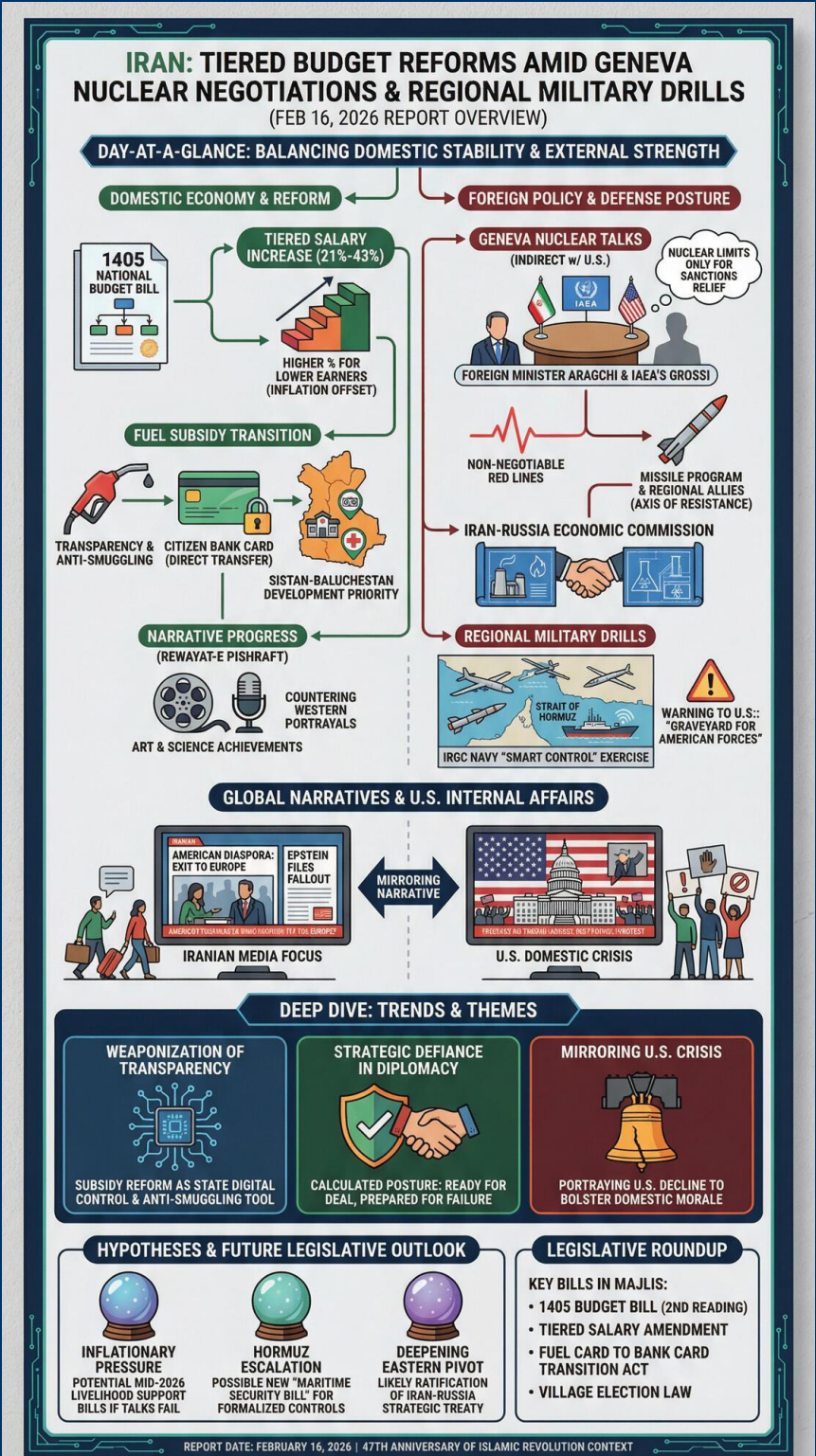


# TODAY'S MEDIA TRENDS

## IRINN

FEBRUARY 16, 2026

THE GDELT PROJECT



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## IRAN ADVANCES TIERED BUDGET REFORMS AMID GENEVA NUCLEAR NEGOTIATIONS AND REGIONAL MILITARY DRILLS

### DAY-AT-A-GLANCE

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On February 16, 2026, the Iranian Majlis (Parliament) significantly advanced the 1405 national budget bill, focusing on a tiered salary increase of 21% to 43% designed to favor lower-income earners and a landmark transition of fuel subsidies directly to citizen bank cards. Domestically, the government is emphasizing "Narrative Progress" (Rewayat-e Pishraft) to counter Western media portrayals, while the IRGC Navy launched the "Smart Control of the Strait of Hormuz" military exercise to demonstrate maritime dominance. The return of 85 recently recovered remains of Iran-Iraq War martyrs further served to bolster nationalist sentiment during the 47th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution.

In the international arena, Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi arrived in Geneva for a second round of indirect nuclear talks with the United States, mediated by Oman. Iranian officials, including Ali Larijani, have explicitly stated that Tehran will discuss nuclear limits

only in exchange for comprehensive sanction relief, while the nation's missile program and regional alliances remain strictly non-negotiable. Concurrently, state-affiliated media reported heavily on domestic instability in the U.S., specifically the "Great American Exit" of citizens fleeing to Europe following the 2024 election and the political fallout from the release of the "Epstein Files."

### MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

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#### Domestic Policy and the 1405 National Budget

- The Majlis approved a tiered salary increase for the 1405 fiscal year (starting March 2026), ranging from 21% to 43%, with higher percentages allocated to the lowest earners to offset inflation. ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#))
- A major reform was passed to transfer fuel quotas/subsidies directly to the bank cards of vehicle owners, aiming to increase transparency and reduce fuel smuggling at the borders. ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#))
- Significant funding was allocated for social services, including 277 trillion tomans for the Social Security Organization and 130 trillion tomans for micro-employment and home-based businesses. ([Source](#), [Source](#))
- Development of the Sistan-Baluchestan province remains a high priority, with the Foundation of the Oppressed and the Executive Headquarters of Imam's Directive (Setad) announcing 600 billion tomans in new investments for schools, health centers, and "Smart Schools." ([Source](#), [Source](#))

#### Foreign Affairs and Nuclear Diplomacy

- Foreign Minister Araghchi arrived in Geneva to meet with Omani mediators and IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi to discuss technical frameworks for a potential nuclear

deal. ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#)) • Ali Larijani, acting as a key envoy, emphasized that while Iran is open to discussing "nuclear weaponry" concerns, it will not negotiate its missile defense or its support for regional allies (the "Axis of Resistance"). ([Source](#), [Source](#)) • The 19th Joint Iran-Russia Economic Commission commenced, focusing on increasing bilateral trade to \$20 billion and finalizing agreements on gas imports from Russia and nuclear power plant expansion in Sirik. ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#))

## Defense and Regional Security

- The IRGC Navy began a large-scale maritime exercise in the Strait of Hormuz, testing "smart control" technologies, cruise missiles with AI-guided systems, and long-range drones capable of striking targets within 1,000 kilometers. ([Source](#), [Source](#)) • Senior military leaders, including Major General Mousavi, issued warnings to the U.S. administration, claiming that any military aggression would result in the Persian Gulf becoming a "graveyard for American forces." ([Source](#), [Source](#)) • Tensions were reported between Saudi Arabia and the UAE regarding control over oil-rich regions in Yemen, which Iranian analysts interpret as a breakdown in the U.S.-led regional security architecture. ([Source](#))

## Global Narratives and U.S. Internal Affairs

- Extensive coverage was given to the "American Diaspora" in Spain, documenting middle-class Americans moving abroad due to the political climate following Donald Trump's return to power. ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#)) • Iranian media highlighted the "Epstein Nightmare" for the Trump administration, citing the release of thousands of pages of emails allegedly linking the U.S. President to the disgraced financier. ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#)) •

The "Narrative Progress" initiative held its second national award ceremony, encouraging Iranian artists and journalists to focus on industrial and scientific achievements to counter Western "propaganda." ([Source](#), [Source](#))

## DEEP DIVE: TRENDS AND THEMES

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**Weaponization of Transparency and Subsidy Reform:** The move to link fuel subsidies directly to bank cards is more than a fiscal adjustment; it is a strategic attempt to modernize the Iranian economy under the "Resistance Economy" banner. By digitizing these benefits, the government seeks to eliminate the middleman and the black-market "mafias" that thrive on border smuggling, particularly in provinces like Sistan-Baluchestan. This trend suggests a long-term goal of state-level digital financial control to mitigate the effects of banking sanctions. ([Source](#), [Source](#))

**Strategic Defiance in Diplomacy:** Iranian rhetoric surrounding the Geneva talks shows a calculated posture of "diplomatic strength." By deploying a "full team" of economic and technical experts, Tehran is signaling that it is ready for a deal, but its insistence on the missile program as a "national security red line" indicates it is also prepared for the talks to fail. The frequent mention of "psychological warfare" by the U.S. (referencing aircraft carrier movements) suggests that Iran is consciously training its public to view international diplomacy as an extension of the battlefield. ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#))

**Mirroring U.S. Domestic Crisis:** A significant portion of the news cycle is dedicated to portraying the United States as a declining power plagued by internal division, moral decay (the Epstein files), and "brain drain." By

showcasing Americans moving to Spain or Germany, the Iranian state media is attempting to flip the traditional "immigrant" narrative, positioning Iran as a stable, sovereign alternative to a chaotic West. This serves to bolster domestic morale by suggesting that "freedom" in the U.S. is illusory and dangerous. ([Source](#), [Source](#), [Source](#))

## HYPOTHESES AND FUTURE LEGISLATIVE OUTLOOK

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**Hypothesis 1: Inflationary Pressure on the 1405 Budget.** Despite the 21-43% salary increases, if the Geneva talks fail to provide immediate sanctions relief, the resulting currency devaluation may render these raises moot. We should expect the Majlis to introduce supplemental "livelihood support" bills by mid-2026 to prevent further domestic unrest.

**Hypothesis 2: Escalation in the Strait of Hormuz.** The focus on "Smart Control" in current drills suggests Iran is readying a more sophisticated "blockade-lite" capability. Legally, the Majlis may soon review a "Maritime Security Bill" that formalizes new fees or inspection requirements for vessels passing through Iranian-claimed waters, citing environmental or security risks.

**Hypothesis 3: Deepening of the "Eastern Pivot."** The Iran-Russia Economic Commission's goal of \$20 billion in trade is likely to result in a series of legislative ratifications regarding the 20-year Comprehensive Strategic Treaty. This will likely involve granting Russian firms preferential access to Iranian mineral and energy sectors, which may face some pushback from nationalist factions within the Majlis.

## LEGISLATIVE ROUNDUP

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The Majlis is currently focused on the second-reading stage of the 1405 National Budget Bill, with heavy emphasis on public sector wages and energy subsidy distribution. Key sessions included the integration of provincial development targets into the national framework.

### BILLS DISCUSSED/DEBATED:

- **1405 National Budget Bill (General Provisions):** Sets overall spending limits, including 3,000 trillion tomans for military and civil servant salaries and 900 trillion tomans for retirees. ([Source](#), [Source](#))
- **Salary Increase Amendment (tiered 21%-43%):** Specifically targets the "inverse-staircase" model to ensure lower-paid government employees receive the highest percentage of inflation adjustment. ([Source](#), [Source](#))
- **Fuel Card to Bank Card Transition Act:** Mandates the technical transition of the "Smart Fuel System" to direct cash-equivalent transfers to citizens' bank accounts. ([Source](#), [Source](#))
- **Village and Rural Council Election Law:** Regulations governing the upcoming May 2026 elections, including candidate registration and financial transparency. ([Source](#), [Source](#))

### HEARINGS & PRESS EVENTS:

- **Araghchi-Grossi Technical Summit (Geneva):** A high-level technical meeting to align Iranian nuclear activities with IAEA safeguards while negotiating "Omani-style" indirect messages to Washington. ([Source](#), [Source](#))
- **19th Iran-Russia Economic Commission (Tehran):** Opening session chaired by the Ministry of Petroleum to coordinate oil, gas, and nuclear energy cooperation. ([Source](#), [Source](#))
- **Chief Justice Ejei's Provincial Visit (Isfahan):** A public hearing addressing economic corruption cases, water



rights for the Zayandeh-rud river, and legal proceedings for "terrorist elements" from the January disturbances. ([Source](#), [Source](#)) • **Se-tad Social Headquarters Briefing (Sistan-Baluchestan)**: A review of poverty alleviation progress, focusing on "Date Palm Revitalization" and textile manufacturing employment. ([Source](#), [Source](#))

## ABOUT THIS REPORT

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**Today's Media Trends** is a public interest experiment in applying deep thematic trend analysis to television news coverage from around the world to explore how responsibly applied advanced AI can help journalists and scholars better understand the overarching trends, themes and patterns of our global world.

**No data is used to train or tune any AI model.**

Each morning, in collaboration with the Internet Archive's TV News Archive, we apply Google's Gemini 3 to deeply examine yesterday's coverage from each television news channel to tease out the overarching themes

and trends of its news coverage into a richly annotated thematic analysis. Each high-level insight is connected back to the original broadcast, allowing journalists and scholars to understand the dominate themes and trends and instantly click out to the underlying sources for details.

By helping journalists and scholars see the broader trends and patterns of global news coverage, this analysis helps them identify relevant stories and coverage they might not otherwise have encountered and uncover connections, emphases and narrative shifts that enable more comprehensive reporting and deeper, evidence-based research.

This report is entirely machine generated using Gemini 3 and may include errors and omissions. Please verify all findings. No data is used to train or tune any AI model.

For questions or suggestions, please contact [kalev.leetaru5@gmail.com](mailto:kalev.leetaru5@gmail.com). You can also learn more about the GDEL T Project at <https://blog.gdel tproject.org/> and the Internet Archive's TV News Archive at <https://archive.org/details/tv>.