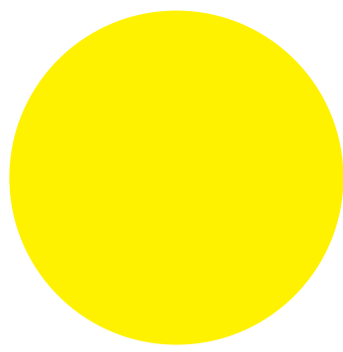


Iran cyberspace council votes to lift ban on WhatsApp, Google Play **7** >



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## Iran 'ready' to reopen embassy in Syria **7** >



Iran, Resistance spearheading fight against terrorism



By Ashkan Pirzadeh  
Strategic affairs expert

**OPINION EXCLUSIVE**

The Islamic Republic of Iran, colloquially known as the "Resistance State," has played an unparalleled role in the Middle East and Southwest Asia in combating terrorism and extremism. Following the emergence of extremist and terrorist groups in the region — which were growing like malignant cancer and had managed to affect a significant number of the countries in the region up to that point — it was Iran and its armed forces, particularly the Quds Force of the IRGC, that raised the banner of fighting terrorist movements and inflicted heavy defeats on them.

According to prominent analysts and politicians, eradicating terrorist groups like ISIS was expected to take nearly two decades. However, it was the Islamic Republic of Iran that — by lending its advisory assistance to legitimate governments of the region and fighting until the eradication of terrorism in the region — not only changed political equations but also demonstrated that the Resistance has an inconceivable power in resolving complex crises by relying on the will of the people.

Furthermore, Iran has taken giant strides in fulfilling its regional and international commitments and responsibilities by actively and effectively combating terrorism. Historically, considering its geopolitical and strategic position, Iran has always been exposed to a combination of internal and external threats. The experiences it gained in confronting and resolving such challenges have placed the country in a prominent position in managing complex regional crises.

Promoting resistance and combating terrorism and extremism is one of the most important components of the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The field and the diplomacy are two important arms that have been synergized in Iran, playing an effective role

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in defeating and combating extremist terrorist groups such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda.

## Building Bridges of Culture, Tourism Between Iran, Japan **4-5** >

**INTERVIEW EXCLUSIVE**



Saisho Yuta (R), the political counselor of Embassy of Japan in Iran, accompanied by his colleague Toyoko Morita, sits down for an interview with Iran Daily in the newspaper's office in Tehran. **HOSSEIN NAQIZADEH/IRAN DAILY**

Ex-Iran volleyball coach Ataei has 'unfinished job' with national team **6** >



Iran pioneers AI in oil industry with first WRFM center launch **2** >



Iran's forest ecosystems in peril, urgent action needed for conservation: **DoE chief** **8** >

Iran takes action as NY auction reveals more stolen ancient coins **8** >



## Pistachio is Iran's rich heritage, global commodity **3** >



Iranian pistachios are among the most important and valuable agricultural products in the country, playing a significant role in the national economy and non-oil exports. Known for their exceptional quality, unique flavor, and diverse cultivars, these strategic products have consistently attracted attention in both domestic and international markets. With a history spanning over three thousand years, pistachios represent an invaluable heritage from the heart of Iran's deserts, forming an essential part of the nation's culture and economy.

**3** >

# Iran pioneers AI in oil industry with first WRFM center launch

The Iranian oil sector is embracing AI technology with the launch of its first WRFM center, which aims to optimize real-time management of wells, reservoirs, and surface facilities using advanced analytics, according to senior government officials.

The WRFM center, unveiled by Hossein Afshin, vice president for Science, Technology, and Knowledge-Based Economy, represents a significant leap in digitizing Iran's oil industry. Speaking at the launch event, Afshin announced that the nation's first AI-powered oil well is set to debut next year at the Sepehr and Jofeir oil fields.

"This project sets the stage for integrating AI into the oil sector, with our first smart refinery under development in Qeshm," ISNA news agency cited Afshin as saying.

WRFM, an integrated approach to managing oil and gas fields, focuses on optimizing operations in three key areas: well management, reservoir management, and facilities management. It combines real-time data and advanced technologies such as AI to enhance decision-making and operational efficiency. By monitoring well performance, predicting reservoir behavior, and maintaining surface infrastructure, WRFM systems streamline operations, reduce downtime, and ensure sustain-

able production.

The WRFM center is designed to enhance real-time operations across oil wells, reservoirs, and surface facilities, leveraging advanced sensors, data management systems, and AI-powered analytics. The center, developed entirely with domestic expertise, contrasts with similar projects in neighboring countries that rely on international firms.

Afshin highlighted the project's strategic importance, stating that "reaching artificial intelligence requires achieving business intelligence first. In one year, AI capabilities will be added to this center to provide advanced solutions."

He further commended Pasargad Exploration and Production Company for spearheading the initiative, describing the project as a breakthrough. The company's involvement, he noted, paves the way for other firms to follow suit, with the nation's first smart refinery also under their leadership.

The WRFM center's first phase, built with a \$10 million investment, uses cutting-edge technology to monitor, transfer, and analyze data, enabling synchronized and real-time management of operations. To complete the subsequent phases, an additional \$5 million is required, which the government and stakeholders aim to secure within the next year.

Reiterating the long-term vision for AI integration, Afshin stated, "Machine learning algorithms and advanced analytics will transform processes, offering precise predictions, increased automation, and reduced costs and risks."

The WRFM system aims to elevate Iran's oil and gas operations to global standards. Combining well, reservoir, and facilities management, the center ensures operational efficiency by utilizing real-time data for informed decision-making.

The initiative is seen as a critical step toward practical digital transformation in upstream oilfield management. With advanced tools and AI-driven insights, it sets a benchmark for innovation and efficiency in Iran's oil industry, potentially serving as a model for other sectors.

Afshin said, "This investment isn't just an expenditure — it's a leap into a smarter, more efficient future for our oil sector, promising significant progress and global competitiveness."

## Booting oil production

Speaking at the ceremony, the CEO of Pasargad Exploration and Production Company announced that oil production from the Sepehr and Jofeir fields has surpassed 50,000 barrels per day, with hopes of achieving an additional



SHANA

30,000 barrels per day increase next year.

Ahmad Mohammadi noted that the WRFM center was established and operationalized in under a year through proper planning.

"With this center, we can monitor well and reservoir data online. The oil industry must embrace real-time data monitoring for decision-making," he said. Mohammadi emphasized that the initial development plan for the Sepehr and Jofeir fields was production-focused.

"In the first phase, we aimed for a daily output of 36,000 barrels from these fields, but production has reached

around 40,000 barrels per day. Currently, production from the Sepehr and Jofeir fields exceeds 50,000 barrels per day," he stated.

He added, "In developing fields, we must achieve the target production increase, which requires an investment of \$15 to \$25 million for every additional barrel produced."

Mohammadi further noted that with a 30,000-barrel-per-day increase next year, it would be possible to complete the second phase of the Sepehr and Jofeir field development two years ahead of schedule, boosting production capacity to 110,000 barrels per day.

## Oil gets lion's share in Iran's economic growth in H1

### Agricultural sector exceeds expectations



IRNA

#### Economy Desk

Preliminary findings on Iran's economic growth in the first half of the current Iranian year (started March 20) indicate that oil remains the primary driver of the country's economic growth. However, the agricultural sector has also demonstrated significant growth, outperforming industry and services in its contribution to the economy.

The quarterly reports of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) on economic growth are a key indicator of whether the economy is thriving or faltering. According to IRNA, a notable change in the second quarter's reporting is the shift in the base year from 2016 (1395 in the Iranian calendar) to 2021 (1400), aiming to provide a more accurate reflection of economic realities by adjusting for inflation.

#### Key economic indicators

Preliminary calculations from the CBI show that Iran's GDP at constant prices (the base year being 1400) reached 2,130.9 trillion rials in the second quarter of the current calendar year of 1403, reflecting a 2.7% growth compared to the same period in 1402. Excluding the oil sector, economic growth for the same period was 2.3%.

Industrial formation grew by 4.6%, government final consumption expenditures rose by 4.4%, and private consumption increased by 2.4% compared to the same quarter in 1402.

#### Economic performance in H1 of 1403

In the first half of the current Iranian year, sectoral growth rates were as follows:

- Oil and gas: 9.3%
- Agriculture, forestry, and fishing: 2.8%
- Industry and mining: 2.4%
- Services: 2.2%

These sectors contributed 0.7%, 0.4%, 0.8%, and 1.0 percentage points, respectively, to overall GDP growth during this period.

Industrial growth, particularly in large manufacturing facilities with over 100 employees, was 1.3%, with these facilities accounting for 70% of the industrial sector's value added. Among the 24 key industrial subcategories, 15 reported positive growth, including chemical products, basic metals, food production, power generation, and electrical machinery.

#### Expenditure analysis

During the first six months of 1403, gross fixed capital formation grew by 4.1%, as private sector consumption rose by 1.9%, and government overall consumption increased by 0.6%, compared to the corresponding period of last year.

Notably, machinery investment in Q1 and Q2 of the current Iranian year rose by 0.9% and 4.4%, respectively, reflecting improved economic activity compared to the same periods in 1402.

Investment growth, measured by 'gross fixed capital formation' at constant prices of 1400, increased by 4.6% compared to the same quarter in 1402. Investment in machinery grew by 4.4%, while construction saw a 4.8% increase. In the second quarter of 1402, gross fixed capital formation had grown by 4.3%, with machinery and construction investments rising by 7.2% and 2.2%, respectively.

For the first half of the current year of 1403, Iran's GDP, including oil sales, stood at 40,360.2 trillion rials, while GDP excluding oil sales was 37,034.1 trillion rials, reflecting growth rates of 2.9% and 2.4%, respectively. This sustained growth follows positive economic performance across all quarters of 1402.

#### Economic growth drivers in Q2 of 1403

Analysis by sector shows that GDP growth in the second quarter was driven by positive contributions across all major sectors. Growth rates were:

- Oil and gas: 8.8%
- Agriculture, forestry, and fishing: 2.8%
- Services: 2.5%
- Industry and mining: 1.7%

When analyzed by final expenditure components (with 1400 base year), gross fixed cap-

## Iran expected to receive observer status in EAEU

Leaders of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) countries will grant Iran an observer status and discuss the joint work of the members and the Islamic Republic within their free trade agreement in a meeting to be held in St. Petersburg on Thursday, December 26.

They are also set to sign a number of documents on forming a unified customs transit system, a common electricity market, and a single market for services that harmonizes financial laws and implements liberalization plans for certain sectors of services, Press TV wrote.

The meeting comes just a year after the Eurasian bloc — comprising Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia — signed a fully-fledged free trade agreement with Iran to eliminate customs duties on almost 90% of goods and establish a preferential regime for almost all trade between Iran and Russia.

The agreement is expected to bring bilateral trade with Iran to \$18-20 billion over five to seven years from \$6.2 billion in 2022. Among the EAEU states, 80% of Iran's trade is with Russia, followed by Armenia (10%), Kazakhstan (8.7%), Belarus (0.6%), and Kyrgyzstan (0.5%). Iran and Russia have cultivated closer political and economic relations in recent years under their shared goal of countering Western sanctions. They have announced a flurry of joint initiatives, including trading in their national currencies as part of their de-dollarization program.

Recent barter arrangements between the two have involved exchanging Russian metals for Iranian automobile parts and gas turbines. The two countries have also held talks with Azerbaijan to revive the rail component of the International North-South Transport Corridor to connect them to India.

In the energy sector, the National Iranian Oil Company and the Russian Gazprom have unveiled an ambitious plan for \$40 billion of Russian investments in Iran to sustain and develop oil and gas fields, build liquefied natural gas facilities, and construct gas pipelines.

Iran's disenchantment with the West — marked by the collapse of a nuclear agreement after former US president Donald Trump withdrew Washington from the accord in 2018 and imposed more draconian sanctions on Tehran — has convinced the Islamic Republic to look to its neighbors for trade. The Eurasian Economic Union, due to the low volume of its economic relations with the US and the dominance of Russia over the bloc, offers Iran a fertile ground to expand its economic diplomacy.

The commercial opening, achieved through the free trade agreement and reduction of tariffs and the use of the existing capacities in the union to circumvent economic sanctions, provides a platform for a long-term strategic cooperation between Iran and the EAEU.

The Eurasian Union, as a pole of regional convergence in North and Central Asia, creates a breathing room for business for Iran as the close cooperation of China, India, Turkey, and some other East Asian countries with the group holds the prospect of easing up the pressure of sanctions.

Over the past few decades, Iran has sought to make the best use of its domestic capacities including privileged geographical features, rich natural resources, and young and educated manpower to forge various partnerships in its foreign policy outreach to hedge against hegemonic powers.

Hence, employing economic diplomacy and foreign policy capacities to advance the goals of



national development has been more or less constant in different Iranian administrations and reflected in the strategic development documents of the country.

The main issue in cooperation with the union is to formulate a short-term strategy for boosting the productivity of the existing commercial opportunities in parallel with a long-term strategy to strengthen the export capacity and reduce the level of vulnerability of the country's production system.

Caution should be observed in binding the country to the union's regulatory regime where Russia rules supreme and any excessive commitment could expose and compromise the Iran's economic, commercial, technological, and political capabilities.

That said, Iran's economic diplomacy, currently limited to tariffs and free trade, should be expanded to investment and technological cooperation. The government, as the main actor, should also facilitate the cooperation of private and non-governmental actors.

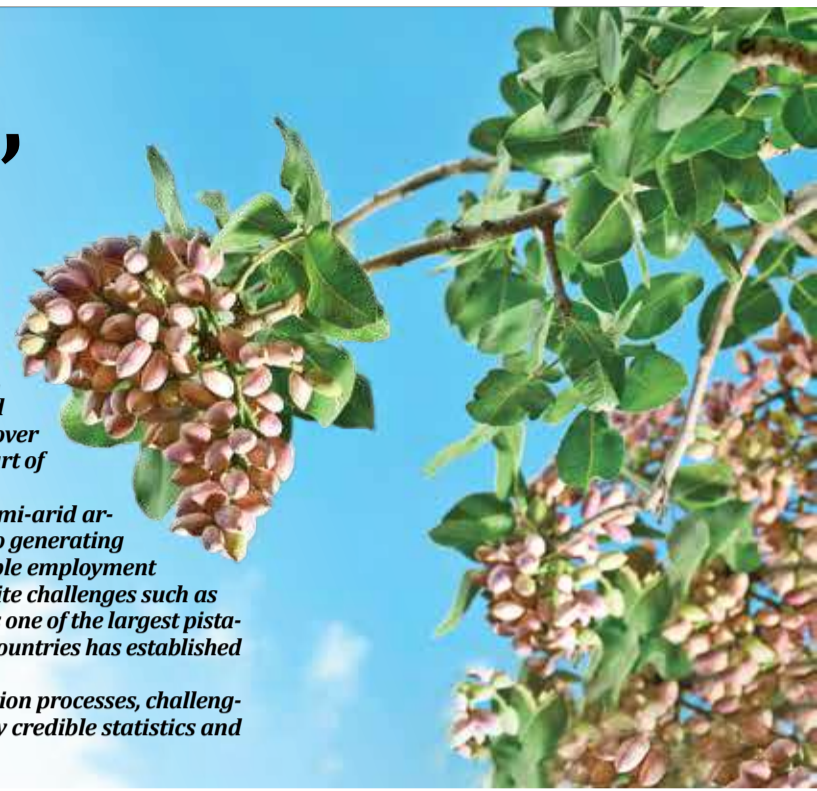
The emerging regional integration will create economic interdependence and lead to the internationalization of economy and politics. It will increase the sensitivity and vulnerability of nations against hostile measures such as unilateral sanctions by the United States. Therefore, the regional economic convergence will act as a buffer against coercive measures and create economic deterrence.

# Pistachio is Iran's rich heritage, global commodity

## Iranica Desk

*Iranian pistachios are among the most important and valuable agricultural products in the country, playing a significant role in the national economy and non-oil exports. Known for their exceptional quality, unique flavor, and diverse cultivars, these strategic products have consistently attracted attention in both domestic and international markets. With a history spanning over three thousand years, pistachios represent an invaluable heritage from the heart of Iran's deserts, forming an essential part of the nation's culture and economy.*

*The primary regions for Iranian pistachio cultivation are the dry and semi-arid areas, particularly Kerman Province and the city of Rafsanjan. In addition to generating substantial foreign exchange, the pistachio industry provides considerable employment opportunities in planting, cultivation, harvesting, and processing. Despite challenges such as water shortages, pest infestations, and economic sanctions, Iran remains one of the largest pistachio producers in the world. The export of this product to more than 65 countries has established Iranian pistachios as a premium brand in global markets, ISNA wrote. This report will explore the history, cultivars, cultivation areas, production processes, challenges, and future prospects of the Iranian pistachio industry, supported by credible statistics and real-world examples.*



## Historical context

Iranian pistachios are among the oldest agricultural products in the country, dating back over 3,000 years. During the Achaemenid era, they were highly valued as a trade commodity along the Silk Road. The primary origins of pistachios are the dry and desert regions of Iran, particularly Kerman Province and Rafsanjan, which accounts for over 30% of the country's pistachio production, according to official statistics.

Semnan. For instance, Khorasan Razavi produced 30,000 tons in 2022-2023, contributing significantly to national production. This trend highlights the country's potential for expanding pistachio cultivation.

Iranian pistachios hold a special place in global markets due to their diverse varieties and excellent quality. The cultivation of pistachios has expanded in many desert and semi-desert regions of Iran, thanks to the tree's high resistance to arid conditions.



The history of pistachios underscores their significant role in Iran's economy and culture. During the Safavid era, Iranian pistachios gained immense popularity in Europe. Today, thanks to its favorable climate and fertile soil in central regions, Iran is recognized as one of the largest pistachio producers worldwide.

## Recent developments and expansion

Recent advancements in agricultural technology have facilitated the expansion of pistachio cultivation into other provinces, such as Khorasan Razavi, Yazd, and

Kerman Province, especially Rafsanjan, is considered the hub of pistachio production in the country. In 2021, Rafsanjan alone produced over 70,000 tons of pistachios, representing a significant share of national production.

In addition to Kerman, the Khorasan Razavi Province, Semnan, Yazd, and Sistan and Baluchestan are also important for pistachio production. For example, in 2022, Khorasan Razavi Province accounted for 25% of the country's pistachio production, with Fayzabad and Bardaskan counties being key production centers. Recently, Sistan and Baluchestan

Province has emerged as a significant region for pistachio production. According to a report from the Ministry of Agricultural Jihad, pistachio production in this province increased from 3,000 tons in 2016 to over 10,000 tons in 2022. This growth indicates the high potential for expanding pistachio cultivation in water-scarce areas.

## Planting, cultivating and harvesting process

Pistachio trees are typically planted in sandy-loamy soils in dry regions. These trees require minimal water and thrive in hot, arid climates. The planting process begins in the first year, with pistachio trees usually reaching economic productivity between the seventh and tenth years. During the cultivation stage, care for pistachio trees includes regular irrigation, appropriate fertilization, and pest and disease management. One significant challenge at this stage is managing water consumption. For instance, drip irrigation methods can reduce water usage in pistachio orchards by up to 40%.

Pistachio harvesting occurs in late summer and is generally performed using both manual and mechanized methods. According to statistics from the Ministry of Jihad Agriculture, most pistachio orchards in Iran are harvested traditionally. However, the use of mechanized equipment can lower harvesting costs and enhance production efficiency.

Pistachios are rich in nutrients, including protein, fiber, vitamins, and essential minerals such as iron, potassium, and phosphorus. Regular consumption of pistachios can help lower bad cholesterol (LDL) levels and improve heart health. Research has shown that consuming 40 grams of pistachios daily can reduce the risk of heart disease by up to 20%.

Thanks to their high fiber content, pistachios positively impact digestive health and help regulate blood sugar levels. Studies

conducted at Tehran University of Medical Sciences found that pistachio consumption led to a 10% reduction in blood sugar levels among patients with type 2 diabetes.

Pistachios are also a rich source of antioxidants, which help prevent cellular aging and combat cancer. The vitamin E found in pistachios plays a crucial role in boosting the immune system and improving skin health. For these reasons, pistachios are recognized globally as a healthy and nutritious snack.

Iran has long been one of the largest producers and exporters of pistachios in the world. According to statistics from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Iran produced over 430,000 tons of pistachios from March 21, 2023, to March 20, 2024, making it the third-largest pistachio producer globally and accounting for about 20% of market demand.

Iran's primary competitors in this market include the United States and Turkey. The US, particularly California, has increased its share in the global pistachio market in recent years through advancements in agricultural technology. However, the quality and flavor of Iranian pistachios remain unmatched. Reports from the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration indicate that Iranian pistachios are exported to over 65 countries, including China, India, Germany, and Russia.

Asian markets, especially China and India, are among the most important destinations for Iranian pistachio exports. In 2021, over 80,000 tons were exported to these two countries, demonstrating Iran's capacity to supply global markets. Despite sanctions, Iranian pistachio exports continue to play a significant role in the agricultural economy.

Pistachio production in Iran faces multiple challenges, including water scarcity. Most pistachio orchards are located in dry and desert areas, necessitating opti-



mal water management. Statistics reveal that over 70% of pistachio orchards in Iran rely on traditional irrigation methods, leading to significant water waste.

Another challenge is the prevalence of pests and diseases in pistachio orchards. The pistachio psylla, for example, is one of the most destructive pests, causing substantial damage to producers each year. In 2022, over 20% of pistachio orchards in Kerman experienced reduced yields due to infestations.

Sanction-related issues have also significantly impacted Iranian pistachio exports. High transportation costs and banking restrictions make it difficult for producers to access international markets. Nevertheless, the government seeks to alleviate production and export barriers through supportive policies.

Despite these challenges, the Iranian pistachio industry has substantial potential for growth and development. Advancements in modern irrigation systems and the use of high-yield cultivars can notably enhance the country's pistachio production. For example, implementing pressure irrigation projects in Kerman orchards has successfully reduced water consumption.

Marketing and developing export markets are other forward-looking strategies to bolster Iran's

position in the global pistachio market. Markets such as China, India, and Russia continue to be important destinations for Iranian pistachio exports. In 2023, exports to China increased by 25%, reflecting a strong demand for Iranian pistachios.

Given the climatic changes and increasing drought conditions, the future of the pistachio industry hinges on investment in modern technologies and scientific research. Collaborative efforts between the government and the private sector can implement strategic programs to maintain and enhance Iran's share in the global pistachio market. These actions will contribute to sustainable agricultural development and the country's economic prosperity.

In summary, Iranian pistachios, as one of the most valuable agricultural products, have historically played a vital role in Iran's economy. Their high quality, diverse cultivars, and unique flavor secure a special place for Iranian pistachios in global markets. Despite challenges such as water scarcity, climate change, and economic sanctions, Iran has maintained a significant share of the global market. The export of pistachios to over 65 countries underscores the high potential of this product for generating revenue and developing non-oil trade in the country.



# Building bridges of culture, tourism between Iran, Japan

By Leila Imeni & Hamideh Hosseini  
Staff writers

## INTERVIEW

Historical documents show that Persian culture has had a significant influence in East Asian countries throughout the past centuries, and many historical and cultural artifacts and tablets are still being discovered in these countries, proving the extent of their longstanding relations with Iran. Japan, a fascinating country in East Asia, and Iran share a long-standing tradition of friendly relations rooted in historical and cultural ties, alongside economic and political interactions. The two countries have had extensive relations dating back to the prosperous Silk Road era, with a number of people frequently traveling between the two countries. In recent years, both sides have managed to familiarize each other with their arts and customs through cultural weeks and the exchange of cultural and artistic delegations. Japanese tourists are keen to travel to Iran, and many of them develop a fondness for this country after their first trip and experience traveling here two or three more times thereafter. They are not only interested in viewing historical sites but also wish to have experiential travels in Iran, such as living with nomads. They are eager to get acquainted with Iranian culture and customs up close, and they also admire the natural beauty of Iran. In recent decades, both short and feature films from Iran have established a strong presence in the international arena. Cinema enthusiasts in Japan, like their counterparts in other countries, have heard the acclaim for some Iranian films and are eager to watch them. The Iranian Film Festival, held every August by the cultural center of the Iranian Embassy in Japan in the Minato Ward of Tokyo, has become a prominent event in Japan. To assess the level of cultural and tourism relations between the two countries, Iran Daily conducted an interview with Saisho Yuta, the political counselor of Embassy of Japan in Iran, which will follow below.



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Japan and Iran are among the countries with the largest number of World Heritage Sites.

**IRAN DAILY:** How have tourism relations between Iran and Japan developed in recent years? Are there any specific trends or changes you have observed during this time?

**SAISHO YUTA:** As you know, at the beginning of this year, the Iranian government eased its visa policy for Japanese tourists. They decided to exempt the touristic visa for Japanese people. Normally, this had a lot of effect on increasing Japanese tourists to Iran. Because in Iran, there are a lot of touristic assets, a lot of UNESCO World Heritage Sites, so it should have normally increased. But, after April, due to the regional situation, it became very hard for Japanese tourists to come to Iran even though they were interested in visiting. They are very careful and cautious. But if one day, I hope it will not be too far from today, the situation will be much calmer. At that will be the moment to accept a lot of Japanese tourists in Iran.

**Are there any specific places or experiences that are popu-**

**lar among Japanese tourists? For example, are there any specific hot springs or something like this that you believe would be more appealing for Japanese tourists?**

Isfahan and Tabriz are very picturesque touristic places for Japanese tourists, and they are very pleased to visit Iran. But as you mentioned, Japanese people are hot spring lovers. Japan is a volcanic and seismic country, similar to Iran, which hosts a lot of very appealing hot spring places in the country. I didn't have a chance to visit yet, but Ardebil, Sarein, and many other cities in Iran have hot springs. Nowadays, it's the time of Instagram and Twitter so, if one day there are many Japanese who know such information and some have already visited such places, information will be shared immediately. At that time, maybe we can have many more Japanese tourists in such hot spring places. In the beginning of 2000, some Japanese researchers studied 18 hot spring places in Iran. They wrote a report and sent it to the Iranian government. JICA,

the Japan International Cooperation Agency, accepts many government officials every year to provide capacity-building cooperation and courses related to governmental issues. One of the courses they gave was tourism courses, and one of its lectures was about hot springs. An Iranian official attended this course. The Iranian Embassy in Tokyo asked this guy to conduct a survey about the development of hot spring tourist destinations near Tehran. It was already almost 20 years ago. I sent an email to him yesterday, and I received his reply. Maybe they are still interested in knowing how the situation has developed since then and how he can contribute again to the Iranian hot spring tourist places.

**What about UNESCO World Heritage Sites? Are they interesting for Japanese tourists?**

Yes, as far as I know, Iran is the 11th country in terms of the number of World Heritage Sites, and Japan is the 12th. So, the numbers are very close. This summer, Japan and Iran



Saisho Yuta (R) and his colleague Toyoko Morita  
● IRAN DAILY/HOSSEIN NAQIZADEH

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Japan is a volcanic and seismic country, similar to Iran, which hosts a lot of appealing hot springs.



Japanese tourists in Iran

succeeded in adding one more UNESCO World Heritage Site, so congratulations to Iran. It was Hegmataneh in Hamedan Province. Japan and Iran are among the countries with the largest number of World Heritage Sites. In Japan, there are many world heritage amateur, including me. The first place I traveled to visit in Iran was the Soltanieh Dome in Zanjan. So, there are many options to visit other than Tehran, Isfahan, Tabriz, or Shiraz, and there are always a lot of appealing places in Iran in this regard once the situation becomes calmer.

**And how important is Iranian food in drawing attention of Japanese tourists? Is there any specific food?**

As Japanese food, like *Washoku*, is appealing to foreign tourists, and because of this food appeal, Japan can invite a lot of foreign tourists. It's the same for Iran. To draw a lot of Japanese tourists, the cuisine factor is one of the most important ones. There are many good foods in Iran. Before I came here, my wife was a little bit worried about the sheep meat because sometimes it smells. But in Iran, it's very fresh. So far, she hasn't had any problems, and she also enjoys other foods, as well as vegetables and fruits. Now, it's the season for pomegranates, which are very tasty, and even in Japan, they are somewhat famous. Iranian nuts are number one. There is a lot of food attractiveness in Iran. Once you can share them with Japanese tourists, they will be more and more happy to visit Iran. Another factor is that nowadays, there are many more boutique hotels, very stylish and renovated hotels in Iran. They are much more appealing. I have already found some photos on social networking services (SNS) of very amazing renovated Iranian hotels in some places. They

are either traditional houses or caravansaries. They are historical, modern, and very stylish, which is very appealing to Japanese tourists. Tradition is highly captivating to Japanese tourists, and we can find this kind of combination in some renovated restaurants even in Tehran. Such information is very appealing to Japanese tourists.

**Do you think Japanese tourists prefer group tours or individual tours?**

It depends on their ages. Older people prefer group tours to visit some famous modern heritage sites, while younger people would like to discover things on their own, so they prefer individual tourism.

**Do we get any individual tourists from Japan who come to Iran on their own without a tour operator?**

The number is limited due to the tensions that exist in this large region and there are some images that make it very difficult to visit Iran. But there are some who would like to try visiting Iran. Sometimes, they put some videos on YouTube, and almost all of their evaluations are very positive. Before coming here, they compare it with previous images, noting that Iranian people are very kind, the food is good and cheap, and there are many historic tourist places. So, almost all evaluations are very positive.

**How can we improve Iran's image to other people, including foreign tourists, and specifically Japanese tourists?**

Before coming here, I was in France, in Paris, where I worked for Japanese Embassy. When I

**Why is Iranian cinema not well-known in Japan, despite the popularity of Japanese anime in Iran?**

It's surprising for us that Iranian cinema is not well-represented in Japan, despite the popularity of anime in Iran. One reason is that it's difficult to obtain the rights to broadcast Iranian films in Japan, and the number of Iranian films available in Japan is still limited.

**What Japanese dishes or food experiences would you recommend to Iranian tourists?**

Sushi. But I think you don't have the culture to try raw fish; it's not for all Iranians, although there are some who like such foods. *Dashi* is a kind of broth that forms one of the culinary cornerstones of Japanese cooking. It is made from water, dried fish, and vegetables. It is a type of bouillon that is popular worldwide. *Dashi* is the base for soups; for example, in French cuisine, they use mint or various vegetables, but in our case, we also use fish and edible seaweed.

We also have advanced fermentation techniques. These aspects of *dashi* and the fermentation techniques in Japanese cuisine are becoming increasingly popular worldwide, so you can experience Japanese culinary techniques in Japan, for example in Tokyo and Kyoto, Tokyo is similar to Tehran, while Kyoto is akin to Isfahan. Kyoto is a very historical city offering traditional Japanese cuisine.

**What challenges do Japanese tourists face in Iran?**

Japanese tourists may face linguistic problems; as Persian language is a difficult language. They may also encounter difficulties with travel infrastructure, such

told my French colleagues that I would be going to Tehran, some of them knew Iran very well, including a French woman who is an amateur of Iranian cinema. Before having a conversation with her, I didn't know much about Iranian films, even though they are very famous worldwide. This is due to the difficulty of accessing Iranian films in Japan. This kind of information is still not popular among Japanese people. However, if there are some interesting Iranian films that showcase the beauty of visiting Iran, it will likely increase the number of Japanese tourists. There are many ways and aspects to attract interest. It's a step-by-step process to entice and appeal to Japanese tourists.

**Can you name any Iranian movies that you admire?**

In my case, it's very limited, but I have only watched Kiarostami's films. From 2010 to 2020, there are several Iranian filmmakers who have received worldwide awards.

as accessing money, cell phones, and Wi-Fi. In terms of cultural or religious issues, Japanese tourists are generally respectful of Iranian culture and traditions, and we do not have any major issues.

**What is the state of Japanese studies in Iran and Iranian studies in Japan?**

In Iran, the University of Tehran has an intermediary major in Japanese Studies, where students can study various aspects of Japan. In Japan, we have Persian courses in universities such as Tokyo University of Foreign Studies and Osaka University. We have a significant number of Persian specialists, and our country has one of the largest numbers of foreign Persian language specialists.

**Are there opportunities for Iranian students to study in Japan with scholarships?**

Yes, there are scholarships available for Iranian students to study in Japan. Every year, there is an



A showcase of exquisite Iranian handicrafts at the AGEO World Fair in Saitama, Japan, 2023

examination for scholarships to study in Japan. Iranian students can apply for these scholarships to study in Japan.

**What are the challenges in showcasing Iranian films in Japan?**

The main challenge is that Iranian films are not commercially viable in Japan, making it difficult to broadcast them. However, there are some film enthusiasts who are passionate about showcasing Iranian films in Japan, despite the commercial limitations. These enthusiasts are working to promote Iranian cinema in Japan, and collaborations between Japanese and Iranian film lovers can help increase awareness of Iranian films.

**Does the Iranian Embassy in Japan organize cultural events to promote Iranian culture and cinema?**

Yes, the Iranian Embassy in Japan occasionally holds cultural events, including a cultural week, to introduce Iranian culture and cinema to the Japanese public. However, the selection of films is sometimes limited, and there may be miscommunication about the types of films that appeal to Japanese audiences. In addition, some Iranian films are available on Netflix and Amazon Prime, which can help increase their visibility in Japan.

**What Iranian souvenirs are popular among Japanese tourists in Iran?**

In Japan, pistachios and saffron are well-known as souvenirs from Iran. We also appreciate the stylish and lovely copper products found in Tajrish market, as well as Iranian scarves with beautiful designs.

**How can Iranian handicrafts be exported to Japan despite the obstacles?**

Even under economic sanctions, there are ways to export Iranian handicrafts to Japan. For example, a Japanese shop has been working with Afghan refugees in Iran to manufacture *Gabbeh* (a simple and colorful hand-knotted textile with a pile of long threads), which is then imported to Japan and sold to aid Afghan people. This shows that economic sanctions are not a total obstacle to cultural exchange.

**Are there opportunities for joint courses to protect cultural heritage between**



In Japan, pistachios and saffron are well-known as souvenirs from Iran.

**Iran and Japan?**

This is an interesting idea. Many countries face challenges in managing their heritage sites, and exchanging experiences could be beneficial. I will share this idea with our nation, but I am not aware of any specific plans for joint courses at this time.

**What are the plans for the Japan Foundation to disseminate Japanese culture in Iran?**

Previously, the Japan Foundation sent a Japanese teacher to Tehran every year, but this process was stopped due to some problems. We are open to collaborating with Iranian organizations to promote Japanese culture in Iran. If you have any events or ideas, please feel free to share them with us, and we will help promote them through our social media channels.



Iranian pistachios

**What became of the cultural cooperation agreement signed between Iran and Japan in 2015?**

The agreement was signed to commemorate the 90th anniversary of our diplomatic relationship. Although not much has been done to implement the agreement, we are now looking forward to our 100th anniversary in 2029, and we hope to use this occasion to strengthen our cultural cooperation and people-to-people exchange.



Sushi



There are some film enthusiasts who are passionate about showcasing Iranian films in Japan, despite the commercial limitations.



A hot spring in Sarein, Iran

# Ex-Iran volleyball coach Ataei has 'unfinished job' with national team

## Sports Desk

Former Iran head coach Behrouz Ataei says he will be looking to return to the national volleyball team at some point in the future to complete his "unfinished job." Ataei, 54, became the first domestic coach on Iran's bench in more than a decade when he took over from Russian Vladimir Alekno after the Tokyo Olympics in 2021. He got off to flying start to his reign by leading his rejuvenated team to the Asian title, thanks to a victory over host Japan in the final.

The Asian crown was followed by an impressive run to the 2022 Volleyball Nations League Finals, before Iran fell to a last-eight defeat against European powerhouse Poland.

However, a change in fortunes saw Ataei's team finish second from bottom in the VNL preliminary table the following year and suffer a comprehensive loss to Japan on home soil in the Asian Championship final.

Feeling hard done by for some of the criticism he received in the latter stages of his tenure, Ataei stepped down from his role midway through the Olympic qualification tournament in Rio de Janeiro in October last year, where Iran lost six in seven and failed to secure a place in the Paris Games.

A former world champion as Iran under-21 coach, Ataei managed to restore his reputation on return to club action with Foolad Sirjan, lifting the Iranian



Foolad Sirjan head coach Behrouz Ataei is thrown up by his players after the victory over Lube for the bronze medal at the FIVB Club World Championship in Uberlândia, Brazil, on Dec. 15, 2024.

● FIVB

and Asian trophies over the past 12 months.

The pinnacle of his helm at Foolad came in the FIVB Club World Championship in Uberlândia, Brazil, in early December, where his team beat Italian outfit Lube in a five-set thriller

for the bronze medal – only a second Iranian club to achieve the feat, following Paykan in 2010.

"The victory over Lube, which is among the top three teams in the world's best league and benefits from numerous inter-

national stars in the squad, is not an easy job at all," Ataei told Varzesh3, adding: "But Foolad managed to beat them not once but twice [after the first-day win in the preliminary round] and all of my players deserve credit for their resilience in both games. I'm

really proud to be working with this group."

Opposite spiker Ali Hajipour and outside hitter Alireza Abdolhamidi played massive parts in Foolad's remarkable run, with the former finishing second to Brazilian Wallace De Souza in

the top scorers' chart, while the latter was named in the team of the tournament.

"Abdolhamidi delivered a top-notch performance and played at the highest level throughout the event. Hajipour also enjoyed an exceptional tournament just as he did at the Asian Championship [in September]. However, I believe it was a team effort at the end, and all the players had the right mindset for this competition," added the Iranian coach.

Asked if he fancies his chances of being appointed as Iran head coach for a second spell, Ataei said he has much more to offer to the national team.

"I have an unfinished job with the national team, but all I can say is that I'll try to earn that right again through my future performance. That is what I'll be looking forward to, though I'm not sure if it will happen anytime soon and, for now, I'd rather stay focused on my duty with Foolad," said the Iranian.

Iran, meanwhile, will be looking to embark on a new chapter under Italian head coach Roberto Piazza, starting with next year's Volleyball Nations League in June.



Iran's Amirmohammad Rahmati is seen in action at the Asian Youth and Junior Weightlifting Championships in Doha, Qatar, on December 23, 2024.

● IWFFIR

## Asian Youth and Junior Weightlifting Championships: Gold rush continues as Iran collects nine medals on Day 5

### Sports Desk

Iranians continued their prolific run at the Asian Youth and Junior Weightlifting Championships, bagging nine medals, including triple golds, on the penultimate day of the event in Doha, Qatar.

Representing the country in the men's junior event, Amirhossein Sepah walked away with a snatch gold, coupled with the clean & jerk and total silvers, with a 162-187-349 tally in the 96kg contests.

Joining Sepah on the podium was Mohammad Esfandiari, who registered 152-182-334 to make a clean sweep of three bronze medals.

There was further glory for Iran in the youth category of the weight class, with Hamidreza Zarei win-

ning three medals apiece.

The Iranian finished runner-up in the snatch discipline with a 146kg effort, and then won the ultimate prizes of the C&J and total categories, courtesy of 188kg and 334kg records.

Tuesday's results took Iran's haul to 30 medals, including seven golds, at the event.

Amirmohammad Rahmati headlined the country's medal hunt on Monday, collecting three medals, including one gold, in the men's youth 81kg class.

A 140kg lift in his third effort saw the Iranian claim the snatch gold, before his bronze-winning 167kg effort in the clean & jerk discipline was followed by the total silver on 307kg. Elsewhere in the men's competitions, Ilia Salehipour and Alireza

Abbaspour won six medals between them in the junior 89kg event.

Salehipour won the snatch silver with 161kg, and then went on to register 195kg for the C&J bronze, before adding the total silver to his account with 356kg.

Abbaspour, meanwhile, settled for the snatch bronze with 159kg, but finished one kilogram clear of his fellow-Iranian to take the clean & jerk silver.

A total tally of 355kg helped Abbaspour finish his campaign with a second bronze medal.

In the women's youth draw, Asal Kadkhodaei missed out on the snatch and C&J podiums in the 81kg weight class, finishing fourth on both occasions, but still managed to win the total bronze with an 87-106-193 record.

## Inter's Inzaghi pleased with Como win, backs Martinez despite dry spell

REUTERS – Inter Milan coach Simone Inzaghi hailed his side's 2-0 Serie A home win over Como on Monday and said he was not worried about hard-working captain Lautaro Martinez's goal drought.

Despite the defending champions lacking the firepower from last week's 6-0 thrashing of Lazio, Inzaghi stressed his team were up to the challenge posed by battling Como.

"Clearly we are maintaining a very high level. All teams are running ahead, there

are opponents like Como who come to play great games, but we played an important game as a mature and aware team," the Italian told reporters.

"I feared this match a lot, we had some weaknesses in the back line. We played a game of concentration, in the first half we weren't as sharp as usual. Then in the second half we raised the intensity and struck at the right moments."

Goals from Carlos Augusto and Marcus Thuram earned Inter the victory that keeps them third with 37 points and a

game in hand on leaders Atalanta, who sit on 40 points.

Martinez has struggled to reach the form that made him Serie A top marksman last season and has failed to score in over a month since securing a 1-0 win over Venezia in early November.

Yet Inzaghi remains confident in his forward, saying the Argentine is playing a key role in his side's packed schedule.

"I was a striker. I know these moments happen," he said. "Lautaro was one of the outstanding performers against Lazio.

"The forwards are working hard, we ask a lot of them and are trying to rest them as much as possible in the circumstances.

"I told Lautaro to relax, because he has always scored goals and always will, luck will turn and he should only be worried if he doesn't get scoring opportunities."

● DANIELE MASCOLO/REUTERS



# Iran 'ready' to reopen embassy in Syria

Damascus responds in kind in diplomatic talks



country. During a press conference on Tuesday, Mohajerani stated that Iran would pursue the matter through diplomatic channels, Press TV reported.

"Our approach to reopening embassies is diplomatic, as it always has been, and we stand ready for this," she said.

"They are also prepared, and we are currently engaged in diplomatic talks for the reopening of embassies," she added.

After HTS militants seized control of Syria on December 8, which brought an end to Bashar al-Assad's 24-year presidency, the country continues to face significant challenges on both national and international fronts.

Syria's stability and future are threatened by various factors, including Israel's illegal occupation of Syrian territory, driven by its expansionist

policies, and the persistent presence of the so-called Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which are backed by the US, in the country's northern regions.

### Clean energy to ease crisis

In another part of the press conference, the government spokesperson regarding addressing the energy imbalance said that, following President Masoud Pezeshkian's directive to the Planning and Budget Organization for investment in renewable energy, a joint working group has been formed, one member of which is the Ministry of Energy.

Given the country's climatic conditions, it is possible to produce 30,000 megawatts of solar power, and she expressed hope that the country can move towards clean energy.

With over 300 sunny days per year and high wind capacity in various regions, Iran has vast potential for gen-

erating electricity from clean energy sources.

Tehran and other provinces have faced rolling power blackouts for weeks in October and November.

Regarding the implementation of power outages, the government spokesperson stated, "Currently, the supply of liquid fuel diesel to power plants has doubled, showing a 200 percent increase. We hope that with the increase in gas supply and the import of gas from some countries, this declining trend that we have witnessed in recent days in the number of outages and the amount of damages done to the industry will continue."

"To overcome this situation and avoid facing another problem in the summer, 14 major projects have been designed and are currently being worked on at the Ministry of Energy," Mohajerani added.

### International Desk

The Iranian government spokeswoman expressed Tehran's readiness to

reopen its embassy in Damascus, amid challenges facing Syria two weeks after Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) militants took over the Arab

## Report: Iran pondering Japan's mediation in talks with Trump admin



### International Desk

An informed Japanese source claimed that the Iranian government is considering Japan's mediation in behind-the-scenes negotiations with the second administration of Donald Trump, the elected president of the United States, regarding the nuclear issue.

The Kyodo News Agency reported that the previous Trump administration had a hardline approach to Iran's nuclear program, which increased tensions in Iran-US relations, ISNA reported. Japan is considered a friendly country to Iran, and if it mediates, it is expected to play a role in reducing tensions between the US and Iran concerning its nuclear program and the issue of sanctions.

Iran has stepped up nuclear work since 2019, a year after the first administration of Trump pulled Washington out of the 2015 nuclear agreement, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which was clinched under Trump's predecessor Barack Obama. Tehran started to reduce its commit-

ments under the JCPOA in a series of pre-announced and clear steps after witnessing the other parties' failure to secure its interests under the agreement.

Iran says it will continue to cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to resolve disputed issues surrounding its nuclear program, rejecting media reports and statements by Western government officials that suggest Tehran is not willing to cooperate with the UN nuclear agency because it has not benefited from the JCPOA.

On Sunday, the Iraqi newspaper Baghdad Alyoum reported that Iran received a message from the US president-elect through Oman proposing high-level talks on issues including the nuclear file. No Iranian or US official has commented on the report at the time of writing this report. Meanwhile, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan on Sunday said the outgoing Biden administration is briefing Trump's team on the growing risk of Tehran pursuing the development of a nuclear weapon.

## First step in removing Internet curbs

# Iran cyberspace council votes to lift ban on WhatsApp, Google Play



### National Desk

Iran's top council responsible for safeguarding the Internet voted Tuesday to lift a ban on the popular messaging application WhatsApp, as well as digital distribution service Google Play Store, which have been subject to restrictions for over two years.

"Ban on WhatsApp and Google Play was removed by unanimous vote of the members of the Supreme Council of Cyberspace," IRNA reported, adding that "this is the first step in the plan to remove restrictions." During the council's 104th meeting,

the members emphasized the importance of lawful governance in cyberspace and unanimously voted in favor of lifting access restrictions to some widely used foreign platforms, including WhatsApp and Google Play. The meeting was attended by the heads of the three branches of government, ministers, and members of the Supreme Council of Cyberspace. During the meeting, the members stressed the importance of supporting domestic platforms.

Iranians often bypass the government-imposed ban on the Internet by utilizing Virtual Private Network (VPN) software applications, which make



The 104th meeting of the Supreme Council of Cyberspace is attended by the heads of the three branches of government, ministers, and members of the council in Tehran, Iran, on December 24, 2024. [president.ir](http://president.ir)

their computer appear to be located in another country. Censoring the Internet, which is being monitored by the country's Internet Censorship Committee, led by the prosecutor general, restricts users from accessing websites and social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, and YouTube, due to their offensive and criminal content.

## Iran, Resistance spearheading ...

At the request of legitimate governments and through offering practical support and with the help of Resistance forces in countries like Iraq and Syria, Iran succeeded in preventing the spread of terrorism and extremism in the Middle East.

With its dynamic and active diplomacy in cooperation with regional countries, Iran has always sought to institutionalize the discourse that sustainable security can only be achieved through the will and cooperation of regional countries. In fact, peace and security in the Middle East will not be achieved due to conflicting interests among trans-regional actors, who themselves have been the source of multiple crises and challenges. Therefore, the presence of transregional actors will not help maintain sustainable peace and security in the region. Utilizing the capacities of international and regional organizations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, however, provides a suit-

able opportunity for member countries to adopt strategic decisions in combating the growing threats of terrorism in the region.

Iran has been associated with a collection of groups and forces known as the "Axis of Resistance," which have had a successful track record in combating terrorism. The Axis of Resistance, now a major player in West Asia, has always been under maximum pressure and attacks from its enemies, primarily the criminal Zionist regime and the United States. Nevertheless, America's efforts to weaken and eliminate the Axis of Resistance in the region have not been successful and have instead only exacerbated instability in the region.

On the other hand, America's actions in the region have shown that its talk of seeking peace and prosperity for the people of the region is more of a ploy to deceive public opinion and a reason to remain and further entrench itself in the Middle East with the aim of plundering the wealth of its nations.

It is very clear that the US played a pivotal role in creating and organizing extremist and terrorist groups like ISIS, equipping and supporting them with the aim of injecting instability into the region. Only the ideology of resistance stands in the way of America's growing influence in the region, and it is evident that the culture of resistance has always been a nightmare for the Western bloc and its supporters. Unsurprisingly, using any means to weaken the resistance is on top of their agenda as clearly demonstrated as of late.

Undoubtedly, the Axis of Resistance is recognized as one of the most active and influential movements in the Middle East. Considering the current complex developments and the new order, the Axis will continue to play its effective role in the regional power structure by intelligently utilizing its advantages and capabilities and will be able to change the regional equations as the spearhead of the fight against terrorism and extremism.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi  
Cartoonist



# Iran takes action as NY auction reveals more stolen ancient coins

## Arts & Culture Desk

The New York auction house Classical Numismatic Group (CNG) recently unveiled 15 ancient coins, including pieces from the Achaemenid and Sasanian eras, stirring serious concerns among Iranian cultural activists.

This announcement comes just days after the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts of Iran initiated legal proceedings to reclaim two Sasanian coins that were linked to illegal excavations in the Beyza archaeological site of Fars Province, ILNA reported.

The ministry acted swiftly following the initial revelation last week, when CNG showcased two Sasanian coins believed to be part of a larger trove of over 600 artifacts looted by unauthorized diggers last year.

Speaking on the matter, Fatemeh Davari,

spokesperson for the Iran's Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, stated, "As soon as we became aware of the auction involving Iranian historical coins, we took immediate steps to investigate the situation and pursue the matter further."

The newly revealed coins have raised alarms among heritage advocates, as it remains unclear how many of these artifacts have entered the auction circuit through illicit means. The situation is particularly troubling given that the coins in question were excavated from the Beyza site, where illegal excavations have long plagued Iran's rich archaeological landscape. Reports indicate that these coins were initially funneled into international markets via various intermediaries.

Davari elaborated on the ministry's ongoing efforts, emphasizing that they are committed to preventing the sale of any

artifacts that have been illegally obtained. "Our process involves verifying the authenticity of any historical items that surface in auctions. After compiling documentation, we work collaboratively with relevant authorities to halt the auctions and initiate legal claims for restitution," she explained.

The recent auction announcement has prompted Iran to bolster its claims under the UNESCO 1970 Convention, which mandates countries to take necessary measures to prohibit and prevent the illegal import and export of cultural property. As the auction approaches, scheduled for January 14, 2025, the Ministry is diligently preparing a comprehensive case to ensure the return of these invaluable artifacts.

Among the coins featured in the upcoming auction is a particularly rare gold coin from the reign of Hormizd I of the Sasanian



dynasty, minted around 272-273 AD. This coin, estimated to weigh 7.41 grams, has a minimum bid of \$45,000 and could fetch up to \$75,000, according to the auction house. Another notable coin, attributed to the Achaemenid era under Darius II, weighs 8.37 grams and dates back to 420-375 BC.

As the auction nears, Iran's Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts remains vigilant. "We are determined to see these historical artifacts returned to their rightful home, and we hope that our efforts will lead to the successful retrieval of these coins," Davari concluded.

## Iran's forest ecosystems in peril, urgent action needed for conservation: DoE chief



## Arts & Culture Desk

The head of Iran's Department of Environment (DoE), Shina Ansari, expressed concern over the deteriorating condition of the country's forests, emphasizing the need for increased efforts in their preservation and conservation.

In a message read by her senior advisor at the 6th National Forest Conference of Iran, held at the University of Tehran, Ansari highlighted the rich biodiversity and diverse ecosystems of Iran's varied geography, climate, and topography, Tasnim reported.

"Iran, with its vast expanse, has less than nine percent of its land covered by forests, including the Hyrcanian and Zagros forests," Ansari said.

She further noted that Iran is among the world's dry and semi-dry countries with less rainfall than global standards and limited forest cover. "From ancient times, Iranians have tried to preserve natural resources through sustainable management of water and soil resources," she added.

Ansari emphasized the crucial role of forests in maintaining the balance of oxygen, carbon dioxide, and moisture on Earth, stating that they account for 40 percent of the world's total oxygen.

She also highlighted that 80 percent of the world's terrestrial biodiversity is found in forest ecosystems, and the livelihoods of more than a quarter of the world's population depend on forests.

The DoE head listed the various services provided by forests, including their intrinsic value, biodiversity, cultural and historical heritage, watershed protection, food cycles, carbon storage, biodiversity benefits, sustainable timber production, non-timber forest products, ecotourism, and flood and erosion control, among others.

"Today, biodiversity conservation and habitat protection are among the most important indicators of sustainable development worldwide," Ansari said. She added that by 2030, UN member states should strive to achieve sustainable development goals at national, regional, and international levels. Enhancing ecosystem quality, preventing biodiversity loss, combating climate change, promoting healthy living, and improving community welfare are among the key objectives in the field of environment and forests.

Ansari pointed out several indicators of the declining state of Iran's forests, including the emergence of various diseases, dieback of boxwood trees in the Hyrcanian forests, degradation

of Zagros forest ecosystems, oak dieback, wood smuggling, over-exploitation of forests, deforestation, land encroachment, and change of forest land use. She stressed the need for increased efforts in conserving the limited forest areas and protecting the biodiversity of forest ecosystems through protective and participatory measures.

Ansari emphasized the importance of adhering to the recommendations and policies regarding the environment and natural resources, as well as the principles and goals of sustainable development. These include explicit emphasis on protecting unique forest ecosystems, preserving essential ecological processes and life-supporting systems, conserving biodiversity and vulnerable species threatened with extinction or rare, and sustainably utilizing species and ecosystems.

She suggested several ways to save Iran's forests, including expanding protected forest areas, promoting convergence in implementing territorial programs among various or-

ganizations, enforcing natural resources and environmental policies, raising awareness and implementing participatory conservation programs with a priority on cooperatives and local communities, controlling wood smuggling, installing monitoring and control tools at forest road entrances and wood and paper industries, and thoroughly evaluating the environmental impact of infrastructure development projects.

Ansari also mentioned additional measures such as preventing ecosystem disruption, assessing environmental economics and incorporating it into project cost-benefit models, utilizing modern technologies to reduce natural and human hazards like wildfires, monitoring and evaluating programs to resolve conflicts between livestock and sensitive and vulnerable habitats, implementing adaptation programs and increasing resilience to climate change, and finally, preparing a sustainable forest management package based on sustainability indicators with the participation of stakeholders.

## Iranian filmmaker joins two Indian festival juries

## Arts & Culture Desk

Behzad Rezaei, a writer, director, and acting instructor, was appointed as a jury member for the documentary section of the 8th New Delhi Film Festival and as a permanent jury member of the Jaipur International Film Festival.

The 8th New Delhi Film Festival, which will take place from February 21 to 23, 2025, is one of Asia's most prestigious film events and is managed by the organizers of the Jaipur International Festival, Mehr News Agency reported.

The Jaipur International Film Festival is one of the oldest film festivals in India, holding a special place among filmmakers worldwide. The 17th edition of this festival will be held from February 17 to 21, 2025.

Rezaei is the producer and director of the documentary 'The Breath,' which participated in the 8th edition of the Nebrodi Cinema DOC International Festival in Italy. 'The Breath' vividly portrays the loneliness and lack of human connection during the coronavirus epidemic.

## Iran celebrates legacy of father of Persian poetry

## Arts & Culture Desk

In a message, Esmail Baghaei, the spokesman for the Iranian Foreign Ministry, commemorated the birthday of the renowned Persian poet Rudaki, known as the "Father of Persian Poetry."

Baghaei extended his congratulations to Persian speakers and cultural enthusiasts worldwide, particularly in Iran, Tajikistan, and Afghanistan.

In a post shared on X, Baghaei noted, "December 24 is the birthday and celebration of Rudaki, the great poet of the 4th century AH, who is rightly referred to as the father of Per-

sian poetry. He was a wise and talented poet who perceived the world through the power of imagination and the eye of the heart, vividly portraying it with his words."

He emphasized that Rudaki's work continues to connect the hearts of Persian speakers and lovers of Iranian culture across a vast geographical expanse.

Ahmad Ta'mimdari, a professor of Persian literature at Allameh Tabataba'i University, highlighted Rudaki's unique position in Persian poetry as the first poet whose body of work has been officially recorded. "It is impossible for Iran, which had a thriving culture and civilization

for centuries, to have had no poets or writers before Rudaki," he stated in an interview with ISNA.

Ta'mimdari elaborated on the historical context, explaining that while many poets existed in pre-Islamic Iran, the Sasanian dynasty's prohibition on literacy among the populace stifled their recognition. "Rudaki is indeed the first poet whose collection is documented, but many of his verses have been lost," he said.

The professor also cited an estimation that Rudaki composed over 1.3 million verses, of which only about 700 remain. He asserted that even this

small number reflects Rudaki's mastery and intellectual depth. "The significance of Rudaki is not merely in the quantity of his surviving works, but rather in the profound impact of his poetry," Ta'mimdari noted. He shared a poignant narrative regarding Rudaki's blindness, suggesting that it may have been politically motivated due to his Shiite beliefs during a time of conflict with the Abbasid caliphs. "Rudaki was a court poet for the Samanids. There are historical accounts that suggest he was blinded by the order of the Abbasid caliph," Ta'mimdari explained. The professor highlighted Ru-

daki's diverse contributions to poetry, particularly his poignant reflections on aging and the human experience. Notably, he referred to Rudaki's famous poem 'Dandaniyeh,' where the poet laments his old age and frailty. Ta'mimdari pointed out that Rudaki's works encompass not just personal themes but also philosophical musings on life and the passage of time.

He further argued that Rudaki was not merely the first Persian poet post-Islam but also one of the foundational figures in the evolution of Persian literature. The Sasanian and Buyid periods, according to Ta'mimdari, were crucial for the flourishing

of Iranian and Islamic civilization, providing a backdrop for Rudaki's artistic endeavors.

Ta'mimdari concluded with reflections on the accessibility of classical Persian literature compared to Western classics like Shakespeare's 'Hamlet.'

He noted that while Shakespeare's works have undergone multiple translations, Persian literature from figures like Rudaki and Ferdowsi has not faced similar linguistic evolution. "The grammatical changes in the Persian language occurred significantly during the Sasanian era, affecting how contemporary readers engage with classical texts," he explained.