is more open than ever to act adventurously. Even if military action is not taken against Iran, the United States and Israel, with the participation of Europe, will keep the shadow of military threat over Iran, and through this, the Iranian economy and society will remain under continuous pressure; pressure that could be a major obstacle to normalizing affairs domestically, including removing the internet blackout, which is an addition to previous bottlenecks and a new obstacle to resolving livelihood problems.

Iran: Active and intelligent diplomacy

The Iran newspaper said it is a sign of wisdom and tact to seek short-term and medium-term solutions to the current crisis the country is facing. The paper argues that Iran must put active and intelligent diplomacy on its agenda to immediately manage tension (with the United States), move towards desirable domestic governance centered on social capital, listen to the opposition's discourse, and counter hopelessness and disillusionment. Iran today is on the brink of multifaceted crises. Its salvation requires moving beyond the logic of elimination and conflict to the logic of cohesion and interaction. History has taught us that Iranian civilization has remained stable in the most difficult circumstances, relying on collective wisdom and unity centered on national interests. The present era is the time to return to that wisdom and unity. Iran's future will not be shaped by domestic actors who follow aggressive approaches nor by foreign actors from the West and the East, but by sticking to rationality and relying on its people with all their diversity to build a common homeland based on dignity, expediency, and wisdom. On the other hand, Iran must, by preserving its dignity, expediency, and wisdom.

Turkish FM to US: Resolve issues with Iran one by one

TEHRAN – Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan on Wednesday called on the United States to resolve its problems with Iran one by one.

“My advice always to the American friends, close the files one by one with Iran. Start with nuclear, close it, then the others,” Fidan told Al Jazeera.

“If you put them as a package, all of them, it will be very difficult for our Iranian friends to digest and to really process it and to go through this,” he added.

The comments by Fidan come as the U.S. is amassing military assets in the Middle East amid a spike in tensions with Iran.

Fidan said Iran can fit in a “perfect place” in the regional order.

Fidan warned that a United States attack on Iran would be “wrong,” calling on Washington and Tehran to resolve their issues diplomatically and gradually.

Calling for regional cooperation, Fidan said, “It's wrong to start the war again.”

Iran's Larijani, Qatar PM share views on regional developments

From page 1 ► Dancing to the tune of the Zionists, the United States' Donald Trump has taken a much more aggressive approach toward Iran in his second term as president. In his first term, Trump pulled out of the 2015 nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), returned sanctions, and introduced a “maximum pressure” policy against Iran. This took place despite the fact that the JCPOA had been endorsed by UN Security Council resolution 2231.

In June 2025, Trump joined Israel, which initiated an unprovoked and surprise attack on Iran. The U.S. bombarded three Iranian nuclear sites, using B-2 bombers.

In his new remarks posted on Truth Social, Trump wrote the U.S. is seeking “A DEAL” with Iran. Howev-

er, the U.S. is deploying the aircraft carrier Abraham Lincoln, destroyers, and other military assets to the region. In his post, Trump said, “A massive Armada is heading to Iran. It is moving quickly, with great power, enthusiasm, and purpose.”

Officials in Tehran have threatened that if the U.S. resorts to military action against Iran, they will regret their action.

Talking to reporters after a cabinet meeting on Wednesday, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said diplomacy will fail to prove “effective” or “produce results” through military threats.

Araghchi said, “If they want negotiations, they must surely set aside exorbitant and illogical demands.”

Diplomacy and threats are incompatible, Iran tells US

From page 1 ► The chief diplomat said Iran is in contact with different countries that are seeking to “play a role with goodwill,” but “no decision has been taken yet, and there has been no request from our side.”

U.S. President Donald Trump has been repeatedly calling for a deal with Iran on its nuclear program. Iran has not rejected dialogue, but it has insisted that its inalienable rights for a peaceful nuclear program must be respected.

“Dialogue must be on an equal footing, with mutual respect and mutual benefit. If one side seeks to achieve its goals through bullying, that will not be acceptable and cannot be called diplomacy,” Araghchi stated.

On a question that many countries are willing to mediate between Iran and the U.S., Araghchi said, “Our position is clear. Dialogue is not in tandem with threat. And dialogue should take place in a situation far from threats and exorbitant demands.”

Arab countries on the shores of the Persian Gulf have announced that they will not allow the U.S. to



use their airspace or their soil for a possible attack on Iran.

In a telephone conversation with Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian on Tuesday afternoon, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman declared his country's opposition to external threats against the Islamic Republic. The crown prince also asserted that Saudi Arabia “will not tolerate any aggression, threat, or provocation of tension against Iran.”

In his Wednesday remarks, Araghchi told reporters that the ambassadors of regional Arab countries are in contact with

Iran's Foreign Ministry, and he himself is in contact with these countries' foreign ministers.

For example, he said, he talked to Qatar's foreign minister on Tuesday night.

The entire region is against military threats

Iran's chief diplomat went on to say that, in his view, regional countries unanimously believe that a military confrontation will “destabilize the entire region”.

Araghchi went on to say, “The entire region is against military threat, and all believe that instability will cause major challenges

for the region.”

Tehran and Riyadh warn of “dangerous consequences”

In a phone call on Wednesday, Foreign Minister Araghchi and his Saudi counterpart Faisal bin Farhan also warned of the “dangerous consequences” of any escalation in tensions for security and stability in the Middle East.

The two ministers warned of “dangerous consequences of any escalation of tensions in the region on regional peace and stability,” Press TV reported.

They also said all regional countries have a shared responsibility to maintain stability and security in the region

Araghchi also held a separate phone call with Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan on Wednesday.

TRT news agency cited a source within the Turkish Foreign Ministry as saying that the ministers discussed efforts aimed at reducing tensions in the wake of the latest developments.

Fidan has warned the U.S. against launching a military attack on Iran, calling such a move “wrong.”

Collective efforts needed to counter US unchecked power: Sharif University

‘Overt military intimidation and economic strangulation designed to incite internal fragmentation entail global attention’

From page 1 ► U.S. imperial aggression.

We recognize a universal human responsibility. We must all—irrespective of our differing political beliefs—work to inform the global publics about the catastrophic consequences of these malicious policies. We must unequivocally condemn this pattern of intervention and violence.

As scholars and citizens of one of the world's oldest civilizations, we call for the mobilization of all national, regional, and international capacities to resist complicity with these inhumane policies. We must unite to prevent the world from descending fur-



ther into a state where might makes right and where powerful actors are free to act without law or limits.

Our stance is one of the principles in defense of human dignity and a just world order. We stand in solidarity with all peoples who are threatened by the lashes of unrestrained power and violence, conscious that in our own homeland, Iran, the time for vigilance and collective action is now.

Signed,

A group of concerned faculty members Sharif University of Technology Tehran, Iran

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

If Iran attacked, it would unleash a conflict that would be impossible to control: senior analyst

TEHRAN - In an analysis on January 27, a Princeton University researcher argues that if Iran is attacked by the United States and Israel, the Islamic Republic will consider it as an “existential threat” and would unleash a conflict that would not be possible to control.

The comments by Seyyed Hussein Mousavian come as the U.S. is tightening its military buildup near Iran.

He says a possible attack would be quite different from the 12-day war in June 2025, in which Israel attacked Iran, and later the U.S. joined the Tel Aviv regime.

“For Iran, a next U.S.–Israeli attack

would be an “existential war,” elimin-

inating any incentive for restraint and unleashing a conflict that would be impossible to control,” Mousavian, the former chief of Iran's National Security and Foreign Relations Committee, wrote in Middle East Eye.

The text of the article titled “For Iran, another U.S.–Israeli attack would be an ‘existential war’” is as follows:

Iran is facing a crisis unlike any it has seen in decades. Between domestic unrest, economic instability, and heightened tensions with the U.S. and Israel, Tehran is navigating a perilous landscape with profound regional and global impli-

cations.

The United States has carried out a major military build-up around Iran, deploying additional naval forces, aircraft, and support assets amid escalating tensions. As one of the most significant U.S. military concentrations near Iran in decades, the move is widely viewed as preparation for a potential confrontation and has drawn sharp warnings from Tehran.

In the first year of his second term, U.S. President Donald Trump has pursued a regime-change strategy in Iran.

Last June, Israel launched a dra-

From page 1 ► Legitimate violence—when it is Western

In the United States, police not only have the right to use lethal force, but dozens of people are killed every year during direct encounters with law enforcement—figures repeatedly confirmed by independent human rights organizations. Yet in Western media narratives, this level of violence is framed as “the enforcement of the law.”

In Europe as well, harsh police responses to protest gatherings are widely accepted. Chasing protesters into hospitals, making immediate arrests, and imposing severe restrictions are not concealed; they are presented as signs of state authority. The law in these countries is uncompromising, even when protesters are unarmed.

Iran's police without the right to shoot

By contrast, Iran's police operate under a strict set of legal and operational constraints that limit the use of firearms to extremely exceptional circumstances. The level of violent confrontation by police in Iran is significantly lower than in many Western countries, yet this reality never becomes a headline in

hostile media coverage.

Within the dominant anti-Iran narrative, any law enforcement action is instantly labeled a “bloody suppression,” even when no weapons are used and police officers themselves are victims of violence. Facts are irrelevant here; what matters is constructing a dark image for media consumption.

A two-faced opposition and the logic of cost

What is particularly revealing is that these same anti-Iran groups fully understand the “logic of cost” when operating abroad. Monarchists and other regime-change advocates know exactly what confronting Western police entails—from immediate arrest to criminal records and long-term legal consequences.

Yet when it comes to Iran, they freely encourage violence against police and even the killing of security forces on social media. Why? Because they are confident that Western media arms will not condemn such violence against Iran's police, but instead portray it as “justified” or even “heroic.”

The narrative war and the destabilization project

What lies behind this media environment is not merely political disagreement, but a clear and deliberate destabilization project. In this framework, the institution responsible for public security must be transformed into the enemy of the people, while street violence is given a moral façade.

When a country like Iran becomes the target of psychological operations, even terrorist attacks are justified within the same narrative logic—as if insecurity itself were a legitimate tool of political pressure. This is the point where media ceases to inform and becomes a weapon.

The reality is simple: the law is strict everywhere, but narratives are shaped according to power. Western police, despite their overt violence, are portrayed as symbols of order, while Iran's police, despite restraint, are depicted as instruments of repression. This contradiction does not stem from differences in law, but from a war of narratives—a war in which truth is the first casualty.

US plan: ‘Make Iran Texas again’

Senator Cruz wants to bring Texas-style weaponization to Iran, openly stating that Washington must arm terrorists

By Soheila Zarfam

TEHRAN – Ted Cruz, the U.S. senator from Texas, has a reputation for rhetoric that often outpaces his grasp of its consequences. He was a central figure whose remarks fuelled the 2021 attack on the U.S. Capitol, and he remains infamous among his constituents for fleeing to Cancun during a deadly winter storm that crippled the state's power grid. On the world stage, he is a reliable advocate for American military intervention, from West Asia to South America.

But his recent call for Washington to arm insurgents to destabilize Iran—ostensibly to make America “safer”—represents a new level of recklessness, even for a senator whose words are often dismissed as political theatre.

At a moment when global diplomatic efforts were focused on de-escalating tensions between Tehran and Washington to avert a regional war, Cruz took to X. He declared that America must be “arming protesters in Iran,” concluding that such a move would make the United States a “much, much, safer” country.

The “protesters” Cruz seeks to arm bear little resemblance to those who initially took to the streets. What began in late December as legitimate demonstrations against inflation—a persistent issue since the Trump administration's “maximum pressure” campaign began in 2018—were quickly overtaken by coordinated, armed violence. Between January 8 and January 14, the situation fundamentally changed, descending from protest into what official Iranian assessments describe as a full-blown insurrection across multiple cities.

The scale of the destruction shows a violent, organized campaign. The unrest involved the widespread use of firearms, including pistols, Kalashnikov rifles, Israeli-made Uzi submachine guns, and sniper rifles. Assaults also wielded cold weapons such as knives, machetes, and axes, and deployed explosives ranging from Molotov cocktails to military-grade grenades. Rioters targeted military and police facilities as



US Senator Ted Cruz has cultivated a reputation for inflammatory rhetoric and proposals that critics argue are divorced from realities

well as public and private property. In Tehran alone, the damages were estimated at 3 trillion toman, with a tally that included over 700 shops, 750 banks, 414 government buildings, hundreds of police and Basij centres, and dozens of mosques, schools, and metro stations.

The human toll was equally staggering. Official reports state that 2,427 people, including civilians and security personnel, were killed by armed groups during the unrest. Victims included children as young as two, shot in public spaces or inside family vehicles. The violence was often extreme, with numerous documented cases of security personnel being stabbed, set on fire, and mutilated—methods reminiscent of tactics employed by extremist terrorist organizations.

Many detainees have admitted to contact with foreign spy services, including Israel's Mossad. These claims followed public statements from several American and Israeli figures. Former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and a Persian-language Mossad account on X had, prior to the violence, both alluded to having “agents” inside Iran. Concurrently, Western-based social media influencers, who had previously supported a U.S.-Israeli war against Iran in June 2025, boasted that many “protesters” were already “armed.”

Analysts in Tehran believe the ri-

ots were engineered to create a pretext for a second war against Iran, weakening the country's military by forcing it to contend with an internal insurgency. The successful neutralization of the riots, they argue, forced the plan for a foreign attack to be scrapped, at least for now. This view is bolstered by unofficial reports suggesting a U.S. strike was planned for January 14, the same day Iran abruptly closed its airspace. Against this backdrop, the Trump administration is now dispatching what the president has called a “big armada” to the Persian Gulf, leaving it unclear whether a direct military strike remains on the table.

Cruz's proposal to continue arming these elements is seen by observers as a clear endorsement of war. Such a strategy seeks two possible outcomes: the violent overthrow of the Iranian government from within, or a softening of the country for an external U.S. attack. Even if the insurgency fails to topple the Islamic Republic, hawkish figures like Cruz—whose campaigns are heavily funded by pro-Israel lobbies such as AIPAC—believe the escalating pressure will ultimately force Iran to capitulate at the negotiating table. The concessions they demand are absolute: the complete dismantling of its nuclear program, severe limits on its missile capabilities, and the severance of its alliances with regional Resistance forces.

Cruz's prescription is also a resuscitation of a bloody, failed playbook from the 1980s. During that decade, the U.S. strategy to topple the nascent Islamic Republic involved empowering insurgent factions to pave the way for foreign aggression—most notably Saddam Hussein's invasion. The primary beneficiary of this support was the Mujahedin-e-Khalq (MEK). Far from bringing democracy, the MEK embarked on a campaign of terror that claimed the lives of over 18,000 Iranians, ranging from high-ranking officials to ordinary citizens.

This aggressive path is precisely what many regional powers have been urging Washington to avoid. Countries including Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the UAE, and Turkey have called for a return to diplomacy to forge a win-win agreement, similar to the 2015 nuclear deal, or JCPOA, which the Trump administration unilaterally abandoned in 2018.

Should a new conflict erupt, the repercussions would extend far beyond Iran and the United States. Tehran has made it clear that it will treat any aggression, no matter how limited, as an all-out war and deploy strategic options it has previously held in reserve. These include closing the Strait of Hormuz, a conduit for nearly \$500 billion in annual trade; targeting U.S. military personnel across the region; and striking strategic assets in any country that facilitates an attack on its territory. Retaliatory strikes against Israel, which many Israelis have acknowledged is unprepared for a sustained missile barrage, would be certain to follow. Furthermore, Iran's allies from Lebanon to Iraq and Yemen have stated in recent days that they would enter any such war.

In advocating for arming these groups, Cruz is not only endorsing acts of terrorism and flagrantly violating international law; he is lobbying for a policy that can only be described as catastrophic. Cruz is not known for his deep strategic thinking, but this latest proposal risks a lesson taught not in the Senate chamber, but on the battlefield: Iran is not Iraq, Syria, or Libya.

10-man Foolad defeat Persepolis: 2025/26 PGPL

TEHRAN — 10-man Foolad pulled off a dramatic 3-1 victory over Persepolis in Match-week 18 of the 2025/26 Iran's Persian Gulf Professional League (PGPL) at the Foolad Arena in Ahvaz on Wednesday.

The hosts took the lead in the 21st minute through Ehsan Mahroughi, who finished calmly to put Foolad ahead. However, the match took a dramatic turn later in the second half when Foolad midfielder Amir-masoud Sarabadani was shown a straight red card for bringing down Persepolis defender Hossein Abarghouei inside the penalty area.

Persepolis capitalized late on the advantage, as Ali Alipour converted from the penalty spot in the 89th minute to level the score and seemingly put the visitors in control heading into stoppage time.

Despite being reduced to 10 men, Foolad stunned Persepolis with a late surge. Farshad Ahmadzadeh restored the hosts' lead in added time, before Yousef Mazraeh sealed the memorable win with a third goal just two minutes later.

Elsewhere in the league, Sepahan were held to a 1-1 draw at home by Gol Gohar. Majid Eydi opened the scoring for the visitors in the 34th minute, while Kaveh Rezaei equalized after the break in the 57th.

Earlier in the day, Mes Rafsanjan and Zob Ahan played out a goalless draw, Fajr Sepasi edged Kheybar 2-1, and Shams Azar claimed a 1-0 away victory over Paykan in Tehran.

At the top of the table, Tractor remain leaders with 32 points, ahead of Esteghlal and Sepahan on goal difference.

Iran beat Malaysia at 2026 AFC Futsal Asian Cup

TEHRAN - Iran's title defense started with a 4-1 win against Malaysia in their AFC Futsal Asian Cup Indonesia 2026 Group D tie on Wednesday.

With the win, Iran joined Afghanistan - who beat Saudi Arabia 3-0 earlier in the day - on maximum points.

Malaysia forced Bagher Mohammadi into making two early saves, both efforts from Awalluddin Nawi but it was Iran who would take the lead inside the opening minute.

A mix-up between goalkeeper Syaifuddin Syukri and Saad Sani saw what was supposed to be an easy gather turned into a simple tap-in for Mohammadhossein Derakhshani.

Mohammadi came to the rescue of Iran again in the fifth minute, coming out of his goalmouth to stop a marauding Firdaus Ambiah who had broken through the last line of defense, the-afc.com reported.

Similarly, Syaifuddin had to work hard to prevent the gap from widening, making a smart reflex swing to tip away Salar Aghapour's rasping drive in the 10th minute and then sticking his leg out in the 18th to clear a volley from the same player before Hossein Tayebi cracked a shot against the post just before the break.

After the interval, Malaysia continued to soak up Iran's pressure with the occasional counter attacks looking dangerous but the reigning champions' efficiency came to the fore in the 25th minute.

Aghapour - from the kick-in - teed up Behrooz Azimi for a precise low strike into the bottom corner which Syaifuddin could do nothing about.

Iran were brimming with confidence now, adding a third a minute later when Tayebi capitalized on a Malaysian mistake to fire home from the edge of the semi-circle.

Moslem Oladghobad added another for Iran in the 28th minute with Malaysia netting a late consolation through Awaluddin.

Persepolis complete signing of Farzin Moamelegari

TEHRAN – Persepolis football club have completed the signing of Shams Azar left-back Farzin Moamelegari.

The 22-year-old defender has joined Persepolis on a 2.5-year deal.

The Reds are strengthening their defensive lineup as they push for the 2025/26 Persian Gulf Professional League (PGPL) title.

Moamelegari previously featured for Iran's U23 national team, making three appearances at the 2026 AFC U23 Asian Cup in Riyadh. Known for his pace and strong tactical awareness, Moamelegari has been on the radar of several top Iranian clubs in recent months.

Persepolis have been active in the January transfer window, already securing the signatures of Uzbek forward Ivan Sergeev and Hungarian winger Dániel Gera.

Currently sitting at the top of the PGPL table, Persepolis continue to reinforce their squad as they aim to reclaim domestic dominance.

Iran learn opponents in 2026 VNL

TEHRAN — The Iranian men's national volleyball team have learned their pool assignments for the 2026 Volleyball Nations League (VNL), following the official announcement by the competition organizers.

Coached by Italian tactician Roberto Piazza, Team Melli will begin their VNL campaign in Brasília, Brazil, where the opening week of the tournament will take place from June 10 to 14. In this pool, Iran will face a challenging lineup that includes hosts Brazil, along with Bulgaria, Serbia, Argentina, and Belgium. According to VNL regulations, each team will compete against four opponents during the week.

Iran's second week of action is scheduled for July 3 to 7 in Orléans, France. In this stage, the Persians will be grouped with reigning Olympic champions France, as well as Japan, the United States, Serbia, and Cuba. The matches in Orléans are expected to be highly competitive, as several of these teams are among the world's top-ranked sides.

Week Three of the preliminary round will run from July 24 to 28 in Belgrade, Serbia. Iran will take on Serbia, Slovenia, Turkey, Germany, and Ukraine as they look to secure enough victories to qualify for the final stage of the tournament.

The 2026 VNL Finals will be held from July 29 to Aug. 2 in Ningbo, China, where the top-performing teams from the preliminary rounds will compete for the championship.

Iran enter the 2026 VNL aiming to build on recent international experience and improve their global standing under Piazza's leadership, as they continue preparations for future major competitions.

Iran finish 12th at the 2026 Asian Handball Championship

TEHRAN — Iran lost to Jordan 10-0 in the 11th-12th place match at the 2026 Asian Handball Championship on Tuesday.

Team Melli withdrew from the match against Jordan due to their several injured players, resulting in a 10-0 defeat.

The 2026 Asian Men's Handball Championship is the 22nd edition of the biennial Asian and Oceania men's handball championship, organized by the Asian Handball Federation (AHF).

The tournament runs from January 15 to January 29 and is being held in Sabah Al-Salem, Kuwait.

Western pressure will not halt Iran's scientific sovereignty, says nuclear chief

TEHRAN – Mohammad Eslami, the head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), has condemned Western attempts to curtail the Islamic Republic's “scientific advancement”, stating that neither sanctions nor political pressure will stop Tehran from mastering nuclear, quantum, and high-tech fields.

Speaking on the sidelines of a cabinet meeting on Wednesday, Eslami dismantled the latest allegations from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), describing them as part of a broader campaign of “obstructionism rather than genuine technical oversight.”

Eslami specifically rejected recent remarks by IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi regarding alleged non-compliance with the Non-Prolifer-

ation Treaty (NPT). The Iranian official reminded the agency that it must operate strictly within the framework of its legal statute, rather than succumbing to political influences. He highlighted the hypocrisy of demanding inspections at facilities that have been victims of sabotage and external military aggression.

“If our sites were targeted, bombed, and destroyed, what exactly do they want to monitor now?” Eslami asked, challenging the IAEA to clarify its protocols for facilities damaged by attacks before making “baseless demands for access.”

The AEOI chief also exposed the glaring double standards inherent in Western policy. He noted that official national security documents from

equivalent military threat, but to administer populations classified as irregular or undesirable within the metropolitan space. Prolonged detention without due process, family separation, accelerated deportation, and the systematic production of legal insecurity constitute ordinary tools of a technology of governance aimed at preserving a particular political and demographic order. This rationality is comparable to that of population-control apparatuses developed in settler-colonial contexts: it does not seek to defeat a symmetrical adversary, but to regulate, fragment, and contain collectives defined a priori as a problem. The separation of children at the southern U.S. border does not represent an exceptional deviation, but the contemporary application of techniques of power long rehearsed in the management of subalternized populations.

The colonial mirror: ICE and the boomerang that never left

From this perspective, it becomes necessary to rigorously question the liberal

the United States explicitly prioritize the development of artificial intelligence, nuclear technology, and quantum science. Eslami argued that the obstacles placed before Iran stem “not from misinterpretation, but from deliberate efforts to hinder technological advancement,” noting that it is the legitimate right of the Iranian nation to pursue these same strategic priorities based on its own national interests.

Eslami also dispelled the Western narrative that attempts to equate nuclear technology solely with weaponry. He underscored the peaceful and humanitarian success of the program. “Iran now exports nuclear-related products to 50 countries for use in healthcare, agriculture, and environmental protection,” Eslami stated.



narrative that interprets these practices as the supposed “return of the imperial boomerang.” According to this reading, coercive methods developed in the colonies would have unexpectedly returned to the metropolitan center, disrupting an internal order previously governed by the rule of law. The implicit premise is that violence was originally external and that its domestic appearance constitutes a historical anomaly.

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

From ICE to Iran: Power without symmetry

From Page 1 ► and under what conditions certain subjects are excluded from effective political membership. Far from being an anomaly returning from colonial peripheries, this logic is part of the foundational fabric of Western modernity and today unfolds with striking coherence in both domestic and international arenas.

By proposing a provocative comparison, Friedman overlooks the fundamental ontological difference between the entities he equates. Hamas operates from a position defined by occupation, siege, and the absence of international recognition. Its political and military room for maneuver is conditioned by a radical asymmetry, and its capacity to exercise authority is permanently contested, limited, and fragmented. ICE, by contrast, is a central agency of a fully sovereign and hegemonic state, endowed with legal authority to exercise coercion within its own territory and backed by a juridical framework that not only legitimizes but normalizes its actions.

ICE's function is not to respond to an

Iran free zones' digital economy roadmap awaits approval, official says

TEHRAN – Iran has finalized a policy document on developing the digital economy in its free trade zones, which is now awaiting final approval, the secretary of Iranian Free Zones High Council said.

Reza Masrour said global free zones are moving toward sixth- and seventh-generation models, with a growing focus on digital economy-based zones and joint free zones, prompting Iran to draft a dedicated roadmap to steer its own zones in that direction.

Speaking to Mehr News Agency, Masrour said strengthening economic diplomacy is a key priority for Iran's free zones, particularly through expanding economic engagement with neighboring countries. Achieving that goal, he said, requires sustained interaction with foreign ambassadors and investors.

He said a recent conference attended by ambassadors from Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries and chief executives of Iran's free zones discussed economic diplomacy, mechanisms to expand cooperation, development of trade corridors and the potential for commodity swap arrangements.

Masrour said follow-up meetings would pursue these issues in greater operational detail, noting that stronger economic diplomacy could directly boost Iran's foreign currency revenues. Similar meetings with other countries are planned, he added.

Addressing the gap between Iran's free zones and global standards, Masrour said the newly drafted digital economy document aims to guide the zones toward next-generation models. While the document is largely complete, it has yet to receive formal approval.

He said not all free zones would benefit equally from digital economy initiatives, but zones such as Kish and Anzali already enjoy relative advantages in this field and could play a more prominent role in the coming years once the roadmap is implemented.

The value of commodities and services export from Iran's free zones increased by 19 percent during the first eight months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-November 21), as compared to the same period of time in the previous year.

As reported, the worth of exported products and services from the country's free zones stood at \$994 million in the mentioned eight-month period.

On December 10, Reza Masrour, the secretary of Iran's Supreme Council of Free Trade and Special Economic Zones, announced the finalization of the transformation document for free zones and the drafting of the digital economy document for free zones within the government, stating that the implementation of these documents will transform the future roadmap of the free zones.

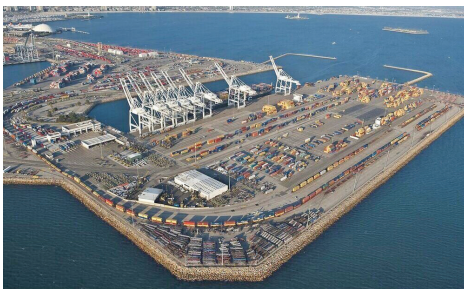
Elaborating on the details of the transformation document, the official stated: "This document has been formulated based on an examination of the systemic issues and an assessment of these zones against global experiences. Each free zone has been specialized according to its real advantages. For example, Kish is defined as a financial and digital economy hub, Aras is focused on logistics and transit, and other zones have been defined based on their capacities."

According to Reza Masrour, the free zones are required to develop and submit their five-year roadmaps based on this document.

Pointing out that one of the axes of the seventh generation of free zones globally is the digital economy, he added: "The digital economy document for free zones will also be finalized within the next two weeks. This document includes the legal requirements for transforming free zones into the country's digital economy hubs."

The official further stated that a significant part of development challenges are rooted in existing laws, emphasized: "The amendment to the Free Zones Law has been reviewed in the High Council and approved in a specialized workshop, and it has now been submitted to the relevant ministry as a bill to undergo legal procedures so that it can be sent to the parliament after government approval."

Regarding the progress of completing unfinished projects, Masrour said: "Dozens of infrastructure projects are underway in the free zones, ranging from small-scale projects to projects worth tens of billions of toman. The



main challenge for these projects is financing."

He added: "With the notification of the guideline for partnership with the private sector and the use of modern financing methods, the pace of project completion has accelerated. Monthly meetings are also being held to monitor and remove construction obstacles."

The Free Trade and Special Economic Zones High Council has recently announced that the process of converting customs offices located in free zones into specialized customs for importing specific goods will be accelerated with the aim of facilitating trade processes and providing better services to importers.

According to the announcement by the Supreme Council, the proposal from the Secretariat of the Supreme Council of Free Trade and Special Economic Zones regarding the establishment of specialized customs has been submitted to the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA), and necessary cooperation and coordination are underway by the customs authorities. This measure aims to effectively utilize the four-billion-dollar import quota to the mainland through free zones and accurately identify entry points with trade advantages.

It should be noted that the establishment and development of specialized customs offices will not only accelerate trade processes but also play a significant role in enhancing safety, creating sustainable employment, and strengthening the local economy in free zones.

On November 20, Economy Minister Seyed Ali Madanizadeh said that Iran plans to create an independent banking system dedicated to its free trade zones as part of a broader effort to overhaul the country's economic governance, adding that free zones will serve as the launchpad for structural reform.

Speaking at a meeting with business leaders in the Aras Free Zone, Madanizadeh said the government aims to expand economic freedoms, lift restrictions and accelerate decentralization in the country's most commercially active regions.

He said the administration has begun implementing a new transformation plan for free zones, built around decentralization and specialization of activities in each zone. The pilot phase will begin in East Azarbaijan Province, centered on the Aras Free Zone.

Madanizadeh said the government is moving to establish an independent bank dedicated to the financial needs of free zones. Aras will also be assigned a lead commercial bank to coordinate services, and steps are being taken to establish an independent chamber of commerce for the zone.

He said the government has adopted a supportive stance toward investors and producers operating in free zones, and confirmed that all ministerial directives limiting trade activity in these areas will be revoked. A new Free Zone Development Secretariat has been launched inside the Ministry of Economy, with Aras designated as its pilot site.

The minister also announced new tax policies aimed at relieving pressure on businesses, including maximum instalment options for tax payments. A unified "free-zone citizen card" will be issued for all free zone residents and operators, he added.

Other measures under review include the removal of price-setting rules in free zones. Madanizadeh said a number of restrictive regulations in the past had originated from within the ministry itself, and the government was now working to eliminate them. He urged private-sector actors to pursue their demands directly, and said a new communication channel would be established to allow businesspeople to engage with the minister's office.

He said the government is committed to mobilizing all available tools to expand investment across the free zones, calling on companies to "step forward" as reforms advance.

Maritime transport key to trade security: transport minister

From Page 1 ► Sadegh noted that Iran's access to open waters and proximity to key maritime corridors give it a privileged geopolitical position that has featured prominently in diplomatic engagements and drawn interest from regional and extra-regional countries.

Emphasizing the importance of multimodal transport, she said the parallel development of road, rail and maritime networks forms the backbone of Iran's trade and economy, and that strategic planning must be grounded in rigorous data, scientific analysis and long-term forecasting.

Maritime transport, she added, serves as the main artery of trade and market access, with navigational safety, accident reduction and port efficiency dependent on precise planning and the use of scientific information.

Sadegh said sustainable development of coastal and port infrastructure requires scientific studies, detailed geographic analysis and environmental considerations, as well as effective use of new technologies and advanced information systems.

Highlighting the link between maritime transport and marine meteorology, she said accurate weather and ocean data are essential for smart decision-making and safe management of Iran's waters, enabling early warning systems, risk forecasting and resilience against climate change impacts.

Last month, Saeed Rasouli, Head of Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO), pre-



sented a comprehensive vision for developing Iran's maritime economy. He characterized it as a unique and underutilized opportunity for national development.

His remarks highlighted a strategic shift in governmental focus, outlined key operational priorities, and announced significant international plans, particularly for the Caspian Sea region.

Rasouli formally identified the maritime-oriented economy as a "unique opportunity" for Iran.

He acknowledged a historical oversight, stating, "Unfortunately, due to the country's economic dependence on oil, we have neglected numerous sectors, including the maritime economy." This candid assessment underscores a recognition of the need for economic diversification.

The official emphasized that this sector is now receiving special and significant attention from the government.

He stressed that this heightened focus must be leveraged effectively, declaring, "now that

the government is paying special attention to this issue, we must use this capacity to its fullest."

The PMO head further outlined several critical pillars for this development strategy:

- * Cultivating a maritime culture: He highlighted the fundamental importance of "culture-building" regarding the maritime economy, indicating a need for broader public and institutional awareness and engagement.

- * Balanced port development: A key operational focus was placed on inclusive development. While mega port projects continue, he insisted that "we must also pay attention to the country's small ports."

He announced a policy of active engagement, stating, "In this regard, we are visiting all related institutions and companies and believe we must utilize the capacity of all of them."

- * Maximizing Caspian Sea potential: Specific programs for the Caspian Sea were announced.

Iran boosts trade with Oman, Qatar, UAE

TEHRAN – Iran's trade with Oman, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates rose in the first nine months of the current Iranian year (March 21 –December 21, 2025) compared with the same period last year, a senior official at Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) said.

Abdolamir Rabiavi, director general for West Asia affairs at the TPO, said Iran's exports to the UAE increased by about nine percent year on year, reaching \$5.815 billion in the first nine months, up from \$5.341 billion in the same period last year.

Imports from the UAE fell by more than 10 percent, declining from \$15.403 billion last year to \$13.532 billion in the current period, he said.

Rabiavi said Iran's exports to Oman rose 27 percent to \$1.517 billion, compared with \$1.192 billion a year earlier. Exports to Qatar also increased, reaching \$115 million, up from about \$101 million, a rise of 14 percent.

He attributed a decline in exports to Iraq to reduced Iranian gas shipments in recent months, seasonal bans on some agricultural products, Iraq's self-sufficiency in certain goods, and higher tariffs on items including steel and petrochemicals. He also cited tighter regulation and monitoring of trade cards and foreign currency repatriation commitments, noting that a significant share of Iran-Iraq trade had previously been conducted through small-scale exports.

Rabiavi said Iranian companies and

brands had a strong presence at the Gulfood exhibition in the UAE and international trade events in Turkey, adding that preparations were under way to set up Iranian pavilions at trade fairs in Qatar and Iraq.

He also said trade ties with Lebanon were easing following a visit by Iran's foreign minister, with both governments and private sectors expressing readiness to expand bilateral trade and to review a potential preferential trade agreement.

Referring to relations with Oman, Rabiavi said joint investments, participation in free zones and industrial parks, and efforts to attract Omani investors to Iran were continuing, alongside steady export and import flows.

Flare gas recovery a strategic priority for Iran's oil industry

TEHRAN – Collecting flare gas is among the most valuable and strategic measures in Iran's oil industry to boost efficiency, complete the value chain and protect the environment, the head of the National Iranian South Oilfields Company (NISOC) said.

Ramin Hatami, NISOC's managing director, said on Wednesday that the company, Iran's largest crude producer, operates across seven provinces and accounts for about 75 percent of the country's crude oil output and nearly 10 percent of its gas production, supplying feedstock to a large share of petrochemical plants in southern Iran.

Speaking at a meeting reviewing progress on flare gas recovery projects attended by representatives of the Oil Ministry and other government bodies, Hatami said NISOC oversees most of Iran's onshore oilfields, with 61 oil reservoirs and 20 independent gas reservoirs currently under production and monitoring.

He said oil in place in these fields is estimated at about 387 billion barrels, with recoverable reserves of nearly 109 billion barrels, adding that roughly 70 billion barrels have been produced since the start of Iran's oil industry.

Hatami said oil production has

become more complex as reservoirs enter the second half of their lifecycle, making the use of advanced methods, higher recovery rates and improved efficiency increasingly necessary.

He said NISOC has led a range of upstream projects based on technical expertise, laboratory studies and field operations, including the country's first field pilot for enhanced oil recovery, which could raise output and national wealth if expanded.

Hatami said surface projects, including facility optimization and efficiency upgrades, were being pursued alongside flare gas recovery, describing the cap-

ture of associated gas as one of the oil industry's most valuable achievements despite technical challenges linked to varying pressures, volumes and gas compositions.

He said two major contracts had been signed to collect flare gas and supply feedstock to petrochemical plants, adding that detailed reports on the volume and quality of recovered gas would be released soon.

Hatami said continued efforts could further reduce gas flaring, increase revenues and improve protection of national resources.

Tehran to host Iran–Russia joint economic committee meeting

TEHRAN – The 19th session of the Iran–Russia Joint Economic Committee meeting will be held in Tehran in mid-February, reflecting expanding cooperation prospects between the two countries, Iran's deputy oil minister for international and commercial affairs said.

Seyed Ali-Mohammad Mousavi said the meeting will take place from Feb. 15 to 17 and will be co-chaired by Iran's Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad and Russia's Energy Minister Sergey Tsiviliev, who head the joint committee.

He said a broad range of issues will be discussed, including completion of the International North–South Transit Corridor (INSTC), gas transfer from Russia to Iran, and cooperation in space industries, nuclear energy, trade and economy,

finance and banking, customs, industry and mining, agriculture, health, culture and tourism, as well as science and technology.

Mousavi said expert-level meetings will be held on the first two days, with Iranian and Russian specialists working through sectoral groups to address challenges and outline practical ways to expand cooperation. The discussions are expected to produce a roadmap for future collaboration, to be formalized in a memorandum of understanding signed by the commission's co-chairs.

He said annual trade between Iran and Russia currently stands at about \$5 billion, noting that while exchanges are growing, the figure does not reflect the depth of the two countries' strategic

relations and could be significantly higher.

"The outlook for Iran–Russia cooperation is bright and on an upward trajectory," Mousavi said, adding that the joint commission plays a key role in strengthening bilateral cooperation and advancing shared interests.

He said the meeting would also support implementation of broader agreements, including the comprehensive strategic partnership treaty and the free trade agreement between Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union.

The previous session of the joint economic commission was held in Moscow in late April. According to Iran's Oil Ministry, 110 of the 193 clauses included in the memorandum signed at that meeting are currently being implemented.

Trump’s ultimatum to Iraq: A blatant assault on sovereignty and the democratic order

TEHRAN — The recent statements by U.S. President Donald Trump regarding former Iraqi prime minister Nouri al-Maliki’s potential return to power represent a direct challenge to Iraq’s sovereignty and a troubling disregard for international norms.

When a foreign leader publicly threatens to withhold support to influence the outcome of another country’s internal political process, it is not merely rhetorical—it is coercion. Such actions violate long-standing principles of international law, particularly those enshrined in the United Nations Charter, which affirms that all states are equal and have the right to govern themselves without outside interference.

This crisis began on Saturday when the Coordination Framework, Iraq’s largest parliamentary bloc, officially nominated Maliki as their candidate for Prime Minister—a decision rooted in the domestic political process following November’s elections. This nomination reflects Iraq’s own democratic mechanisms, not external preferences.

In response, Trump took to Truth Social to denounce the nomination as a “very bad choice,” claiming that under Maliki’s previous tenure, Iraq “descended into poverty and total chaos.” He went further, issuing



Former Iraqi prime minister Nouri al-Maliki casts his vote at a polling station in Baghdad during Iraq’s parliamentary elections on November 11, 2025.

an explicit ultimatum: the United States would “no longer help Iraq” if Maliki were elected, warning that without U.S. support, the country would face “ZERO chance of Success, Prosperity, or Freedom.” This public threat amounts to coercion, leveraging America’s military and economic influence to intimidate a sovereign nation—a practice broadly condemned under international law.

Maliki responded sharply, condemning what he called “blatant American interference in Iraq’s internal affairs.” On X, he rejected the threats as a violation of Iraq’s

sovereignty and democratic order, emphasizing that the selection of a prime minister is the prerogative of Iraq’s parliament and its people, not a foreign power. His statement underscores a core principle of international law: legitimate leadership must be determined by a nation’s institutions, free from external pressure.

From a legal and moral standpoint, Trump’s ultimatum undermines the foundational idea of sovereign equality. By signaling that the U.S. will punish Iraq financially and diplomatically for following its own democratic procedures, Wash-

ington erodes the legitimacy of Iraq’s parliamentary process. Such coercive tactics are precisely what the United Nations Charter seeks to prevent: domination of smaller or dependent states by powerful nations.

Trump’s actions reveal a stark contradiction. While publicly promoting democracy and stability abroad, he threatens to destabilize Iraq if the political outcome does not suit his preferences. This approach transforms partnership into subjugation, sending a clear message that Iraq’s independence is conditional upon compliance with U.S. interests. True stability and democracy cannot be imposed externally—they must emerge from the domestic political system, built on the consensus of Iraq’s people and institutions like the Coordination Framework.

Ultimately, the choice of Iraq’s Prime Minister belongs to the Iraqi Parliament and its citizens. Any attempt by a foreign leader to override that choice is a direct assault on sovereignty and a breach of international norms. Trump’s public interference is not only a violation of law but also a dangerous precedent, signaling that the internal affairs of smaller nations can be dictated through threats rather than respect for their democratic processes.

Israel’s Rafah closure is a death sentence for Gaza’s patients

By Wesam Bahrani

TEHRAN – Israel’s continued closure of the Rafah crossing amounts to a death sentence for thousands of Palestinian patients and wounded trapped in the Gaza Strip.

The shutdown of the Rafah crossing is preventing Palestinians from accessing life-saving medical treatment abroad, Gaza’s Ministry of Health has warned.

The ministry said the ongoing restrictions imposed by the occupying Israeli regime have pushed the already devastated health system to the brink of collapse.

According to the ministry, nearly 20,000 patients with completed medical referrals are currently waiting for permission to leave the Gaza Strip for treatment outside the enclave.

Many of these cases involve serious and complex conditions that cannot be treated locally due to the Zionist regime’s destruction of medical infrastructure and the severe shortage of medicines and equipment.

The health authorities reported that the lack of essential drugs and medical consumables, combined with the suspension of most specialized medical services, has dramatically worsened the humanitarian situation.

Hospitals have been damaged or rendered inoperable, diagnostic services are limited, and specialized care is largely unavailable.

As a result, waiting lists for treatment abroad continue to grow.

The ministry documented 440 cases classified as life-saving emergencies, while 1,268 patients have died while waiting for permission from the occupying Israeli regime to travel for treatment.

Cancer patients are among the most severely affected groups. With no access to specialized oncology care or diagnostic services inside Gaza, around 4,000 cancer patients remain on urgent waiting lists, facing deteriorating conditions and rising mortality risks.

Children make up a significant portion of those affected. The ministry stated that approximately 4,500 patients with registered medical referrals are children. Despite the scale of the crisis, only 3,100 patients have been able to leave Gaza since the Rafah land crossing was closed on 7 May 2024, underscoring the vast gap between medical needs and actual evacuations.

The Ministry of Health warned that the continuation of the closure could lead to unpredictable and catastrophic health outcomes, including a sharp rise in preventable deaths and an even greater backlog of patients requiring treatment abroad.

It stressed that opening the Rafah crossing, facilitating the departure of patients and wounded individuals, and ensuring the uninter-

rupted entry of medical supplies represent the last remaining lifeline for thousands of people.

On Monday, following the recovery of the body of the last Israeli captive soldier from Gaza, Hamas emphasized that the Zionist regime must fully implement all provisions of the agreement without delay or evasion.

The movement specifically called for the unconditional opening of the Rafah crossing in both directions, the entry of humanitarian and medical supplies in sufficient quantities, the lifting of all restrictions on goods, and the complete withdrawal of the occupation regime from the Gaza Strip.

It also demanded that the Israeli occupation forces allow the national committee tasked with managing Gaza’s civil affairs to operate freely.

The health crisis in Gaza highlights how movement restrictions function not only as a security measure but also as a form of collective punishment for the entire Palestinian population trapped inside the Strip.

By controlling access to treatment and supplies, the Israeli regime determines life-and-death outcomes for patients.

Humanitarian organizations warn that without immediate and sustained access through Rafah, Gaza’s health system may suffer irreversible collapse, transforming a medical emergency into a long-term humanitarian catastrophe.

Kaja Kallas: Europe no longer Washington’s center of gravity

In the aftermath of the Greenland crisis, the EU’s top diplomat has urged European nations to stop outsourcing their security and defense, Euro News reported.

The changes in the relationship between Europe and the United States are “structural, not temporary,” EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas has said, as she warned against the dangers of outsourcing security in a new age of “coercive power politics”.

Her remarks come on the heels of US President Donald Trump’s attempt to seize Greenland from Denmark through punitive tariffs,

an unprecedented dispute that brought the nearly 80-year-old transatlantic alliance to the brink of collapse.

The tensions were defused by a framework deal on Arctic security, the details of which remain under discussion.

“Arguably, the biggest change in the fundamental reorientation is going on across the Atlantic: a rethinking that has shaken the transatlantic relationship to its foundation,” Kallas said on Wednesday morning at the European Defense Agency’s annual conference.

“Let me be clear: we want strong

trans-Atlantic ties. The US will remain Europe’s partner and ally. But Europe needs to adapt to the new realities. Europe is no longer Washington’s primary center of gravity.”

“This shift has been ongoing for a while,” she added, referring to previous American administrations. “It is structural, not temporary. It means that Europe must step up. No great power in history has ever outsourced its survival and survived.”

In her speech, Kallas labelled Russia a “major security threat”, China a “long-term challenge”, and the Middle East a “completely un-

predictable” region.

These developments, coupled with Trump’s no-holds-barred foreign policy, have put a “severe strain on the international norms, rules and institutions enforcing them that we have built over 80 years”, Kallas said.

“The risk of a full-blown return to coercive power politics, spheres of influence and a world where might makes right is very real,” she noted.

She then exhorted European nations to “acknowledge that this tectonic shift is here to stay and act with urgency”.

In the Gaza Strip, internal displacement affects nearly two million people—the vast majority of the population. Many have been displaced multiple times due to the Israeli offensive that began in October 2023.

Adnan Abu Hasna, media adviser for the UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA), describes the situation in Gaza as unique. With 90 percent of homes, schools and infrastructure destroyed, Abu Hasna notes that 2.5 million Palestinians are, in effect, homeless, making a return to normalcy “almost impossible” amid total destruction.

Meanwhile, protracted conflicts continue to drive displacement figures in Syria, where 12 million remain displaced, and in Yemen, where the number exceeds five million.

Hamas official rejects foreign diktats on Palestinian arms



A senior Hamas political bureau member sharply criticized Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, accusing him of obstructing the transition to the second phase of the Gaza ceasefire agreement. The remarks came after Netanyahu reiterated that Israel would not permit Gaza’s reconstruction unless armed groups in the Strip disarm, and insisted that Israeli security control would continue in both Gaza and the West Bank.

Husam Badran dismissed Netanyahu’s demands as an attempt to impose external dictates on Palestinians, stressing that the weapons of resistance are an internal matter not subject to foreign pressure. According to Badran, raising the issue of disarmament at this stage amounts to deliberate sabotage of

the fragile diplomatic process.

He argued that the next phase of the ceasefire must guarantee a full withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza and open the door to serious reconstruction efforts after months of devastation. Badran also stated that Hamas is prepared to hand administrative responsibility for Gaza to a national committee, framing it as a step toward unified Palestinian governance.

On Monday, the Israeli military said the remains of Ran Gvili, the last Israeli captive in the Gaza Strip, had been retrieved. Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem said the discovery of Gvili’s remains confirms the movement’s adherence to the October ceasefire agreement.

Trump accuses Ilhan Omar of staging syringe attack

President Donald Trump lashed out at Rep. Ilhan Omar after learning she was attacked with a syringe during a town hall, accusing the Minnesota congresswoman of staging the incident.

“I don’t think about her. I think she’s a fraud,” Trump told ABC News in a phone interview. “She probably had herself sprayed, knowing her.”

Omar, a Somali-American and regular target of Trump, was sprayed with an unknown substance by a man at a town hall event in Minneapolis late on Jan. 27. The man rushed Omar and sprayed her torso with an unknown

liquid as she called for ICE to be abolished and Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem to be impeached. The man shouted something toward Omar, but it was unclear what was said.

“I haven’t seen it,” Trump said of video of the attack. “No, no. I hope I don’t have to bother.”

Police identified the man who attacked Omar as 55-year-old Anthony Kazmierczak and brought him to the Hennepin County Jail on assault charges, according to Minneapolis Police Department spokesman Trevor Folke. No evidence has been presented to support Trump’s claim that Omar had herself sprayed.

Lebanon’s paradox: An unfinished state and a necessary resistance

By Sondoss Al Asaad

BEIRUT — The central challenge facing Lebanon today is often misrepresented as a confrontation between the “state” and the “Resistance.” In reality, it is a struggle between a state that has yet to be fully realized and a defensive necessity imposed by persistent danger.

Reducing the crisis to a weapons debate before resolving the deeper failure of statehood neither produces sovereignty nor strengthens national unity—it merely postpones the birth of a viable state.

Recent political and military developments illustrate this contradiction clearly.

Lebanese Army Commander General Rodolphe Haykal received U.S. Central Command’s Joint Special Operations Task Force commander, Mason R. Dula, alongside a delegation, to discuss military cooperation and regional developments.

Haykal also met UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert to discuss domestic conditions and preparations for the Paris conference intended to support the Lebanese army.

Her meetings extended to President Joseph Aoun and Defense Minister Michel Menassa, with a focus on the army’s second phase plan to centralize weapons under state authority.

Yet informed sources stress that the March 5 Paris conference remains provisional, pending the outcome of Haykal’s upcoming visit to Washington.

U.S. officials reportedly view the visit as a “test,” particularly regarding the issue of disarming Hezbollah and the army’s readiness to begin implementation north of the Litani River.

Should Washington be dissatisfied, post-

poning—or canceling—the conference remains a strong possibility.

This conditional support underscores how external pressures increasingly shape Lebanon’s internal security agenda.

Further signaling a shift, Lebanon was formally informed that Ambassador Michel Issa will represent the United States in future meetings of the so-called “mechanism committee,” effectively ending the role of Morgan Ortagus.

At the same time, U.S. pressure reportedly led Qatar to remove reconstruction aid for southern villages from its assistance package, pending further consultations.

Washington continues to block Lebanon from launching an official reconstruction appeal or creating a donor fund, explicitly linking reconstruction to the Israeli demand for comprehensive disarmament across Lebanese territory.

Regionally, Saudi envoy Yazid bin Farhan avoided taking a direct stance on upcoming parliamentary elections but was firm in rejecting any political or electoral cooperation with the Islamic Group (Al-Jama’ al-Islamiya), describing it as a “designated terrorist organization.”

Despite this, the group intends to contest elections nationwide, keeping channels open with various political forces.

Beneath these developments lies a deeper philosophical and political question: what defines a state? A state is not merely a flag, an anthem, or nominal institutions. At its core, it is a moral and political contract: the monopoly of force in exchange for protection, and obedience in return for dignity and sovereignty.

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

Mexican photographer: Iran, a country with cultural diversity and beyond stereotypes



TEHRAN—Mexican documentary photographer Roberto Flores, who traveled to Iran for the first time, emphasized Iran's cultural and human potential and said: "My goal in traveling to Iran is to record the cultural diversity and lifestyle of Iranian nomads, a living reality that can challenge the stereotypical narratives of Iran in the world."

In an interview released by Miras Aria on Wednesday, Flores referred to his motivations for traveling to Iran and said: "The idea of recording the life of nomads had been in my mind for years, and Iran, due to its cultural, climatic, and human diversity, was considered one of the most important destinations for this project."

According to the news agency, despite his age of 26, he has a record of traveling and documentary photography in 75 countries around the world. "My perspective in photography is always focused on people; their way of life, the relationship between generations, and the connection with nature and animals. Contrary to popular belief, people around the world are more similar than different."

Describing his journey in Iran, the documentary photographer said: "After arriving in Tehran and at the same time as it was snowing and raining, my journey changed to Lorestan and Khuzestan provinces. We took a local train from Doroud to Andimeshk and spent a whole day as guests of a nomadic family."

Flores continued: "In Andimeshk and Dezful, I witnessed a Bakhtiari wedding and then spent some time with a family of Haftlang Bakhtiari. The sincerity, decency and hospitality of the people were beyond any imagination I had before the trip."

Qasr-e Shirin needs decades of archaeological work, heritage official says



TEHRAN – Iran's western county of Qasr-e Shirin requires up to a century of archaeological research due to the number of historical sites dating back to the Sassanid period, a senior provincial heritage official said on Tuesday.

Siavash Shahbazi, head of the preservation and restoration group for historical buildings and sites at Kermanshah province's Cultural Heritage Department, said past archaeological discoveries show Qasr-e Shirin was a major center for pre-Islamic rulers.

"Based on archaeological findings so far, Qasr-e Shirin was one of the areas that attracted the attention of kings before the Islamic era," Shahbazi told ISNA news agency.

He said the county hosts multiple Sassanid-era sites, including the Palace of Khosrow, Ban Qal'eh stone tower, the Chahar Qapu fire temple and the Shah Gadar canal, a Sassanid water supply system.

"If archaeological work were to be carried out comprehensively in this county, it would require many years," he said.

Shahbazi said the Palace of Khosrow is one of the best-known monuments in Qasr-e Shirin. According to archaeologists, the structure was once a large complex located within a garden enclosure.

He said six seasons of archaeological excavations have been completed at the site, leading to the identification of significant remains of the palace.

He attributed his acquaintance with the lifestyle of Iranian nomads to nomadic tourism activities and said: "I became acquainted with the migration routes of Bakhtiari nomads through the nomadic tourism page of Nomad on Instagram. This experience is one of the most authentic examples of cultural tourism I have ever seen."

The Mexican photographer, who has traveled among the nomads of Afghanistan, Mongolia, North Africa, and parts of Latin America in the last two years, said about the distinction of Iranian nomads: "Everywhere in the world, nomads value family and a simple life more than material things, but in Iran, family ties are deeper and warmer. The night I spent Yalda (Shab-e Chelleh) with a nomadic family was one of the most different experiences of my life."

Expressing concern about the future of indigenous cultures in the world, Flores emphasized: "Many traditional lifestyles are rapidly disappearing. If they are not recorded and documented today, perhaps there will be no trace of them in 50 years. Documentary photography is an attempt to preserve this human memory."

He announced plans to hold an exhibition of his works in Mexico and said: "Next year, I will hold an exhibition of my photographs in museums in Mexico, and part of it will be dedicated to Iran. I want the people of my country to see that Iran is not just a stereotype; it is a land of amazing cultural, climatic and human diversity."

Flores concluded that Iranian people are noble, kind and hospitable. "This trip was not just a work project for me, but a profound human experience that I will never forget."

"The site needs at least three more excavation seasons," Shahbazi said, adding that funding has been allocated in recent years to continue research at the palace.

He said the seventh season of excavations is planned for next year, subject to the allocation of funds.

During the next phase, archaeologists will attempt to identify traces of the surrounding garden described in historical sources, Shahbazi said. Any findings would be documented to help reconstruct the historical layout of the palace.

Shahbazi also said Qasr-e Shirin has historically held strategic importance and today lies on a major route used by pilgrims traveling to holy sites in Iraq, as well as on a commercial corridor with a border market.

"These factors give the county the capacity to become a tourism hub in the province," he said.

In 2007, the Historical Ensemble of Qasr-e Shirin was placed on UNESCO's tentative list for World Heritage status. The ensemble includes architectural and urban remains from the late Sassanid and early Islamic periods, such as the Palace of Khosrow, the Chahar Qapu monument, Ban Qal'eh and the remains of a Safavid-era caravanserai, according to the nomination file.

Siraf historic port dossier submitted to UNESCO for World Heritage review

From Page 1 ► He said the site contains more than 5,000 rock-cut spaces, which he described as one of the most distinctive physical features of the historical ensemble.

Darabi said the Grand Mosque of Siraf, dating back to the first century of the Islamic era, holds a significant place in studies of early Islamic architecture due to its design and structural features.

The official also highlighted the port's stepped architectural layout, shaped in harmony with the area's natural topography, reflects human adaptation to the environment.

Darabi also cited the presence of more than 150 active water wells that have continued to supply water for centuries as evidence of advanced engineering knowledge and water management in the historic port.

He said these historical, architectural and technical attributes led the national world heritage registration policy council to select Siraf as a site of outstanding universal value for nomination to UNESCO.



He then expressed hope that planned measures for protection, management and presentation of Siraf would be implemented and that the site would be inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage list in the near future.

Siraf was Iran's most important port from the Sassanid period through the fourth century AH and played a leading role in maritime

trade linking Western Asia with India, the Far East and eastern Africa between the 9th and 11th centuries.

Between 1966 and 1973, the British Institute of Persian Studies conducted seven seasons of excavation and survey at Siraf, identifying extensive remains of a major port city on the northern coast of the Persian Gulf.

Historians estimate Siraf's population reached about 300,000 during the early Islamic era, while the modern town has a population of roughly 7,000.

Situated in Bushehr province, the ancient port hosts numerous historical and archaeological sites spanning the Elamite, Achaemenid, Parthian, Sassanid, Islamic and Qajar periods.

Lori traditional clothing: an amalgam of Iranian culture, history and identity



TEHRAN – Lori traditional clothing is one of the most vivid expressions of Iran's indigenous culture. More than a form of dress, it reflects the history, beliefs and lifestyle of the people of the Zagros region who have preserved their Iranian identity for centuries.

With a rich and ancient cultural background, Lor ethnic groups have played a notable role in Iran's history and civilization. Their clothing traditions offer insight into living conditions, geography and social values. The use of durable fabrics, designs that allow ease of movement, and adaptability to both cold and warm climates highlights the ingenuity of the Lor people in responding to their natural environment. These garments stem from long-standing nomadic and rural traditions, with each element serving a practical purpose.

Beyond functionality, Lori clothing also reflects a distinct aesthetic. Colors, patterns and decorations convey emotion, character and social status. Bright, diverse colors in women's clothing symbolize vitality and hope, while the simplicity and strength of men's attire represent endurance, courage and the epic spirit associated with the Lor people.

Lori clothing also varies by occasion, including celebrations, weddings, religious rituals and traditional ceremonies. These variations underscore the close relationship between dress and social customs, with each style conveying cultural meaning.

The use of durable fabrics, suitable design for mobility and adaptation to cold and heat, indicates the intelligence of Lor people in adapting to their natural environment. These garments are the result of long experiences of nomadic and rural life, and each component of them has a specific and meaningful function.

On the other hand, Lori clothing is not only practical, but also has a certain aesthetic.

The colors, patterns, and decorations used in women's and men's clothing express the feelings,

spirit, and social status of the individuals. For example, the happy and diverse colors in Lori women's clothing symbolize hope, life, and social vitality, while the men's clothing, with its simplicity and strength, is considered a sign of the strength, zeal, and epic spirit of Lor people.

Also, Lori local clothing on various occasions such as celebrations, weddings, religious rituals, and traditional ceremonies has differences from everyday clothing, which indicates the deep connection between clothing and social customs. Each change in type of clothing conveys a specific message and is considered a kind of silent language of Lori culture.

Today, with the spread of modern life and changes in clothing styles, the risk of forgetting local clothes has increased. Therefore, recognizing and introducing the Lor ethnic clothing is not only a cultural act, but also an effective step in preserving the intangible heritage of Iran.

Examining this traditional clothing helps us to become familiar with the identity, history, and lifestyle of people who have still maintained their originality in the midst of the changes of time.

In an interview released by Mehr news agency, Negar Motlaq, a designer and tailor of local clothes, said about the color and type of fabrics used in sewing the local clothes: Local clothes are directly related to the age of the people. "Elderly women often use fabrics with simple and gentle designs and colors, sometimes dark, and with few decorations. In contrast, the clothes of girls and young women have a pleasant variety of happy colors and beautiful patterns, and usually more ornaments and decorations are used in them."

She continued that in newer designs and models, young girls are more receptive to patterned sleeves and prefer more different diaphanous scarves (charqads).

Regarding the components of local clothing, Motlaq said that hats, vests, charqads, tunics or skirts, and coins tied to the forehead, beautiful needles that are attached to the charqad are all components of the Lori clothing. Married women often do not wear hats and wear another scarf under the charqad on their forehead, or their scarf is often white and floral.

She said that local clothing is not just fabric and stitching, each has a story and soul and is the result of the hands of artists who have centuries of experience hidden in them.

?Motlaq added that intricate embroidery de-

signs, needlework, and dazzling color combinations that originate from nature and culture are all pure models for creating new works. What is particularly valuable about local clothes is their authenticity and handmade nature. In a world where everything has become mechanical and uniform, that sense of warmth and precision in sewing, those delicate details that are created only with love and patience, are extremely valuable.

She clarified that every local dress is a complete mirror of the identity of an ethnic group. "By looking at a dress, you can guess part of the history, lifestyle, beliefs and even the geographical location of that people. These clothes are our cultural identity, and this diversity doubles the beauty of Iran."

Farideh Shojaeian, a Lor woman and a local dress tailor in the Noorabad Mamasani region of Fars province, explained about the details and importance of this garment and said that the cost of fabric and sewing a complete local Lor dress, especially for ceremonies such as weddings, is very high.

She continued that a complete Lori local outfit includes several layers of skirts, shirts, scarves or shawls, vests and decorations such as flower tassels, pins under scarves and ashrafi-style coins.

A significant amount of fabric is needed for the skirts alone, which are sometimes sewn in up to three layers; so that up to six meters of fabric may be used for the main skirt. In total, about 10 to 14 meters of fabric are needed to sew a complete outfit, depending on the type of fabric and its thickness. Expensive decorative ribbons are also used for decorations, which add to the final cost.

Referring to her belonging to the nomadic tribe, the artist and traditional clothing tailor considered the age of the clothes to generations before her and emphasized: "These clothes have been and are an inseparable part of the nomadic life. The appropriate covering and hijab of these clothes are also considered, and this, in addition to their beauty, adds to their attractiveness."

Shojaeian said: "Despite the high costs, the younger generations are still interested in these clothes. Many young girls, despite the difficulty of walking in heavy clothes, tend to wear them for various ceremonies. These clothes are especially popular in areas such as Noorabad and among the Lor community. However, the interest in wearing local clothes is not limited to special occasions such as weddings, and some women use them on a daily basis."

Lighting operation of Belqeys citadel to begin



TEHRAN--Lighting operation of Belqeys citadel in Esfarayen county, North Khorasan province, will begin on Thursday with the aim of improving the night view, improving the visual effects and attracting more tourists.

Ahmad Dinari, head of North Khorasan Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Department, stated that with the follow-up of Bahman Nouri, governor-general of North Khorasan province, measures were done for the development of tourism infrastructure in Esfarayen county, Miras Aria reported.

He clarified that the project has entered the implementation

phase with funding from provincial sources and after going through legal processes and signing a contract with a competent contractor, and includes lighting the walls of the historical citadel

of Belqeys city.

Emphasizing the importance of the Belqeys citadel as one of the most prominent historical monuments in the northeast of the

country, he stated that implementation of the lighting project will play an important role in better presentation of the monument, boosting longer stays of tourists, and boosting historical and cultural tourism in Esfarayen county.

Dinari said that developing tourism infrastructure and improving historical sites are among the priorities of North Khorasan Cultural Heritage Department, adding that numerous projects are being implemented at the provincial level.

Belqeys citadel is the second-largest mudbrick fortress in Iran after the UNESCO-registered Bam citadel.

Health Insurance Organization covers over 130 rare, hard-to-treat diseases

From page 1 ▶ Before the establishment of the foundation, patients suffering from Thalassemia, hemophilia, kidney failure, Hemodialysis were supported. Diseases such as 'butterfly skin or EB', 'Spinal muscular atrophy (SMA)', 'Metabolic diseases', 'Autism', and 'Dystrophies', Diabetes, cancer, and immune deficiency diseases are among rare diseases.

The budget allocated to rare and hard-to-treat diseases has increased over the past few years, rising from 50 trillion rials (about 33 million dollars) in the first year to 120 trillion rials (about 80 million dollars) this year.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), rare diseases are often complex and multi-systemic, affecting multiple organs and leading to comorbidities, and many of these conditions are chronic, progressive, and can consequently result in serious disabilities and premature death.

Out of a thousand population, 2 people get a rare disease, while



the prevalence can be curbed by changing people's culture, screening, identifying, preventing births, and raising awareness.

Health insurance services

In 2024, seven more anti-cancer drugs were added to the list of rare diseases fund, with health insurance covering 70 percent of the costs.

"Currently, with the inclusion of these seven drugs, a total of 90 anti-cancer drugs are cov-

ered by the rare and hard-to-treat diseases fund, and the health insurance is paying 70 to 95 percent of their costs," IRIB quoted Kameli, an official with the health insurance organization, as saying.

The number of health centers that have concluded contracts with the Health Insurance Organization increased by seven percent in the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19) compared with the year before.

More than 53,000 centers have concluded contracts with health insurance organizations so far in the current year, IRNA quoted Keivan Tajbakhsh, an official with the Organization, as saying.

Health insurance contracts have been signed with government, non-government, private, and charity centers for services.

The centers include doctors' offices, hospitals, pharmacies, rehabilitation centers, and all medical centers.

"We hope to witness an increase in the number of health centers that are parties to the contract with Health Insurance Organization as new forms of the contract, approved by the Supreme Council of Insurance, are announced," Tajbakhsh said.

He stated that 13,931 pharmacies, 20,804 doctors' offices, 2,049 clinics, 2,446 independent laboratories, and 4261 rehabilitation centers, both independent and affiliated with other organizations, have concluded contracts with the Health Insurance Organization.

Modern tech to help resolve environmental issues

TEHRAN – The Department of Environment (DOE) and the Vice-Presidency for Science, Technology, and Knowledge-Based Economy have signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to resolve environmental challenges utilizing modern technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI).

The MOU was signed by the Vice-President for Science and Technology, Hossein Afshin, and the DOE chief, Shina Ansari, on Monday, IRNA reported.

The MOU highlights expanding cooperation and synergy between the two sides, as well as leveraging the capabilities of both parties in the technology and innovation ecosystem to address key environmental issues in the country.

The main objectives of the signed MOU include providing scientific, technological, and innovative strategies to enhance monitoring and remove environmental pollution, particularly air pollution, utilizing modern technologies and knowledge-based capacities in policymaking and planning, developing the market for domestic knowledge-based products and services, and enhancing societal resilience against environmental and social crises.

Standardization and risk assessment of environmental technologies using international experiences, the promotion of women's participation in the development of green technologies, the establishment and expansion of specialized institutions and tools in the environmental innovation ecosystem are among other goals of this MOU.

Based on the MOU, the vice-presidency for science, technology is committed to identifying knowledge-based companies oper-

ating in fields like air, water, and soil pollution, waste and wastewater, sand and dust storms, developing technology supply and demand exchanges, supporting the use of new technologies including AI, biotechnology, the Internet of Things, and block-chain to manage environmental challenges, and establishing innovative infrastructures with a focus on women entrepreneurs and less privileged groups.

The DOE is committed to cooperating in the expansion of technology through national environmental fund, research and technology funds, facilitating environmental approvals for the development of the green and digital economy, identifying challenges and technological needs, supporting pollution reduction projects and environmental risk assessment, establishing a knowledge-based and circular economy desk in the department, promoting innovation culture in the field of environment, utilizing the capacity of environmental technology houses, and participating in relevant national and specialized working groups.

Main environmental challenges

Air pollution is one of the major environmental challenges in the country, particularly in metropolitan with numerous adverse impacts on people's health as well as the economy of society.

Land subsidence and waste management are also among main critical issues the country is facing. Indiscriminate extraction of underground water reserves and failure to restore aquifers over the previous decades have led to land subsidence in the country.

Climate change, particularly a sharp decline in annual precipitation, along with other environmental changes such as the drying up



of wetlands, land degradation, sand and dust storms, and desertification, has caused numerous environmental problems.

Apart from affecting the environment, climate change poses a crisis in the health sector. Being located in West Asia, the impacts of climate change and the rise in temperature in Iran are more than the global average, which indirectly leads to the intensification of pathogens.

Dust storms are other major environmental challenges that adversely impact food security, human health, and the sustainable development process at national and regional levels.

Being located in an arid and semi-arid area, Iran has been negatively impacted by climate change. The rise in temperatures, drop in precipitation, intensified droughts, and frequent SDSs have not only threatened the ecosystem and biodiversity but also jeopardized the country's food security by exacerbating soil erosion, expanding desertification, and declining agricultural productivity.

Iran attends Asian Nano Forum

TEHRAN – Attending the Asian Nano Forum in Japan, Emad Ahmadvand, the secretary of the headquarters for the Iran Nanotechnology Innovation Council, has presented an account of the country's progress and accomplishments in the nanotechnology sector.

The conference is being held on the sidelines of the 25th International Nanotechnology Exhibition and Conference, known as Nano Tech 2026, taking place from January 27 to 31, 2026, in Tokyo, Japan.

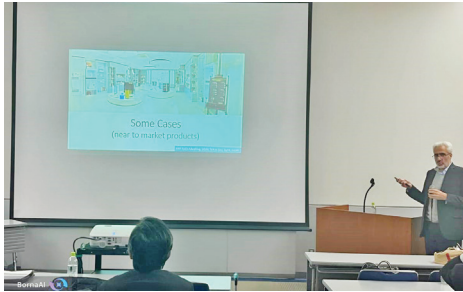
Representatives from Japan, Iran, Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan, and South Korea have attended the forum. The event has provided a great opportunity for sharing expertise and developing regional collaboration in nanotechnology.

On the first day of the forum, Ahmadvand delivered a lecture expounding on the country's latest achievements and advancements in nanotechnology. The official elaborated on the current status of nanotechnology and its commercialization in Iran, showcasing the country's capacities, infrastructure, and political experiences.

Supported by the Organization for Development of International Cooperation in Science and Technology, Iranian knowledge-based companies are participating in Nano Tech 2026.

Nano Tech 2026 is themed 'Bridge to Future Business: Innovating Nanotechnology'. It is a place where innovative materials and next-generation devices are gathered to explore the implementation of future technologies in society based on nanotechnology, an important common base technology for research and development.

The exhibition serves as a great platform for knowledge-based firms to showcase their products and achievements in different



fields like materials, nanocarbon, cellulose nanofibers, graphene, electron microscopes, analytics, nano fabrication, solid state batteries, 5G, 6G, and the environment.

Nanotechnology leaps forward

Iran has made significant progress in nanotechnology over a year (August 2024 -August 2025), with more than a 100 percent increase in nanotech products exports, indexing 10,860 articles in the Web of Science (WoS), and being ranked sixth in publishing nanotech articles.

Having published a total of 4,615 articles in the top 25 percent of journals (Q1 journals) in 2024, Iran is placed among the top ten countries in publishing nanotechnology articles, ranking 12th in h-index for nano-articles in the world.

China, the U.S., and India, with 86,924, 14,473, and 11,194 articles, respectively, are the top three countries. Iran is atop England (4,360), Japan (4,022), and Spain (3,830) in the ranking, ISNA reported. The Q1 journal index is used to categorize scientific journals based on their impact. It is most commonly used in databases like Scimago Journal Rank (SJR) and Journal Citation Reports (JCR).

The Journal Citation Report (JCR) Impact Factor 2024 has cited 161 Iranian journals, naming five among the world's most cited in the nanotechnology sector.

Iran, Philippines discuss ways to boost counter-narcotics co-op

TEHRAN – Iranian and Filipino officials have explored the potential to enhance ties in combating narcotics.

In a meeting held on Tuesday, Mohammad Narimani, an official with Drug Control Headquarters (DCHQ), and Roberto G. Manola, the Philippines' ambassador to Tehran, agreed to draft a memorandum of understanding on determining cooperation mechanisms, IRNA reported.

During the meeting, Narimani highlighted Iran's accomplishments in prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, and harm reduction services, saying that the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) established the Iranian National Center for Addiction Studies in 2019.

Elaborating on the DCHQ measures from 2019 to 2025, Narimani said Iranian anti-narcotics police discovered and seized 118 tons of heroin, 120 tons of morphine, about 4,000 tons of opium, 850 tons of hashish, and 210 tons of methamphetamine.

In 2025, they confiscated over 375 tons of different illegal drugs, including 40 tons of methamphetamine, and disbanded over 2,000 regional and international drug trafficking gangs, the official noted.

For his part, Manola said the policies of the former president in the country focused mainly on intensifying countermeasures, while the current president has also highlighted the importance of reducing demand.

Industrial drugs are manufactured by Filipino nationals, while foreign nationals manage and transmit them.

Pregnant women and underage children are frequently used to smuggle drugs, he added.

The official went on to say that the Philippines is exposed to diversion of chemical precursors from China, which is very difficult to combat.

Enhancing national capacity

The UNODC, in close collaboration with the Iranian DCHQ and the Ministry of Health and Medical Education (MoHME), held a training workshop aimed at enhancing the competencies of drug use disorder treatment professionals through the systematic application of the UNODC TreatNet Training Package.

The NODC continues to support the strengthening of evidence-based drug treatment



services in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The three-day workshop, titled "Assessment and Elements of Psychological Treatment for Drug Use Disorders", was held in Tehran from December 28 to 30 as part of a broader series of capacity-building initiatives, the UN Iran website announced in a press release on January 5.

The workshop brought together psychologists, counsellors, and treatment professionals from national institutions, including Prisons Organization and MoHME-affiliated services and other relevant organizations involved in treatment, and social support. The training was delivered using the UNODC TreatNet package, which provides standardized, evidence-based guidance for the assessment and treatment of drug use disorders.

The three-day agenda was designed to combine theoretical knowledge with practical skills development. Participants were introduced to the TreatNet framework and its application in the treatment of drug and alcohol use disorders.

Particular emphasis was placed on the logic of screening and the use of the Alcohol, Smoking and Substance Involvement Screening Test (ASSIST), including brief interventions and their role in early detection and timely referral.

Core principles of motivational interviewing were introduced and explored, with a strong focus on their practical application in clinical and counselling settings to enhance client engagement and treatment adherence.

Finally, the treatment planning and prioritization, translating assessment results into structured and individualized treatment plans was covered by the training. Participants further explored strategies for putting treatment planning into practice and for supporting patients through the development of new coping and life skills.

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

World's first 'subway library' to open in Tehran

For the first time in the underground transportation system worldwide, a public library will be opened in Tehran subway, Farnoush Nobakht, director of Tehran Urban and Suburban Railway Operations Company, said.

According to the memorandum signed between the Tehran Urban and Suburban Railway Operations Company and the Tehran public libraries foundation, libraries will be launched in seven selected stations, first of which will be inaugurated on August 12, ISNA reported on Tuesday.

The library, called "Metro Book", is in line with the cultural programs to promote the culture of reading and increase per capita reading among subway passengers during intra-city trips, the library with a capacity of more than 5,000 books provides services continuously from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., she explained.

افتتاح کتابخانه عمومی در متروی تهران برای اولین بار در جهان

مدیرعامل شرکت بهره برداری متروی تهران و حومه گفت: برای اولین بار در سامانه حمل و نقل متروهای جهان، کتابخانه عمومی در متروی تهران افتتاح می شود.

به گزارش ایسنا، فرنوش نوبخت اظهار داشت: قرار است طبق تفاهم نامه منعقد شده بین شرکت بهره برداری متروی تهران و حومه و نهاد کتابخانه های عمومی استان تهران در هفت ایستگاه منتخب «مترو کتاب» راه اندازی شود.

مدیرعامل شرکت بهره برداری متروی تهران و حومه گفت: این کتابخانه در راستای برنامه های فرهنگی معاونت امور فرهنگی اجتماعی شرکت بهره برداری متروی تهران مبنی بر ترویج فرهنگ کتابخوانی و افزایش سرانه مطالعه در میان مسافران مترو هنگام سفرهای درون شهری این کتابخانه با ظرفیت بیش از ۵۰۰۰ عنوان کتاب به صورت فیزیکی از ساعت ۸ صبح تا ۲۰ به طور مستمر به ارایه خدمات می دهد.



JANUARY 29 , 2026

GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

*The mind of a wise man is the safest custody of secrets;
cheerfulness is the key to friendship; patience and forbearance
will conceal many defects.*

Imam Ali (AS)

Prayer Times » Noon:12:17 Evening: 17:48 Dawn: 5:40 (tomorrow) Sunrise: 7:06 (tomorrow)

Veteran film critic Parviz Nouri passes away

TEHRAN- Parviz Nouri, a veteran Iranian film critic, screenwriter, and director, passed away in San Francisco on Tuesday due to throat cancer. He was 87.

Nouri was one of the prominent critics in Iranian cinema, beginning his career in the 1950s. He contributed critiques for various publications, including "Film Critique," "Today's Film," and "Shahrvand Emrooz Weekly," where he reviewed Iranian films.

In addition to his critical work, Nouri had a penchant for filmmaking, directing notable works such as "Hakimbashi," "Dawn of Explosion," and others. He also appeared in the first episode of the film "Tehran, Tehran," directed by the late Dariush Mehrjui.

Beyond directing and screenwriting, Nouri



ri was an influential translator and expert in the field of cinema. His translations include significant works such as "Japanese Cinema," "Principles of Film Editing," and "The Man Who Knew Too Much."

41st Fajr International Music Festival to be held in Tehran

TEHRAN- The 41st edition of the Fajr International Music Festival is set to commence in Tehran on February 9.

Organized by the Deputy of Artistic Affairs of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, in collaboration with the Music Office of the Culture Ministry, the Iran Music Association, and the Rudaki Foundation, this edition of the festival, under the directorship of Arash Amini, will feature a wide range of artists and musical ensembles, IRNA reported on Wednesday.

The selected works will be performed across 12 venues. The festival has been organized in six sections of Iranian Music, Choirs, Performances by Children and Youth Groups, Fusion Music and Pop Music Genres, Classical Music, and Regional Music.

The 41st Fajr International Music Festival was previously scheduled to run from January 21 to February 17. However, due to the recent unrests in the country, the dates were revised and rescheduled for February 9 to 15.

The Fajr Music Festival stands as Iran's most prestigious annual celebration of the country's rich and diverse musical heritage. Held in the ten days leading up to the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution—a period known as the Fajr (Dawn) ceremonies—the festival serves as a national platform for artistic excellence.

It curates a program that bridges tradition and innovation, featuring distinct competitive and non-competitive sections. Audiences experience the depth of classical Persian music, the vibrant sounds of regional and ethnic folk traditions, the discipline of choral and orchestral works, and contemporary expressions in fusion and pop genres.

By bringing together master musicians, emerging talents, scholars, and the public, the festival not only showcases artistic achievement but also fosters cultural dialogue and preserves Iran's intangible musical legacy for future generations.

Cartoon of Day



The Gaza's List
Cartoonist: Franco Juri from Slovenia

Iranian artist pens truth on Venezuela's front page

TEHRAN- An Iranian artist has articulated the nation's perspective on recent developments through the platform of a major Venezuelan publication.

On Tuesday, the Venezuelan national newspaper El Correo del Orinoco featured a detailed commentary by Iranian cartoonist and graphic designer Masoud Shojai Tabatabai. The piece, which presents an analysis of current conditions in Iran and critiques the adversarial policies of the United States and the Zionist regime, was published under the title "Neither Wars nor Threats Will Impose a Lie!"

The article originated as a personal correspondence, with the Iranian artist sharing his insights with his Venezuelan colleague Iván Lira. In a gesture of solidarity, Lira enriched the text with an introduction and conclusion before facilitating its publication to a broad Latin American readership. The full text of this significant op-ed is presented below.

Neither wars nor threats will impose a lie!

Iván Lira – Masoud Shojai Tabatabai

I write with urgency to echo a message I have received from Iran, a message from Masoud Shojai Tabatabai, a great Iranian artist and cultural promoter and director of the Tehran Cartoon House. He is a key figure in employing comic art as a tool for cultural diplomacy and anti-imperialist resistance. Under his leadership, major artistic and cultural events with international impact have been held, including critical exhibitions on the genocide in Palestine and the role of the United States and Israel—making him an important actor in the struggle for the autonomy of the Global South's narrative.

Here I share his message with you:

"Hello Iván, today I came to Mehr News Agency to use the agency's internet to publish images related to the biennial, the judges, and the winners on my page. As you know, in my country, many problems have arisen due

La fuerza de la unidad

Roy Daza

La sociedad venezolana está siendo sometida a una prueba inimaginable, a una agresión sin límite y sin precedentes en doscientos años de vida republicana, pero lejos de amilanarse, muestra a otros pueblos del mundo lo que significa la unidad.

En Venezuela emerge un sentimiento nacional que se expresa por millones en las calles y en ese territorio nuevo de la política: las redes sociales, con un objetivo preciso, claro, contundente: exigir la liberación inmediata del Presidente Nicolás Maduro y de la Primera Dama y Diputada, Cilia Flores,

to the interventions of the United States and Israel. Trump and Netanyahu personally declared war against Iran. These bitter events, alongside bombings, sanctions, and psychological warfare, have affected the reality of our people's lives.

In Iran, 47 years after the Islamic Revolution, those who left the country and migrated to the United States, in cooperation with Israel, have organized activities against Iran around the world and use symbols such as the Lion and Sun flag alongside the Israeli flag.

Despite all this, on January 12, 2026, millions of Iranians took to the streets to protest these pressures. But the global power of money, using fake news and severe media blockade, does not allow the real voice of our people to be heard. I am certain that they will also attempt to delete this message.

Some exiled artists, such as Saman Torabi, who lives in Canada, hold cultural and satirical events and exhibitions against Iran. These individuals are not inside Iran. I speak with those who have remained inside the country. Fortunately, the current situation is calm, and if Trump does not drag us into war, we will not face problems.

The biennials, competitions, and art halls organized by the Iran Cartoon House continue on their path, and activities are proceeding normally. Exhibitions are

¡Ni guerras ni amenazas impondrán la mentira!

Iván Lira-Massoud Shojai Tabatabai

Escribo con urgencia para hacermeco de un mensaje que he recibido desde Irán, de parte de Massoud Shojai Tabatabai, gran artista y promotor cultural iraní, director de la Casa de la Caricatura de Teherán. Figura clave en el empleo del arte satírico como herramienta de diplomacia cultural y resistencia antimperialista. Bajo su dirección, se organizan importantes eventos artísticos y culturales de impacto internacional sobre el Genocidio palestino y exposiciones críticas hacia Estados Unidos e Israel. Posicionándolo como un actor clave en la batalla por la autonomía narrativa del Sur Global. Aquí les comparto su mensaje:

Hola Iván, hoy vine a la reunión de la Asamblea de los artistas realistas, cuyo rey dejó el país hace 45 años después de la Revolución Islámica y amiró

open to the public, awards will be presented at the appropriate time, and images and videos will be published as usual.

So please be our voice, the voice of real people inside Iran. Be careful not to be deceived by fake news—news that seeks to push the country toward chaos and war. Thank you for publishing this message." — Masoud

At a time when bombs, sanctions, and psychological operations seek to break the will of nations, voices like that of Masoud Shojai Tabatabai remind us that the first bastion of dignity is truth and memory. This message, written from the heart of Iran under military threats, media warfare, and information sabotage, is not merely an exposure; it is a declaration of existence in the face of those who wish to erase an entire country from the political and symbolic map of the world.

When imperialism pretends to speak "in the name of the people," one must immediately listen to the voices of those who have stayed, who create, who work, and who resist within their own borders. Satirical art, political cartooning, and cultural spaces in Tehran remain active despite the pressures; this itself is evidence that Iranian society is neither defeated nor isolated, but rather engaged in a full-scale struggle for the independence of its own narrative.

These voices must not be ren-



reales dentro de Irán, y tengan cuidado de no dejarse engañar por noticias falsas que solo

dered invisible, and the loudspeaker must not be handed solely to certain exiles who legitimize the agenda of war and sanctions. From our Latin America—which itself has faced bombings, sanctions, media warfare, and threats of intervention—this testimony resonates as a restless mirror for hegemonic power and as a call for effective solidarity among the nations of the Global South.

Being the voice of real people inside Iran is not the repetition of slogans; it is the defense of every nation's right to narrate its own history, express its own pain, decide its own future, and have no spokesperson appointed by its enemies.

I publish this message as a commitment—a commitment not to expose fabricated lies, to distrust any narrative that always portrays certain countries as "problems" and never as "victims" or "rights-holders." Let the words that arrive from Tehran not be lost in the clamor of censorship, but circulate, be shared, and provoke debate; so that they may become yet another wall against the normalization of war and genocide. So that it is clear that in the face of drones, blockades, and campaigns of hatred, people still have the last word—and as long as artists, journalists, and citizens are willing to break the information blockade, lies will never be able to be imposed as destiny.

These voices must not be ren-

Book exhibition at Kanoon displaying 300 titles by Iranian expats

TEHRAN – A book exhibition titled "Tak Khal" (literally meaning Ace), featuring 300 published works by Iranian expats in various languages, is underway at the Reference Library of the Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (Kanoon), in Tehran.

The Reference Library of Kanoon recently issued a public call inviting Iranian authors to donate or lend books they have published abroad in different languages, Mehr reported.

Following this call, Iranian writers, illustrators, and publishers living overseas sent 300 book titles to the Kanoon Reference Library. All the works are now on display in the exhibition.

The exhibition takes its name from one of the submitted books. "Tak Khal," written by Payam Ebrahimi, has so far been translated into seven languages and, as a symbol of the international presence and impact of Iranian works, inspired the naming of the exhibition.

The book has been translated into English and published under the title "Champ". It is a picture book from a talented Iranian author and illustrator duo, Payam Ebrahimi and Reza Dalvand.

It is the story of a boy named Abtin who was born into an athletic family. Everyone in his family is a champion. So, he had to learn to eat, walk, sleep, and dream like a champion. But he doesn't like to be a champion.

Abtin is nothing like the rest of his family. All his family members are fiercely competitive sports champions, and they expect Abtin to become a great athlete too. But he is a reader, an artist, and has his own way of doing things. Despite his family's best efforts, Abtin remains stubbornly himself. Wanting

his family to be proud of him, he comes up with a plan to make them happy: a plan that doesn't go quite as expected.

The book was listed in the Bologna Bookfair 2018, selected in the Sharjah Children's Illustration Exhibition 2018, listed in White Ravens 2019, acclaimed and recommended by the Children's Book Council of Iran in 2020, and selected as Book of the Year 2024 by Book for Keeps.

A powerful and honest story of continuing to be yourself, despite the pressure to conform, "Champ" is a book for anyone who marches to the beat of their own drum: for the artists in a science family, or the readers in a sports family. It is a book for those around the world who have resisted and continue to do so, no matter what.

This reassuring, quirky tale mocks outrageous parental demands. Kids will chuckle at the conclusion; those whose parents have high expectations will recognize that the comic, over-exaggerated illustrations are sardonic commentaries. Readers will appreciate self-confident Abtin, an actual champ because he recognizes his own worth and, as an artist, creatively fixes his humorously outrageous situation. A winning reminder that those who believe in themselves are true champs.

The kooky, surreal drawings, with exaggerated and menacing relatives lordling it over Abtin in strangely formal indoor settings, certainly make this a unique-looking picture book.

The messages of the book include accepting differences in all cases, avoiding humiliation, and refraining from imposing strictures. Parents should believe in their kids, and kids believe in themselves. By reading the book,

the new generation can see a hero within themselves and grow stronger and more successful than the previous generations.

The book can also help teachers lead Q&A sessions with students about their talents, skills, and career aspirations. Talent searches should begin in schools and families, and this book could initiate a new dialogue with students about their aspirations. Additionally, a workshop where students can paint their dreams for the future would be really fun.

Payam Ebrahimi, 37, started writing stories when he was five years old. At the age of 16, he started working for magazines as a humorist. He studied nuclear physics at university but still kept writing. As a university student, he worked as a graphic designer, film editor, teacher, and journalist, but he never quit writing. Now he is working as a copywriter, editor, and teacher, and still keeps writing stories.

Illustrator Reza Dalvand, 36, has published more than 15 books in Iran, Europe, and Asia, including "Where Is My House?" and "The Gluttonous Washing Machine," "Gulistan" and "Mrs. Bibi's Elephant".

His works have been showcased in many solo and group exhibitions in England, Japan, South Korea, Ukraine, and several other countries.

Alongside the "Tak Khal" exhibition, specialized discussion panels as well as side programs are also planned.

The book exhibition will be open until February 19 at the Kanoon Reference Library, located at the Ahmadrza Ahmadi Hall of Shahid Malek Shamsan Complex, Shahid Seyed Hassan Nasrallah Street, Shahid Beheshti Street. Visiting hours are from 8 am to 7 pm, and admission is free for the public.