

# Bil Gardani, a 2,000-year-old ritual in Markazi Province



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## Iranica Desk

*Bil Gardani* is a 2,000-year-old ceremony held in the city of Nimvar, in the central province of Markazi every year. It was registered on Iran's National Heritage List in 2010.

A ritual which has its roots in people's beliefs, *Bil Gardani* means the turning of the shovel. It is tied to farming, which has been the main occupation of local people since ancient times.

Head of the city's Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Department, Mehdi La'lbar, told ISNA that the ritual is not only a demonstration of power to ill-wishers, but also a thanksgiving festival. In ad-

dition, people pray to God for more rain in the next cultivation season.

He noted that the ceremony is held after the dredging of the main river of Nimvar. Based on old customs, each farmer dredges the river based on the size of his farm.

"After the end of the dredging operation, farmers gather in the city's main square and tie seven shovels together with goat hair, in two groups of three and four," he continued.

La'lbar noted they use a special method to rotate the shovels above their heads, which requires skill and power.

He said there have been various beliefs among the people about the reason

behind the use of seven shovels in the ceremony. The number seven is somehow sacred for many Iranians. It also represents the seven heavens, from which rain is sent to their farmlands.

He noted that in the past, the river bottom was made of soil, and up to 120 people used to go for dredging it, but since it has been cemented, the number of farmers taking part in the process has decreased. He noted that in the past, dredging was carried out in mid-March, but presently it is done at the end of April.

Each bunch of shovels could weigh approximately 30 kilograms. Athletes can turn the shovels from five to 30 times around their

heads, in opposite directions.

During this time people begin to pray for rain, the heavenly blessing. This involves the wish for the seven skies to start moving around and allow rain to fall upon the area in which they live. They want divine mercy in the form of rain, for their lives depend on the crops they harvest each year.

In addition to praying for the heavenly blessing, they take the opportunity to show their physical strength to their enemies so that they could remain in peace without any outside threat to their peaceful lives.

There are several other rain ceremonies held in various parts of Iran.

## Ardebil Province a hub of water tourism

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The northwestern province of Ardebil, with numerous hot springs, waterfalls, natural lakes and newly built dams has a suitable potential to develop water tourism.

As a subcategory of nature tourism, water tourism can draw a large number of travelers to Ardebil Province. They take a trip to the region to use its therapeutic, recreational, or sports facilities, according to IRNA.

The thermal springs of various cities of the province host millions of Iranian and foreign tourists every year. Ardebil Province has more than 110 springs, 75 of which are thermal, that is why it is known as "The Land of Heavenly Springs".

Due to the establishment of several hydrotherapy complexes and development of hotels and accommodations in the province, especially in the city of Sarein, water tourism has been developed

significantly during the past three decades.

Moreover, the thermal springs of Nir, Meshginshahr and Khalkhal attract tourists from various parts of the country, thus significant opportunities are available for the development of water tourism there.

Meanwhile, numerous waterfalls which are scattered throughout the province are among the other natural sites which are highly attractive to tourists.

Although the enchanting waterfalls encourage many people to travel to the province in the spring and summer, they have their own charms in the winter when they freeze and create an amazing landscape.

In addition, the natural lakes of the province including Shourabil and Neor host people traveling to the province from various cities of the country throughout the year. Due to the development of the provincial capital



A hydrotherapy complex in Sarein  
alaedin.trave



Neor Lake  
rangard.com



Shourabil Lake, Ardebil  
soltansafar.com



A thermal spring in Nir  
iranhatonline.com

city of Ardebil in the past year, many local people visit Shourabil Lake, which is presently within the urban environment. A number of shops and accommodations have been

established in the area as well.

In fact, the infrastructures built in the province, especially the newly constructed dams, can be used for development of

water sports such as boating, fishing, diving and jet skiing. This is expected to lead to an increase in the number of visitors traveling to the region.

In order to realize the ob-

jective, Ardebil Regional Water Authority has expressed readiness to hand over its facilities to those investors who are willing to make investment in the sector.

Karim Qaraei, an official of the Ardebil Regional Water Authority told IRNA recently that in order to develop water sports in the region, plans have been drawn up to rent 11 dams of the province to those interested in related activities for a period of 20 years.

He said that the water sector of Ardebil Province has a unique potential providing a suitable opportunity for investors to not only develop their own businesses, but to also generate jobs in the province.

The director-general of Ardebil Province's Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization said that Ardebil Province is known as a tourist hub in the country, saying thanks to the plans devised for development of the tourism sector, the

province is expected to turn into one of the main destinations of foreign nationals traveling to Iran.

Referring to the increasing number of overseas tourists of the province, especially Arabic-speaking people, he said that a number of foreign investors including those from Arab countries expressed readiness to make investments in the sector.

Referring to the numerous hot and cold springs scattered across Ardebil Province, he added that the organization devised investment plans to support the businesspersons who are interested in investing in the tourism sector of the province, especially its health tourism sector.

He noted that 91 tourism investment projects have been implemented within the framework of "Ardebil 2023" event, pointing out that 40 projects are expected to go into operation in various parts of the province by mid-March 2024.