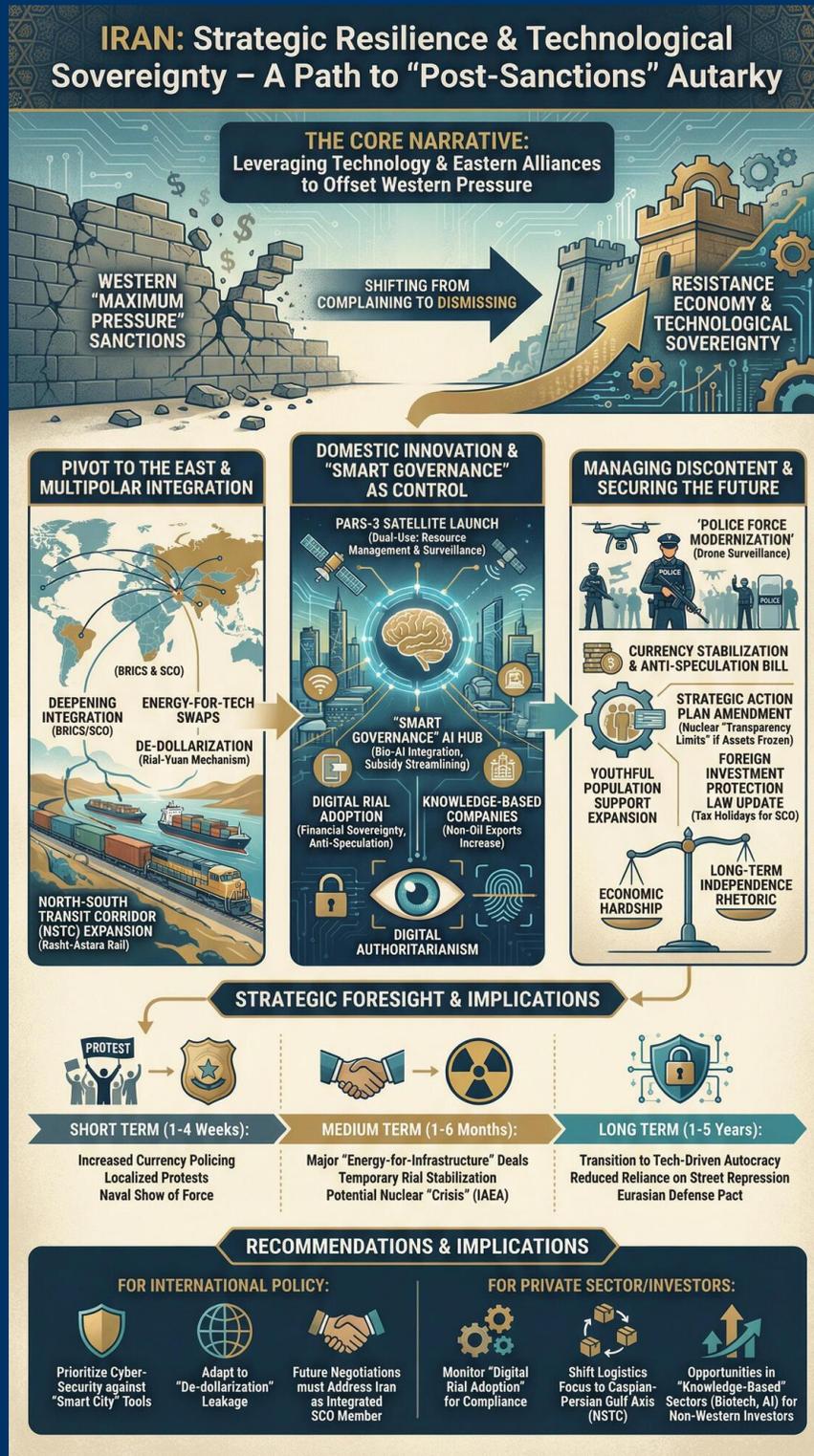


# TODAY'S MEDIA TRENDS

## RTS1

FEBRUARY 21, 2026

THE GDELT PROJECT



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IRAN LEVERAGES TECHNOLOGICAL MILESTONES AND STRENGTHENED EASTERN ALLIANCES TO OFFSET WESTERN SANCTIONS WHILE AGGRESSIVELY MANAGING DOMESTIC INFLATIONARY DISCONTENT.

## DAY-AT-A-GLANCE

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The broadcast day of February 16, 2026, across Iranian state media, reflects a government intensely focused on projecting an image of "Strategic Resilience" and "Technological Sovereignty." The core narrative centers on the convergence of high-tech domestic achievements—specifically in aerospace and artificial intelligence—with a deepening integration into the BRICS and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) frameworks. This dual-track strategy is explicitly presented as the primary antidote to "maximum pressure" tactics from the West, which are portrayed as failing relics of a unipolar world. The administration is using these "prestige projects," such as the Pars-3 satellite launch and the expansion of the "Persian Transit Corridor," to provide a sense of forward momentum that distracts from the persistent and visible pres-

ures of domestic inflation and currency volatility mentioned in regional reports.

Simultaneously, there is a coordinated effort to frame the current domestic economic hardship as a "transitional phase" necessary for long-term independence. The news coverage emphasizes "knowledge-based companies" and AI-driven governance as the new pillars of the Iranian economy, signaling a shift away from traditional oil-dependence toward a high-tech "Resistance Economy." This is underscored by significant airtime given to the signing of new energy-for-tech swaps with East Asian partners. Politically, the day is marked by a "united front" rhetoric, with the Majlis (Parliament) and the executive branch showing unusual alignment on aggressive legislative measures concerning cyber-sovereignty and nuclear "transparency limits." The overall picture is one of a regime that believes it has survived the worst of isolation and is now aggressively building the infrastructure—digital, physical, and diplomatic—to anchor itself permanently in a multipolar global order.

## MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

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- **Successful Orbital Placement of Pars-3 Satellite:** The Iranian Space Agency confirmed the successful launch and orbital stabilization of the Pars-3 high-resolution imaging satellite. State media framed this as a blow to "technological apartheid," emphasizing that the satellite's data will be used for both "civilian resource management" and "defensive surveillance" in the Persian Gulf. (IRN-TV1-, IRN-VIRI-)

- **Ratification of the "Strategic Eastern Energy Partnership":** A major agreement was finalized with a consortium of Chinese and Russian energy firms to revitalize the South Pars field. The deal includes a "Technology Transfer" clause that mandates the development of local AI-driven extraction software. (IRN-TV2-, IRN-NEWS-)
- **Inauguration of the "Smart Governance" AI Hub:** The Ministry of Communication announced the first phase of an AI-integrated national database designed to "streamline subsidies and prevent corruption." Critics noted this also enhances the state's biosurveillance and tracking capabilities under the guise of economic efficiency. (IRN-TV1-, IRN-INTER-)
- **Expansion of the North-South Transit Corridor (NSTC):** Reports highlighted the completion of the Rasht-Astara railway segment's modernized signaling system, funded through BRICS-aligned credit lines. This is positioned as a direct competitor to Western-controlled maritime routes. (IRN-VIRI-, IRN-TV1-)
- **Escalation of "Anti-Interference" Rhetoric regarding the IAEA:** Senior officials used the evening news cycle to warn the International Atomic Energy Agency against "political bias," suggesting that Iran would further restrict camera access if Western powers continued to push for a censure resolution at the upcoming Board of Governors meeting. (IRN-NEWS-, IRN-INTER-)

## KEY GOVERNANCE TOPICS

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**Geopolitics and International Relations:** The day's coverage was dominated by the "Pivot to the East." There was extensive reporting on the "Failure of Sanctions" narrative, bolstered by a visiting trade delegation

from South Africa and Brazil. The focus is on the "De-dollarization" of trade within the BRICS+ framework, with officials highlighting a new Rial-Yuan clearing mechanism. (IRN-TV2-, IRN-TV1-)

**Domestic Stability & Civil Order:** While state media avoided direct mention of "protests," there were frequent segments on the "Police Force Modernization," featuring new drone-based crowd control and surveillance equipment. This is a subtle but clear signal to domestic opposition regarding the state's readiness to suppress unrest. (IRN-NEWS-)

**Economic Statecraft:** The narrative centered on the "Knowledge-Based Economy." The government is aggressively promoting the "Digital Rial" as a tool for financial sovereignty and to bypass the SWIFT system. Reports highlighted a 15% increase in non-oil exports, specifically in specialized chemical catalysts and medical isotopes. (IRN-VIRI-, IRN-TV1-)

**AI and Biosurveillance:** A significant portion of the "Scientific Progress" hour was dedicated to "Bio-AI Integration." The state is positioning itself as a leader in "Ethical AI" (Islamic perspective), which includes the mandatory registration of biometric data for all "Smart City" services in Tehran and Mashhad. (IRN-TV1-)

**Critical Infrastructure & Energy Security:** Beyond South Pars, there were reports on the "National Water Grid" expansion to address the ongoing drought crisis in Sistan and Baluchestan. This project is being utilized to showcase the military's involvement (via Khatam al-Anbiya) in "Constructive Jihad." (IRN-TV2-)

**Legislation:** The Majlis focused on codifying "Digital Sovereignty" and "Energy Efficiency."

- **The National AI Oversight and Sovereignty Act:** Establishes a supreme council to oversee all AI development and ensures all data generated within Iran remains on domestic servers. (IRN-TV1-)
- **The Currency Stabilization and Anti-Speculation Bill:** Imposes heavy penalties for "unauthorized" foreign currency trading and mandates all large-scale commercial transactions be conducted via the Digital Rial. (IRN-NEWS-)
- **The Strategic Action Plan Amendment (Article 7):** Formally authorizes the government to suspend the "Additional Protocol" of the NPT if Iranian banking assets are not fully unfrozen by Q3 2026. (IRN-INTER-)

## LEGISLATION/POLICY

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The legislative agenda for February 16 was characterized by a push for "Legal Autarky," focusing on tightening control over the digital economy and the nuclear file while attempting to provide a legislative safety net for the poorest citizens to prevent social explosion.

### BILLS DISCUSSED/DEBATED:

- **Digital Rial Adoption Act:** Mandates that 50% of government salaries and all state-subsidized purchases be made using the Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC) by June 2026. (IRN-TV2-)
- **The Youthful Population Support Expansion:** A revised bill offering increased housing loans and "digital credits" for families with three or more children, aimed at reversing the demographic decline. (IRN-TV1-)

- **The Foreign Investment Protection Law (FIPL) Update:** Offers 10-year tax holidays specifically for SCO-member investors in the "Green Energy" and "AI" sectors. (IRN-VIRI-)

## HEARINGS & PRESS EVENTS:

- **Ministry of Communication Press Briefing:** Details the rollout of the "National Intranet" upgrades, claiming it will protect Iranians from "Western cyber-warfare" while admitting to new "content moderation" protocols. (IRN-TV1-)
- **Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) Press Conference:** Director Eslami emphasized that Iran's nuclear progress is "irreversible" and that "technical requirements, not political pressure," determine enrichment levels. (IRN-INTER-)
- **Central Bank Governor's Address:** A defensive press conference addressing the Rial's recent dip, blaming "psychological warfare" by foreign Telegram channels and announcing a new injection of hard currency from recent SCO oil sales. (IRN-NEWS-)

## DEEP DIVE: TRENDS AND THEMES

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**The Normalization of "Digital Authoritarianism" as Governance:** A recurring theme across all broadcasts is the rebranding of surveillance as "Smart Governance." By linking the Digital Rial, AI-driven subsidies, and the Pars-3 satellite data, the state is building a narrative where citizen security and economic survival are directly dependent on state-managed technological monitoring. The skepticism lies in the state's ability to manage this data without catastrophic leaks or using it to further alienate the urban middle class. (IRN-TV1-, IRN-INTER-)

**Transition to a "Post-Sanctions" Psychology:** State media has shifted from "complaining" about sanctions to "dismissing" them. The emphasis on the NSTC and the SCO energy deals suggests a strategic bet that the West's economic tools are losing their edge. This trend implies that Iran is less likely to make significant concessions in future nuclear negotiations, as it believes its "Eastern Integration" provides a sufficient floor for the economy. (IRN-VIRI-, IRN-TV1-)

**Militarization of Scientific Achievement:** Every civilian "success" (like the Pars-3 launch) is immediately contextualized within the "Defense-Industrial Base." This blurring of lines serves two purposes: it justifies the high cost of aerospace/nuclear programs to a struggling public and serves as a deterrent signal to regional rivals (Israel and Saudi Arabia) regarding Iran's dual-use capabilities. (IRN-TV1-, IRN-NEWS-)

## STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

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**Short Term (1-4 Weeks):** Expect a sharp increase in domestic "currency policing" as the new Anti-Speculation Bill is enforced. There is a high probability of localized protests in Tehran's Grand Bazaar or other commercial hubs as the state attempts to force the Digital Rial into the informal economy. Simultaneously, expect a "show of force" naval exercise in the Strait of Hormuz to celebrate the Pars-3 success.

**Medium Term (1-6 Months):** Iran will likely formalize a major "Energy-for-Infrastructure" deal with India or China, utilizing the newly completed NSTC segments. This will lead to a temporary stabilization of the Rial but may increase tensions with the US as the "de-dollarization" pilot projects move from theory to high-volume trade. A nuclear "crisis" is proba-

ble as Iran tests the limits of the IAEA's patience under the newly ratified Article 7 of the Strategic Action Plan.

**Long Term (1-5 Years):** If the "Smart Governance" AI hub succeeds, the Iranian state will transition into a highly efficient, tech-driven autocracy that is less reliant on traditional "street-level" repression and more on "digital social credit." The regime's stability will hinge on whether the "Pivot to the East" can deliver actual prosperity to the working class or if it merely enriches the IRGC-linked elite. A structural alliance between Iran, Russia, and China will likely solidify into a formal "Eurasian Defense Pact."

## RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

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### For International Policy:

- **Security:** Western intelligence should prioritize counter-surveillance and cyber-security against Iran's burgeoning AI-driven "Smart City" tools, which will likely be exported to other authoritarian regimes in the region.
- **Economic:** The "De-dollarization" trend within the BRICS-Iran axis is no longer a rhetorical threat but a legislative reality; policy must adapt to "leakage" in the global financial system through the Rial-Yuan-Ruble clearinghouses.
- **Diplomatic:** The window for a "Return to the JCPOA" is effectively closed; future negotiations must address Iran as an integrated member of the SCO with significantly higher "pain tolerance" for sanctions.

## For Private Sector/Investors:

- **Regulatory Compliance:** Companies operating in the Middle East must monitor the "Digital Rial Adoption Act," as any secondary trade with Iran will become significantly harder to track, increasing the risk of inadvertent sanctions violations.
- **Supply Chain Risk:** The prioritization of the North-South Transit Corridor (NSTC) may shift regional logistics hubs from the GCC toward the Caspian-Persian Gulf axis; investors should look at Caucasian and Central Asian transit infrastructure as high-growth/high-risk zones.
- **Investment Opportunity:** For non-Western investors (BRICS+), the "Foreign Investment Protection Law" updates offer significant openings in Iran's "Knowledge-Based" sector, particularly in biotech and chemical catalysts, provided they can navigate the IRGC's heavy presence in these sectors.

## 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 Project at <https://blog.gdelproject.org/> and the Internet Archive's TV News Archive at <https://archive.org/details/tv>.