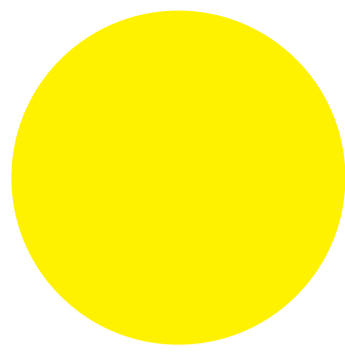


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Iran's Vice President Mohammadreza Aref (c) is seen at the third Caspian Economic Conference in Tehran on February 18, 2025. fjvpresident.ir

Trump's claim about BRICS' collapse far-fetched

By Mohammad Bayat
Middle East affairs analyst

OPINION EXCLUSIVE

Recently, US President Donald Trump once again turned up the heat on BRICS members, warning of 100% tariffs against the group. He stated that BRICS is "rapidly collapsing" and made it clear that if any attempt is made to undermine the dollar, resistance will be inevitable. Earlier, upon his return to the White House, Trump had already laid down the law for BRICS nations, warning that any move to ditch the US dollar in trade would be met with "100% tariffs" on their transactions with the United States. Trump's remarks on BRICS clearly fall in line with Washington's anti-globalist, anti-regionalist agenda—one that fundamentally op-

poses any coalition that does not serve American interests. This is particularly true for BRICS, which brings together emerging powers whose economies pack a serious punch. Projections indicate that by 2050, the combined GDP of at least five founding BRICS members will surpass that of the G7. Understandably, this prospect sends shockwaves through Washington, as the US prides itself on being the guardian of the liberal world order. A crucial factor is that BRICS has been expanding its footprint, with new members joining or expressing interest in doing so. Countries like Iran, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt—rich in natural resources and boasting a relatively skilled workforce—stand to bolster the bloc's economic clout. This is particularly remarkable given BRICS' strategic geographical positioning between the Indo-Pacific and Euro-Atlantic regions.

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Leader: US 'brainless plans' for Gaza to go in vain

National Desk

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei said the US "brainless plans" for the Gaza Strip will go nowhere after American President Donald Trump proposed his plan to take over the blockaded territory and relocate Palestinians from the area.

Ayatollah Khamenei made the remarks in a meeting with Secretary General of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad movement, Ziyad al-Nakhleh, and his accompanying delegation in Tehran on Tuesday.

"These plans will not go anywhere, and those who a year and a half ago claimed to eliminate the resistance in a short time are now receiving their prisoners in small groups and releasing a large number of Palestinian prisoners in exchange."

He was referring to the prisoners exchange deal between Hamas and Israel under a Gaza truce which took effect on January 19 after more than 15 months of fighting.

US President Donald Trump this month proposed a plan for a US takeover of the war-battered Gaza Strip and its Palestinian inhabitants to be relocated elsewhere, including to Egypt and Jordan.

Trump's plan sparked an outcry from

Arab governments including Egypt and Jordan as well as from world leaders, and the United Nations warned against "ethnic cleansing" in the Palestinian territory.

The Leader also congratulated the Palestinian resistance on its victory against Israel in Gaza, where the regime was forced to enter into a ceasefire agreement with Hamas after failing to dismantle the resistance group, a main objective of its genocidal war in the Palestinian territory.

He described as magnificent the victory of the Resistance and the people of Gaza against the "Zionist and American enemies," saying that it has set "a new benchmark" in resistance's battles against Israel.

He emphasized that the great work done by Palestinian resistance leaders and fighters in maintaining unity and cohesion, standing firm against enemies, and navigating the complex process of ceasefire talks, as well as the Gazan people's resilience and patience has made the resistance proud in the region.

Ayatollah Khamenei commended the way resistance handled prisoner exchanges as a testament to its strength before global audiences.

"Currently, international public opinion is in favor of Palestine, and thus



Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei (R) receives Secretary General of Palestinian Islamic Jihad Ziyad al-Nakhleh (2nd R) in Tehran on February 18, 2025.
● leader.ir

no plan can succeed without consent from Gaza's resistance and people," the Leader said.

In this meeting, Nakhleh congratulated Ayatollah Khamenei on Gaza's victory and attributed it to Iran's consistent

support and guidance from late Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah. "The Palestinian resistance was effectively fighting America and the West over the past 18 months and despite the inequality of the balance of power,

it could achieve major victories," Nakhleh said.

"We will never forget our path of resistance, and we will continue this path as soldiers of the resistance," Nakhleh said.

Iran FM: Policy of Iran's exclusion from regional plans hit dead end

International Desk

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said the trans-regional powers' policy of excluding Iran from regional arrangements has failed to achieve its goals.

Addressing the 8th Conference on the History of Iranian Foreign Relations on Tuesday, the top Iranian diplomat said that despite Tehran's principled policies, some trans-regional powers have made every effort to turn the Persian Gulf into a center of crisis and conflict in order to secure their "illegitimate interests."

Araghchi added that certain powers have been trying for decades to keep the Persian Gulf in a state of "permanent tension" by militarizing the region and selling billions of dollars' worth of weapons and preventing cooperation between the regional nations.

However, he said that not only their policy of excluding Iran from regional arrangements and sowing discord between Iran and its neighbors in the Persian Gulf has failed but also with Iran's active diplomacy as well as the changes made in some regional coun-



tries, the Persian Gulf is entering a new era of cooperation.

He cited the full-scale economic war launched against Iran through imposing illegal sanctions as one of the efforts by the trans-regional powers to sideline Iran from the regional arrangements.

Iran has always said that the Persian Gulf countries are able to ensure their security and there is no need to the military presence of extra-regional states. In recent years, relations between the Persian Gulf countries have seen a continuously positive trend and that Iran has been trying to expand its economic and security cooperation with the Arab countries in the Persian Gulf region.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



Gov't spox terms negotiations under pressure as meaningless

International Desk

Iran's government spokeswoman Fatemeh Mohajerani said on Tuesday that the door to negotiations has always been open, but "it makes no sense under maximum pressure."

In her weekly press conference in the southern city of Asaluyeh in Bushehr Province, Mohajerani said that it was the other side that blocked the way to talks by abandoning the negotiating table and imposing the "maximum pressure" on Iran.

She was referring to the United States which withdrew from the 2015 Iran nuclear agreement in 2018 and reimposed sanctions on Iran - a move that left the future of the deal in limbo.

Mohajerani said that Iran negotiated and another party to the

agreement left the negotiating table, and they were the ones who did not adhere to what they had signed.

"Therefore, naturally, in conditions when maximum pressure is being announced, negotiation makes no sense, but we are people who are willing to negotiate, and the whole world knows this," the government's spokeswoman said.

Officials of the new US administration have frequently claimed that Washington is interested in negotiating with Iran over its nuclear program.

On Monday, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei said US's words cannot be taken seriously.

"These words cannot be taken seriously because words must be proportionate to actions. You cannot threaten to destroy on one

hand and on the other hand claim that you are interested in dialogue and talks," Baqaei said.

Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian also said on Wednesday that the US president wants to engage in talks with Iran while closing all the doors for negotiations. He threatens the world not to establish relations with Iran and on the other hand, he suggests that we negotiate.

Pezeshkian added that Iran will not back down and will not surrender in the face of any threat.

Since taking office in January, US President Donald Trump has repeatedly expressed his eagerness for talks with Iran to strike a deal on Tehran's nuclear program.

At the same time, he has reinstated his so-called "maximum pressure" policy and has threatened military action against Iran.

Trump's claim about ...

Against this backdrop, Trump appears hell-bent

on fueling his aggressive stance toward BRICS as an anti-Western coalition. However, as is often the case, he wraps his policy in his own brand of rhetoric. While China and Russia remain key BRICS members, others—such as India, South Africa, and Brazil—do not necessarily fall into the revisionist camp. On the contrary, these countries maintain strong trade ties with the West, particularly with the US. In fact, India has often been viewed as Washington's strategic proxy in the Indian Ocean to counterbalance China. Given these dynamics, a

pressing question arises: Will pressure be applied to BRICS members that do not explicitly challenge the status quo? Recent developments offer some clues. Just days ago, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi met with Trump at the White House, where discussions kicked up a notch regarding military cooperation, technology transfers, and trade.

This sends a crystal-clear signal that Washington and New Delhi are drawing even closer, forming what appears to be a counterweight to the so-called China-Pakistan axis. If the US turns the screws on certain BRICS members—excluding China, Russia, and Iran—it

is likely that, in the coming months and years, these states may start pulling away from BRICS, reducing their involvement to a mere formality or refraining from major strategic initiatives, such as the creation of a common reserve fund or a shared currency. However, if India has managed to get the green light from the US to remain in BRICS, the bloc could well carry on business as usual. One thing is certain, though: as geostrategic rivalry between China, Russia, and the US heats up, tensions between these global heavyweights will only ratchet up further.

What is unfolding today reflects Trump's commitment

to a Jacksonian and Hamiltonian brand of foreign policy—one that zeroes in on US national interests. Unlike the Democratic approach, which saw Washington spread itself too thin across global affairs, Trump's strategy is more hard-nosed and results-driven.

Given all this, Trump's assertion about BRICS' imminent collapse warrants closer scrutiny. For now, however, it is difficult to take such claims at face value. Writing off years of BRICS cooperation on the back of a statement from a newly elected president—one who has been in office for barely a month—would be a rash and premature conclusion.

Iran proposes formation of Caspian free trade zones

Aref announces Iran's plans to host Caspian Sea Cargo in 2025

Economy Desk

Iran's Vice President Mohammadreza Aref proposed the creation of joint free trade zones among Caspian Sea littoral states and the formation of an "Assembly of Caspian Coastal Provinces' Governors" during his address at the third Caspian Economic Conference on Tuesday.

The conference, attended by prime ministers and senior officials from Caspian Sea countries in Tehran, aimed to deepen economic and trade cooperation in the region.

Aref emphasized Iran's readiness to collaborate in advanced and knowledge-based technologies, including the application of artificial intelligence for sustainable regional development.

He also announced Iran's plans to host a conference titled "Caspian Sea Cargo" in 2025.

In his speech, Aref highlighted the importance of balancing economic development with environmental preservation in the Caspian Sea region and stressed Iran's support for initiatives addressing the decline in the Caspian Sea's water levels and its impact on economic activities, shipping, port facilities, and the livelihoods of coastal communities.

The VP stated that the convening of this conference marks a significant step in expanding economic and trade collaboration, providing a platform for public and private sector participation and fostering industrial, commercial, and scientific cooperation among Caspian littoral states.

"I hope that the decisions made today will positively impact the economic growth of the Caspian region and significantly boost trade exchanges. Reaching an agreement on economic cooperation

and trade among Caspian littoral states serves as the foundation for today's conference. The negotiations, agreements, business meetings, and expert panels at this conference are valuable and pave the way for future economic and trade cooperation in the Caspian Sea," he noted.

Aref also proposed that the relevant ministries responsible for implementing the agreement follow up on the conference's decisions through diplomatic channels. "Iran welcomes the development of blue economy and joint investments in maritime transportation, ports, and shipping. Strengthening transportation corridors in the Caspian Sea region is a priority for littoral states," he stated.

Aref went on to say that as diverse transit routes gain attention, increased cooperation among Caspian countries will create more trade opportunities, expand markets, and reduce transit costs, benefiting all parties.

Iran has facilitated support for its techno-engineering companies through sovereign guarantees and invites Caspian littoral states to leverage the high technical and engineering capabilities of Iranian firms.

Joint free trade zones

"I reiterate the proposal to establish joint free trade zones among Caspian littoral states and urge all parties to present their views within the framework of five-party negotiations," Aref said, adding that "through cooperation among the littoral states and the willingness of their governments, we believe that the establishment of such zones is achievable. Iran has formally shared a draft memorandum of understanding on the creation of free trade zones in the Cas-



Iran's Vice President Mohammadreza Aref speaks at the third Caspian Economic Conference in Tehran on February 19, 2025. fypresident.ir

pian Sea with all littoral states and looks forward to receiving feedback."

At the fifth Caspian Summit in Aktau, Kazakhstan, Iran proposed enhancing tourism cooperation in the Caspian Sea and shared a draft agreement with littoral states.

"We are now ready to engage in discussions based on various perspectives and existing capacities in this field. Significant investment opportunities exist in this sector, and Iran has made considerable investments in tourism development along its Caspian coast, including the construction of hotels and recreational facilities."

The vice president pointed out that expanding the tourism industry along the Caspian coast offers substantial potential for

regional development and prosperity. Furthermore, he said, facilitating visa procedures for citizens of littoral states and supporting private sector activities and investors will play a crucial role in realizing these opportunities.

Assembly of governor generals

To operationalize and facilitate the implementation of conference decisions, I propose the formation of an "Assembly of Caspian Coastal Provinces' Governors," Aref noted stating that his country is prepared to host the first meeting of this assembly in 2025 in one of its Caspian coastal provinces.

"Balanced and sustainable development based on science and the exchange of advanced technologies among Caspian

littoral states requires close cooperation among knowledge-based companies in the region," he maintained.

He described the Caspian Sea as a precious gem and our shared heritage, adding: "We must strive to preserve it for future generations. Balancing economic development with environmental conservation is essential. Challenges to the sustainable development of the Caspian Sea region, including declining water levels, human and natural factors impacting the environment, oil pollution, the destruction of historical habitats of Caspian species, and the threat to aquatic resources, can only be addressed through joint research and cooperation among academic and executive experts from all littoral states."

President refutes rumors on CBI governor's dismissal

Economy Desk

President Masoud Pezeshkian dismissed rumors about the dismissal of the Central Bank of Iran governor during a visit to the CBI on Tuesday.

He emphasized that the government is committed to resolving issues through unity, collaboration, and the expertise of specialists and pundits, according to president.ir.

Pezeshkian, who attended a meeting with CBI Governor Mohammadreza Farzin and officials of the lender to review and support measures to control the gold and currency markets, addressed reporters from the state TV afterward.

He refuted rumors of the removal or replacement of the governor, stating, "Some have fabricated and spread these rumors in the media, claiming certain individuals have been dismissed or appointed. Today, both in parliament and here, we are announcing through the media that we will join hands and, with collective effort, resolve the various challenges facing the people of our country."

The president acknowledged that addressing social and behavioral issues takes time and cannot be resolved with immediate decisions.

He reiterated the government's determination to serve the peo-



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ple by fostering empathy, cooperation, and consultation with elites, experts, and political figures, guided by the policies of the Leader.

"We will move in unison toward a common goal. With unity and divine strength, we can overcome threats and challenges," he said.

Pezeshkian also highlighted the need to counter efforts by adversaries to demoralize the public, particularly through online platforms.

"One of their tactics is to spread despair among the people. We want to make it clear that we are fully committed to solving the people's problems and will tirelessly strive to do so," he stated.

Regarding the CBI's efforts to address fluctuations in the gold and currency markets, the president stressed the importance of allowing banking, monetary,

and financial experts to collaborate and devise solutions.

"We discussed the need to let these experts work together to find solutions, which we will then implement with the support of the people, Parliament, and the government. We must trust the specialists to identify the right path forward," he said. Rumors of the CBI governor's dismissal began circulating in local media earlier this week, prompting widespread speculation about potential shifts in economic policy.

The government has consistently denied these reports, emphasizing its commitment to continuity and stability in economic management. Pezeshkian's visit to the Central Bank and his subsequent remarks appear aimed at reassuring the public and reinforcing confidence in the government's economic strategy.

Oil industry closing in on digitalization as NISOC, TCI ink deal

The National Iranian South Oil Company (NISOC) and Telecommunication Company of Iran (TCI) signed a cooperation agreement to collaborate on digitalizing the country's oil industry. During the signing ceremony on Monday evening, Ebrahim Piramoun, CEO of NISOC, highlighted the company's goal of advancing toward digital oil wells, Shana reported on Tuesday.

He stated that one of the primary objectives of the agreement is bilateral cooperation to utilize artificial intelligence for data-driven analysis and decision-making systems in the oil industry.

Piramoun added that the agreement includes developing a roadmap and a plan for a Digital Oil Field, as well as providing the necessary infrastructure and services for its implementation.

He expressed hope that this collaboration with Iran Telecommunications would lead to a formal contract.

Optical fiber project in NISOC

Abbas Rezaei, head of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) at NISOC, outlined the company's ICT



SHANA

roadmap during the ceremony.

He emphasized that the agreement focuses on bilateral cooperation to develop communication services and infrastructure, as well as data exchange in the fields of IT (Information Technology), CT (Communications Technology), and OT (Operational Technology).

Rezaei noted that the collaboration aims to design and implement an optical fiber project across the company's operational areas. He also expressed hope to provide fiber-optic internet services (FTTX) for offices and residential areas.

Implementation of processing infrastructure for reservoir and oil field simulation software.

Also, Mohammad Jafarpour,

CEO of TCI, highlighted the company's capability in providing advanced information services.

He stated that the partnership with NISOC aims to design and oversee the construction of data centers and High-Performance Computing (HPC) centers, including the processing infrastructure for heavy reservoir and oil field simulation software. Jafarpour added that the agenda includes designing and implementing private 5G networks and Internet of Things (IoT) technology to enable smart and automated factories and operational environments.

He emphasized that these steps are crucial for advancing the oil industry toward digitalization.

Music's journey in post-Revolution era:

A narrative of successive policies in Iran's music landscape



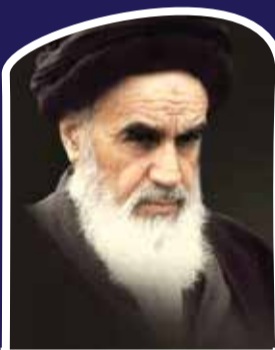
By Zohreh Qanadi
Staff writer

A review of the history of music in the post-Islamic Revolution era reveals a series of policies that their proponents have gradually retreated from over the past four decades and today, music, with its diverse genres, has reached its current position. A glance at the opinions of some musicians regarding the status of this art in Iran provides a relative understanding of today's musical landscape:

Amir Esnaashari, a singer and tar player, has stated, "After the Revolution, we experienced a historical gap. Authentic artists who had a deep understanding of Iranian music were, in a way, banned from working or chose to emigrate. In the realm of pop music, had this connection not been severed, the music we currently refer to as pop would have evolved differently, following a logical trajectory in Iranian music rather than becoming the eclectic mix of the music of various countries that it is today."- Jamsheed Jam, the singer of the piece 'Yar-e Dabestani,' expressed that the situation is not "good." He stated, "We can have rap music that embodies our own atmosphere and culture. Nowadays, everything sung is merely a translated version, lacking originality and melody. The instrumentation of Western music does not align with our culture. The same applies to pop music; if a professional arranger takes the lead, the result would be acceptable."

Keyvan Saket, who prefers to label traditional music as "national," asserts that Iranian national music is dynamic and alive. This tar and setar player highlighted that Iranian music has undergone significant evolution and changes in form, content, and structure. He remarked, "The audience of Iranian music, due to its unique structure, needs to be more familiar with it and receive training in listening to truly appreciate the beauty of this art; as this issue may have made understanding Iranian music somewhat challenging for some people and today's youth in comparison to pop music."

Hamidreza Adab, a musician, said, "A significant part of [traditional] Iranian music is intertwined with Iranian rituals and culture and has managed to secure a prominent position in major world festivals, a status that other music genres in Iran have not been able to achieve." Adab continued, "Iranian pop music is a second-hand and third-rate imitation of Western pop and rock, a replication of a genre predominantly led by Westerners, while traditional music emerges from the very roots of Iranian soil." Abbas Qaed Rahmat noted, "It is possible to display authenticity and classicism in pop music as well, at least by utilizing rich lyrics; therefore, it is better to seek a balance between modern and traditional music in accordance with societal needs."



"I have listened to most of your anthems and I approve of many of them, which is good, but you are just at the beginning, and you need to gain experience. Our music must distance itself from the music of the Pahlavi era. If we endorse music, we are endorsing the kind of music that other forms cannot influence."



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Islamic Revolution and music

The Revolution and music are two terms that have not easily coexisted. The Islamic Revolution of 1979 abruptly marked the end of music, particularly the Iranian pop genre, which had gradually been evolving to compete with the best global examples. Iranian pop music emerged in the 19th century during the Qajar era and flourished with the advent of radio. This musical style transformed with the incorporation of Western instruments and musical techniques as well as with the brilliance of artists like Vigen, recognized as the "King of Iranian pop" and the "Sultan of Jazz" in Iran.

During the Revolution, the media and cultural atmosphere faced a generation accustomed to music, while simultaneously being deemed as containing corrupt themes that could waste the vitality of the youth. Imam Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic Republic, viewed the complete eradication of music from Radio and Television as the only remedy, asserting that music, from the perspective of a Shia jurist, was considered haram (forbidden). During this period, pop musicians and singers, confronted with Islamic values, contemplated the impossibility of continuing this musical style in light of these values and thus opted to leave the country.

In the early days of the Revolution, Imam Khomeini referred to the way corrupt governments sedated the youth, labeling music as a means of this sedation. He stated, "The television shouldn't broadcast ten hours of music. A vigorous youth, once turned away from their strength, is rendered in a state of stupor, much like that induced by opium. This [music] is not much different." At that time, he remarked, "Eliminate this music entirely and replace it with something educational"; "Remove music. Don't be afraid of being labeled as an-

tiquated! If we are antiquated, so be it! Don't fear this. Such words are mere strategies to divert you from serious endeavors."

Over the years, as the officials of that era at Radio and Television believed that if music were removed from the national media, people would turn to illegal and unconventional sources, this indeed happened. A generation accustomed to music sought to satisfy their tastes and fill the void left by the absence of music, turning to the works of singers in exile. Consequently, "Los Angeles singers" remained at their peak for about two decades, while pop music and, consequently, the Iranian rock genre were sidelined within the country for many years.

On the other hand, this period marked the peak and flourishing of revolutionary anthems, which were being created underground in the years leading up to the Revolution. Since music is a reflection of society and emerges from within each nation, the exhilarating days of the Revolution propelled music toward an epic direction. Mohammad-Reza Lotfi, a composer and founder of the "Chavosh Cultural and Artistic Center," discusses the transformation of music in the years following the Revolution in a series of radio programs titled "Contemporary History of Iranian Traditional Music." He states, "Given the social currents and revolutionary fervor, people were not in a position to appreciate traditional music—that is, instrumental and vocal music. The youth were out in the streets, filled with excitement. They expected us to present social and revolutionary compositions." Over these years, the tone of music became increasingly heroic, with pieces gradually taking on the form of anthems.

and heroic sentiments emerged. At this juncture, Imam Khomeini, witnessing this content growth, endorsed the broadcasting of stirring and exhilarating revolutionary music on state media. Saeedeh Shabrang, a researcher of oral history, notes during a discussion on the book "The Cry of Freedom," which includes the oral memoirs of Composer Ahmad Ali Ragheb, that one of the highlights of this book is the memory of creating the anthem "Shahid Motahar" and the private meeting between musicians and Imam Khomeini. Ragheb recounts an instance where the Imam stated, "I have listened to most of your anthems and I approve of many of them, which is good, but you are just at the beginning, and you need to gain experience. Our music must distance itself from the music of the Pahlavi era. If we endorse music, we are endorsing the kind of music that other forms cannot influence. Generally speaking, contradictions in the views and thoughts of significant figures are often sensitive. To understand the reasons behind this transformation in opinions, it's essential to recognize that these apparent contradictions, especially concerning Islamic laws and the perspectives of a Shia authority, carry even more weight. Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei remarks on Imam Khomeini's changing viewpoints: "The Imam believes that time and place affect interpretation. This means that the subject changes, even though a person may think it remains the same; however, the subject has indeed changed, and consequently, its ruling changes." Ayatollah Khamenei further asserts, "In practice, we do not witness contradictions; rather, this reflects the dynamism of his legal thought, which is not limited to a specific area like music but also manifests in fields such as cinema." Thus, the distinction between halal [Permissible] and haram music emerges. In a fatwa is-

Evolution of music in Iran

As the early years of the Revolution passed, more and more anthems infused with revolutionary

sued on September 10, 1988, the Imam introduced a new concept called "halal benefits." In his view, "music" can be utilized for "halal benefits." In this fatwa, the Imam specifies in response to a question regarding "buying and selling musical instruments for legitimate uses," stating, "The buying and selling of shared instruments for the purpose of halal benefits is permissible." He adds, "Listening to and playing entertaining music is haram, while dubious sounds do not pose a problem, and buying and selling instruments solely for entertainment is not allowed, but there is no issue with shared instruments." The issuance of this fatwa garnered significant attention and was perceived among experts as a major shift in the overarching music policy. As mentioned, in addition to changes in the lyrical content of music, its tone also became heroic during these years, with pieces increasingly resembling anthems. During the Iran-Iraq War (1980s), the influence and impact of traditional music on society continued unabated. Musicians, throughout the late 1980s, not only produced traditional music pieces but also took a serious look at the war and the sentiments of the community. Many pieces created by the Chavosh Cultural and Artistic Center were heavily influenced by the political atmosphere in Iran. Mohammad-Reza Shajarian and Shahram Nazeri sang most of these pieces. However, aligning with political and social events was not the only characteristic of traditional music in the early years following the Revolution; in fact, the most significant works in the realm of authentic Iranian music were produced during these years.

Return of Pop music

After remaining on the sidelines for 15 years, Iranian Pop music regained its footing in the early 1990s, a few years after the

Return of Pop music

Return of Pop music

end of the imposed Iraqi war and under the differing policies of the Reconstruction Era [President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani] and subsequently the Reform Era [President Mohammad Khatami]. The authorities in the music sector decided to produce pop works in accordance with their own guidelines and regulations. Fereydoon Shabbazian, a musician and composer, along with Mohammad-Ali Moalem Damghani, a poet and lyricist, established a music council at state media tasked with overseeing and supporting pop music.

Composers such as Babak Bayat, Manouchehr Cheshmazar, Fariborz Lachini, and Touraj Sha'bankhani revitalized the fragmented pop music scene that had been dormant for two decades and linked it to that era. In an interview, Shabbazian states, "When we decided to launch pop music, we were determined to work with the best singers we could find in Iran. As you can see today, the music we presented and the singers we initially introduced are still considered some of the best. However, what we delivered wasn't really pop music, and we didn't want it to be labeled as such."

During that time, in addition to a few prominent pop music figures from before the Revolution who remained in the country and sought permission from the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, a new wave of young singers also began to make their mark in this genre, gradually gaining significant recognition. Among the first pop singers after the Revolution were Khashayar Etemadi and Mohammad Esfahani, although in that brief period, around ten young singers emerged, each with distinct talents, who later became known as "the first generation of post-Revolution pop singers". This generation typically kicked off their careers on television. Thus, the music scene, which had previously been dominated by classical and traditional works, found itself facing a new competitor: pop music.

In the second half of the 1990s, the first post-Revolution pop albums by a handful of stars hit the music market.

Era of album flourishing

The 1990s marked the beginning of a renaissance in Iranian music following the Islamic Revolution. During this period, albums such as "Niloufaraneh," "Dehati," "Noon-O-Dalqak," and "Ghazalak" transformed the music landscape in Iran, encompassing both pop and traditional genres, with poets playing an indispensable role in this resurgence.

The first pop albums after the Revolution were released following the rise of the Reformist government in 1997. The famous pop and traditional singer Mohammad Esfahani debuted his first official and independent album titled "Golchin." In 2002, he released "Noon-O-Dalqak," which became one of the best-selling albums in the history of Iranian music. Shadmehr Aqili was another phenomenon of that era, achieving extraordinary sales with albums like "Mosafer," "Dehati," and "Par-e Parvaz." In 1999, Alireza Asar gained fame as a distinctive and heroic voice with his album "Kooch-e Asheqaneh."

Between 2002 and 2006, a movement emerged known as "Vasookht," producing numerous pop songs with anti-love and curse-themed lyrics, which were enthusiastically embraced by the new generation of music fans in the 2000s. Mohsen Chavoshi,

Mohsen Yeganeh, and Hamed Hakan were among the singers who released several Vasookht tracks.

After the flourishing of pop singers in the late 1990s, aside from a few, including Mohammad Esfahani, Hamid Hami, and even Shadmehr Aqili, who moved abroad, many first-generation pop stars faced a decline in their careers. Some attribute the downfall of this generation to the rise of new artists or a drop in the quality of their new albums. However, some of these stars believed that favoritism and a music mafia prevented them from being seen, which reflects a flawed policy and lack of oversight in the music industry during that time. Hamid Hami expressed that people in Iran do not show interest in high-quality music, which is why he attempts to hold his performances abroad. Qasem Afshar, another pop singer, attributed the lagging status of his contemporaries in the music scene to the chaotic environment of the music market during that decade. He stated, "In those years, music was not given much importance, and there was no commitment to producing musical works. These factors led my peers to experience disillusionment. I myself have also become disenchanted with the prevailing atmosphere of music in recent years."

Overall, the late 1990s and early 2000s can be regarded as a period of decline for pop music in Iran. In the 2000s, the state media organization and its various channels adopted new policies that did not prioritize pop music as before. Consequently, pop music again fell out of favor for a time. It was in the mid-2000s that new singers entered the professional arena, rekindling the audience's and officials' interest in pop music.

From the late 2000s to the early 2010s, the production and release of musical works underwent significant changes. The rise of the internet and the proliferation of digital tools drove these transformations. From those years onward, producing albums became less economically viable, and the release of singles became more common. Among those who entered the music scene, several new talents were discovered and introduced, receiving support in various ways. On the other hand, producers, who had played a minimal role in shaping the content and essence of pop music and other genres before the 2000s, gained substantial power, dictating which singer would produce works and perform on stage.

In recent years, pop music has also influenced traditional music, leading to the rise of a genre known as "traditional pop," which often neglects the proper fusion of lyrics and music. However, if this type of music develops correctly in its own right, it could become a valuable brand for the country's music.

Return of concerts

The holding of concerts was banned in the country for nearly a decade following the Revolution due to the prohibition of music; however, even today, organizing concerts sometimes faces challenges depending on the venue and timing. For instance, Ayatollah Seyyed Ahmad Alamolhoda, the Friday prayer leader of Mashhad, explained his opposition to concerts in this pilgrimage city in an interview in August 2023, stating, "I do not approve of mass music. You see, if a concert takes place here, it will turn into a concert market."



By the end of the 1980s, with the gradual return of pop music, the atmosphere of concert venues began to change. As young people embraced this genre, young singers began to stage concerts. The first generation of pop singers in the 1990s not only released albums but also performed concerts. Dariush Khashayar Etemadi, an established pop singer, was among the first to hold a concert after the Islamic Revolution, managing to do so in 1989 despite the challenges involved. Additionally, some music producers regard Khashayar Etemadi as the first modern concert organizer. Etemadi took the stage in 1999, and his concert was well-received by audiences. Music producer Mohsen Rajabpour believes that the true essence of concert performances began in 1999 with multiple and consecutive shows.

Alireza Asar, who was recognized as a distinctive singer in the 1990s and 2000s, holds records for concert performances during these years. In the 1990s, he set a record by holding 28 consecutive concerts. The band "Arian," considered the first Iranian pop music group, performed numerous concerts for 15 years during a time when concerts were not widespread, thereby establishing their place in concert history. Ehsan Khajeh Amiri, another pop singer, performed seven shows at the Ministry of Interior Hall in 2007, an event that had not happened before. It should also be noted that during those years, the concerts of Mohsen Yeganeh and Reza Sadeqi, following Khashayar Etemadi's success, also set records for concert performances in the late 2000s. Sirvan Khosravi, a composer, arranger, and pop singer, along with Mazyar Fallahi, are regarded as record holders for concerts in the 2010s.

Another success for domestic pop singers has been gaining popularity among expatriate Ira-

nians. In the fall of 2017, Mohsen Yeganeh held a concert at the large "Microsoft" venue in the United States, attracting 7,100 attendees. Notably, prior to Yeganeh, only two other singers had managed to fill this capacity. Challenges in organizing concerts in the late 2010s included the selection of performers and the methods of organizing concerts, as well as high ticket prices and a lack of real oversight regarding how they were conducted. Additionally, the introduction of a new policy requiring that ten percent of concert revenues be deposited into the government treasury has sparked further criticism.

Iranian Rock

Rock music, which emerged in Iran in the late 1960s, gained popularity with the rise of artists such as Koroush Yaghmaei, Farhad Mehrad, Fereydoon Foroughi, and Habib Mohebbian. Iranian rock was a style in which Iranian musicians made modifications to the Rock genre. While it attracted fewer fans than other genres, its followers were quite passionate. However, this musical style was largely forgotten after the Revolution for many years. Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, Kaveh Yaghmaei remained the only Iranian rock singer officially active under the Ministry of Culture's approval, even holding a concert in 1994 that was dubbed the first Iranian rock concert after the Revolution. In fact, it can be argued that, following the Revolution, the genre that emerged in the Iranian music scene was not rock, but rather pop music, which found its place alongside traditional and classical styles. Shadi Vatanparast, a music writer and critic, states that the first movements began with the formation of modern revolutionary anthems and the presence of singers like Bijan Khavari and Hamid Gholamali, whose work produced a blend



The 1990s marked the beginning of a renaissance in Iranian music following the 1979 Islamic Revolution. During this period, albums such as "Niloufaraneh," "Dehati," "Noon-O-Dalqak," and "Ghazalak" transformed the music landscape in Iran, encompassing both pop and traditional genres, with poets playing an indispensable role in this resurgence.



On the final night of the 40th International Fajr Music Festival, on February 17, 2025, the Ghaffari Orchestra and the Arabic Qanun soloist takes to the stage.
● FATEMEH AMUZAD/MEHR

between pop music and anthems. Vatanparast mentions that rock still did not have an official presence.

In the late 1990s, with the emergence of the Reformist government and into the early 2000s, Iranian rock music experienced a revival, marking the beginning of a golden era for Persian rock. In the early 2000s, Iranian youth's interest in this genre and its sub-genres intensified, leading to the formation of numerous groups. During these years, a limited number of concerts were held with official permits.

Regarding rock music, some experts believe that this style does not receive the same support from the Ministry of Culture as pop does. They attribute this lack of support to factors such as the level of excitement and impact of the genre, as well as the appearance and mindset of its artists. The lack of permits for releases has hindered the expansion of works in this genre.

Babak Chamanara from the Beethoven Music Center in Tehran states that pop music quickly overtook traditional music, even compelling music producers to follow this trend. However, he continues by saying that rock music, after those years, neither gained the permission to operate nor received support, and instead, it proliferated spontaneously among young people in homes and private gatherings. Shahram Sharbaf, frontman of O-Hum band, who has felt the barriers imposed by the Ministry of Culture, has acknowledged that "the height of the barrier has become shorter."

However, the 2010s truly marked a new era for rock music in Iran. During this period, many groups, both inside and outside the country, innovated and created music and lyrics, utilizing musical elements that had never been employed before, thus giving a fresh shape to the landscape of Iranian rock music.

Sharbaf believes that the momentum in Iranian rock music and fusion music will undoubtedly continue, but only those whose motivations and reasons for working stem solely from their love for music will succeed in overcoming the obstacles, as money or fame cannot provide sufficient motivation to endure the existing pressures.

Final thoughts

Ultimately, looking at the journey of music over these four decades and considering the rich heritage of Iranian music, which has a history spanning over three thousand years, these questions come to mind: Has this art form now returned to its rightful path? Would Iranian music have reached its current status if that gap or interruption had not occurred? Has this interruption led to the detachment of pop music from its Iranian roots, or is it the changing tastes of the audience and the influence of global music that has brought Iranian music to this point?

Moreover, a crucial point to consider is that poetry is the voice of the soul, and when it intertwines with the beautiful art of music, it becomes unforgettable. Is the measure of whether this art is on the right track determined by audience satisfaction, or should it be based on adhering to the guidelines set by the experts in the field?



Iranian wrestler Yazdani back in training in bid for coveted Olympic crown

Sports Desk

Iranian wrestling great Hassan Yazdani began his bid for an elusive second Olympic gold medal on Monday.

Yazdani, 30, started his rehabilitation program under national team coach Hassan Hosseinzadeh at the Iranian Wrestling Federation gym in Tehran – five months after undergoing a second surgery on his injured shoulder in the French city of Nice.

A winner of a national-high 10 world and Olympic medals, the wrestling sensation last appeared at the 2024 Paris Olympics back in August, where he settled for the freestyle 86kg silver after a 7-1 defeat against Bulgarian Magomed Ramazanov.

Yazdani had already been out of action for eight months before last June's Ranking Series event in Budapest – due to a first surgery on his right shoulder – but recovered in time to secure his place in the national team for the Games.

The Iranian showed no signs of an injury on his way to the final showpiece but the problem flared up against Ramazanov as he struggled with the dislocated shoulder from the get-go, calling for treatment on several occa-

sions throughout the six minutes of action.

A gold medal in Paris would have seen Yazdani overtake taekwondo legend Hadi Saei as the most decorated Iranian in the history of the Olympic Games with two golds and one silver.

A 74kg champion in Rio 2016, Yazdani suffered an Olympic final heartbreak against his familiar foe David Taylor in Tokyo five years later, and when the American fell short against Aaron Brooks in the US Olympic trials, the Iranian looked to be the favorite for the ultimate prize in Paris. Iranian fans thought the defeat against Ramazanov was the last episode of Yazdani's storied career but he was quick to reject the retirement plan on his return from the French capital as he remains eager to collect the coveted gold in the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics.

Dr. Sohrab Kayhani, the head of the medical team at the Iranian federation, said at the time of Yazdani's surgery in September that the three-time world gold winner would face "between 12 to 18 months" on the sidelines and is unlikely to feature in the Iranian trials for the World Championships next summer.

Yazdani has gained significant

weight over the past five months and is unlikely to compete in the 86kg class ever again, according to his personal coach Hemmat Moslemi.

"As it stands, Hassan will participate in the 92kg contests in the 2026 world event, and will then move up to the 97kg category if he decides to compete in the next Asian Games. His ultimate goal will be to take part in the 97kg class in the L.A. Games, but we should take one step at a time," Moslemi told Varzesh3 last November.

That means Yazdani will likely have to overcome domestic competition from 22-year-old Amir-Ali Azarpira – a bronze medalist in Paris – and Mojtaba Goleij for the Iranian 97kg spot in the Games, before taking on the likes of reigning Olympic champion Akhmed Tazhudinov, and American great Kyle Snyder for the top podium in Los Angeles.



Iranian freestyle wrestler Hassan Yazdani is pictured alongside national team coach Hassan Hosseinzadeh during a training session in Tehran, Iran, on February 17, 2025.
● IAWF

AFC U20 Asian Cup:

Iran to face Uzbekistan for group top spot

Sports Desk

The top spot in Group C of the AFC U20 Asian Cup will be on the line when Iran and defending champion Uzbekistan go head-to-head in Shenzhen, China, today.

A 6-0 victory over Yemen on Sunday saw Iran sit atop the group table with six points, thanks to a superior goal difference over Uzbekistan, and a draw in today's game will be enough to send the four-time champion into the last eight as the group winner.

Iran head coach Hossein Abdi looked to be confident in the pre-match press conference, saying that he will likely rotate his squad for the final group game.

"It was very important to take the three points from our match against Yemen," said Abdi, whose team has netted netting nine unanswered

goals in its first two outings.

"We're a little relaxed heading into our next match against Uzbekistan, and will give a chance to the other players to get some minutes here in Shenzhen.

"We have to be careful about our players picking up cautions heading into the knockout stage. We know how Uzbekistan can play and we have other players in the squad to take us through the game."

Having edged Yemen 1-0 in group opener, Uzbekistan secured a place in the quarterfinals after overcoming Indonesia 3-1 later on Sunday, with head coach Muhammad Urinboev eager to maintain their winning momentum.

"Now we have one more battle with Iran, if we win, we can take a 100 percent record into the next round," said Urinboev.

"This tournament is important for us and the fans because we are the defending champions and, hopefully, we are also the next champions."

Both two sides will not know about their last-eight opponents until Group D fixtures conclude on Thursday, with the 2023 semifinalists South Korea and Japan in pole position to go through.

Beaten in the last-four shootout by Uzbekistan in the previous edition, South Korea is top in the group standings with maximum points and will face second-placed Japan (4pts) today.

Syria, which played to a 2-2 draw against Japan last time out, will still fancy its chances of advancing when taking on Thailand.

The four semifinalists in China will qualify for September's FIFA U20 World Cup in Chile.



● FFIRI



● MNA

Tehran to host Asian Women's Kabaddi Championship

Sports Desk

Tehran will host the upcoming edition of the Asian Women's Kabaddi Championship from March 4-8, Abbas Khajeh Avareseji, the chairman of the Iranian Kabaddi Federation, confirmed on Tuesday.

The host country will be joined by four-time champion India, Nepal, Iraq, Bangladesh, Thailand, Malaysia, and Sri Lanka in the sixth edition of tournament, with the eight

teams set to be split into two groups.

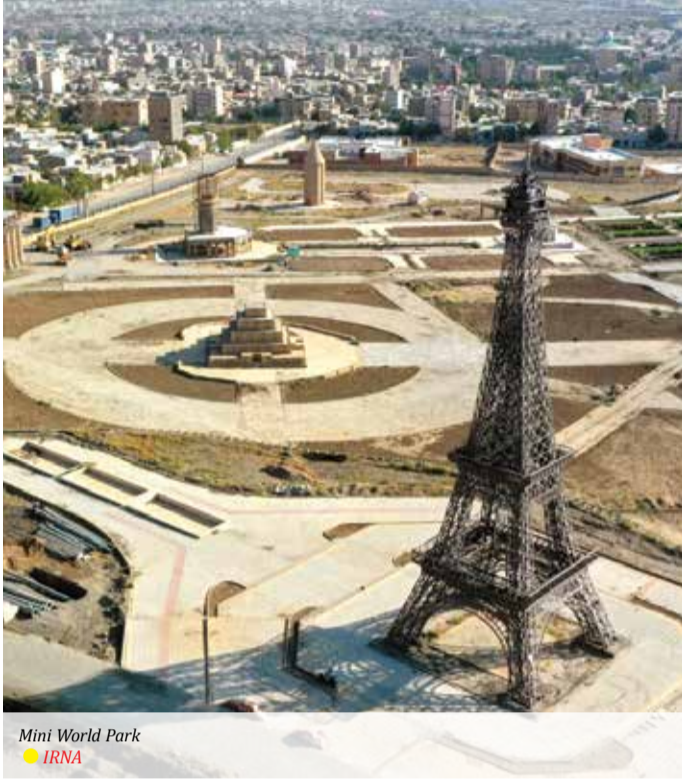
Hosting the event on a third occasion, Iran will be chasing a maiden Asian title, having won double silver and bronze medals apiece.

Having beaten India for a precious gold medal at the 2018 Asian Games, Iran fell to a last-four defeat against the Chinese Taipei in the Hangzhou 2022 event and settled for a consolation joint-bronze alongside Nepal.

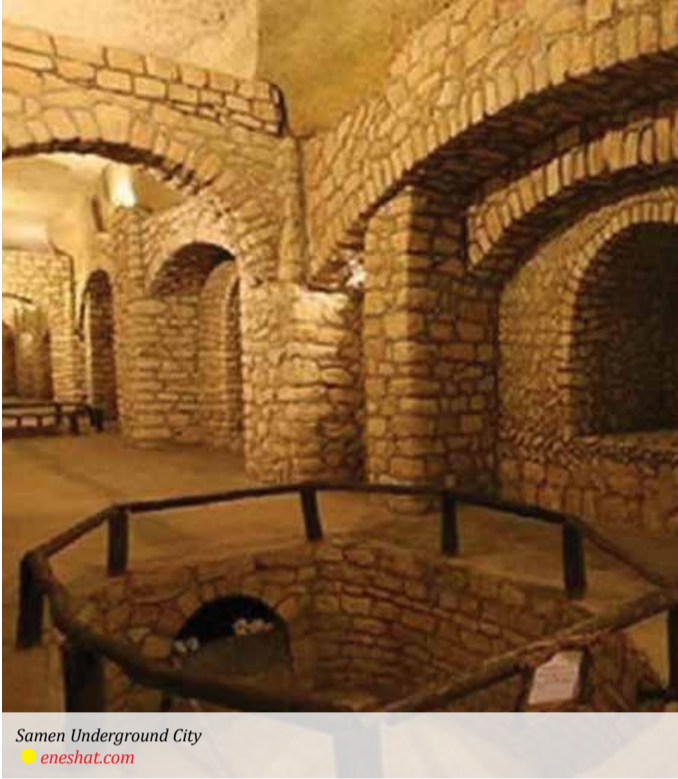
"The Iranian women's squad at the Asian Championship will be much younger than the one that competed in Hangzhou as our ultimate goal is to win the gold medal at the 2026 Asian Games in Nagoya," said Avareseji – the former president of the Asian Kabaddi Federation.

"Next for Iran will be the World Championship, which is to be held in India in June, though the exact date of the competition is yet to be confirmed," added the Iranian.

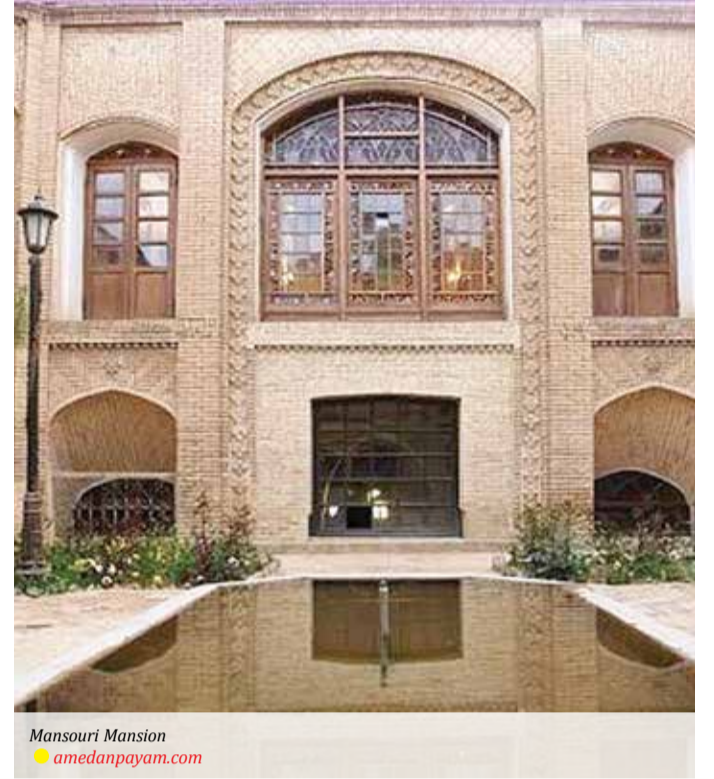
Impact of tourism on Malayer's economy and culture



Mini World Park
● IRNA



Samen Underground City
● eneshat.com



Mansouri Mansion
● amedanpayam.com

Iranica Desk

Today, tourism is recognized as one of the most vital industries for sustainable development, offering substantial economic, social, and cultural opportunities for metropolitan areas and global cities.

Statistics underscore the significance of tourism and its potential for growth, with experts predicting that the global tourism industry's revenue in this century could surpass that of the industrial sector, potentially reaching several trillion dollars in the coming years. For economies like Iran's, these figures are particularly important, as they could influence all economic activities and contribute to national development. However, achieving such revenue requires comprehensive planning and appropriate investments in both the hardware and software aspects of the industry.

Despite its diverse attractions — historical, religious, and natural — Iran has struggled to secure its fair share of the global tourism market due to ineffective policies in this sector. This shortfall has contributed to various socio-economic challenges in the country that could be addressed through tourism development.

Hub of tourism

Malayer, with its pristine landscapes,

abundant tourist attractions, and unique national heritage sites, has made significant contributions to the national tourism discourse in recent years. The city is celebrated for its rich cultural heritage, including its renowned handicrafts and its recognition as both the World Grapes City and the World Craft City for Carved Wooden Furniture. These accolades highlight Malayer's importance not only in Iran but also on the international stage.

Infrastructure development

The discussions surrounding Malayer's tourism and handicrafts, alongside the dedicated efforts of the municipality and the Cultural Heritage Organization to enhance tourism infrastructure and create recreational areas, have been crucial in developing the tourism industry within the county. Malayer's carved wooden furniture is celebrated both nationally and internationally, showcasing the city's craftsmanship. Additionally, the county holds a special place in agricultural tourism due to its extensive grape production, with its grape cultivation system registered as the fifty-third agricultural heritage site in the world.

Mini World Park

The remarkable Mini World Park, established for the first time in the Middle East, has garnered widespread admiration.

This important recreational area is poised to initiate a significant transformation in attracting tourists and enhancing cultural and social issues in the region. Mini World Park, located in the northern part of the city, covers over 48 hectares and is not only the first thematic park in Malayer but also the first mini tourism complex in the Middle East and the fourth in the world. Visitors to this park can enjoy a unique opportunity to see 138 historical, national, and global landmarks on a smaller scale, making it a fascinating destination for both locals and tourists alike.

Samen Underground City

The Samen Underground City is another unique phenomenon located beneath the streets, homes, and office buildings in the central area of Malayer, created through hand excavation in granite bedrock. These structures average a depth of three to 5.5 meters and cover over three hectares, with approximately one hectare currently identified. Archaeological excavations conducted in 2008 by experts from the Cultural Heritage Organization of Hamedan Province yielded highly significant findings. The excavation team, comprising specialists from various fields — particularly archaeology, anthropology, and conservation — was able to explore a substantial portion of the identified spaces, un-

covering artifacts that shed light on the region's rich history.

Architectural heritage

Malayer is also home to the Mansouri Mansion, a treasure of Iranian art that features two floors representing different historical periods. This historical structure, dating back to the Qajar and Pahlavi eras, belongs to the Mansouri heirs and stands as a testament to the architectural heritage of the region. Additionally, the Nushjian Hill, located about 60 kilometers south of Hamadan and 20 kilometers northwest of Malayer, has been a site of archaeological excavations since 1967. These excavations have revealed remnants from three historical periods, including a fortress, a temple, and a columned hall from the early Median period.

Enhancing tourist appeal

Furthermore, the municipality's construction of modern and traditional restaurants on the rooftop of Malayer, the establishment of motels for travelers, and the ongoing development of key projects — such as the carved furniture market, significant exhibitions showcasing handicrafts, and several national carved furniture festivals — have all contributed to Malayer's emergence as a prominent "tourist destination" in the western part of the country.

International events

Recently, Malayer made a successful and notable appearance at the 18th International Tourism and Related Industries Exhibition in Tehran, held from February 11 to 14. The Malayer pavilion showcased the region's tourism potential, handicrafts, and souvenirs, providing an excellent opportunity for interaction with industry professionals, investors, and both domestic and international visitors.

According to ISNA, Malayer's participation in this exhibition played a crucial role in promoting the county as a significant tourist destination in Iran, paving the way for attracting investment and developing sustainable tourism. The event served as a valuable platform to highlight the capabilities of artisans, producers, and professionals in the tourism and handicraft sectors of Malayer.

As the largest event of its kind in the country, the tourism exhibition facilitates the exchange of experiences, showcases the tourism capacities of various provinces, and fosters international collaborations. Malayer's involvement in this exhibition will not only enhance the global branding of the city but also expand target markets and strengthen interactions within the tourism industry, further solidifying its position as a key player in Iran's tourism landscape.

Explore thrills of Sahand Ski Resort in northwestern Iran



● eneshat.com

Located 30km southeast of Tabriz in East Azarbaijan Province, Sahand Ski Resort stands out as a premier center for winter sports in northwestern Iran. As the only ski resort in East Azarbaijan, it features approximately 1,200 meters of skiable terrain.

The resort's geographical location, nestled between the two major mountain ranges of Zagros and Alborz, contributes to its cold, mountainous climate, making it an ideal destination for winter sports enthusiasts. Snowfall in the area can reach up to four meters, enhancing its appeal for skiing and snow recreation.

Sahand Ski Resort is one of 13 international ski slopes in Iran, equipped with advanced facilities and equipment, making it a significant venue for national and international competitions. Visitors can enjoy a range of amenities, including parking,

accommodation complexes, villa hotels, restaurants, and cafes. Additionally, the resort offers experienced instructors and a ski school for those eager to learn skiing. Ski lifts, rope tows, and other sports facilities are also available.

While winter is undoubtedly the best season to experience the resort's offerings, it attracts both domestic and international visitors year-round, thanks to its cool climate and scenic rivers.

To reach the sporting complex, it is advisable to use a personal vehicle equipped for snowy conditions. From Tabriz, take the southeast route; after 27km from the Tabriz-Tehran road police station, you'll find the sign for Sahand Ski Resort. If you choose to visit this remarkable destination, consider exploring nearby attractions such as Quri Gol Wetland, Bostanabad Hot Springs, and the Qajar Museum.

Iran eyes Central Asia, Caucasus as key destinations for Nowruz tourism

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran is targeting 13 countries, primarily in Central Asia and the Caucasus, to boost tourism during the upcoming Nowruz celebrations. The plan spans nations from Turkey to Pakistan, including Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and other neighboring states, IRNA reported. The Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, Reza Salehi Amiri, said that Iran aims to revitalize its tourism sector, encourage cultural exchanges, and strengthen ties between Iranians and the people of Nowruz-celebrating countries. He disclosed that he had recently travelled to Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia to bolster these connections. Salehi Amiri stressed that Iran's approach to tourism is not confined to specific geographical boundaries. "We are leveraging all 29 globally recognized types of tourism," he explained. This includes historical and heritage

tourism, scientific tourism due to Iran's vast academic resources, and agricultural tourism featuring picturesque gardens. Coastal tourism from Chabahar to Khorramshahr and Anzali, as well as desert tourism in regions like Maranjab, also form key parts of the strategy. Plus, culinary tourism and rural tourism are being promoted through over 3,500 ecotourism lodges across the country. To showcase Iran's diverse attractions, the 18th Tehran International Tourism and Related Industries Exhibition was held recently. The event aimed to introduce Iranian tourism offerings to both domestic and international audiences. During the exhibition, Iran signed an agreement with Tajikistan to increase tourist numbers from 8,600 to 100,000. This followed a previous signing in Dushanbe with the presence of the Tajik president. Despite facing international sanctions and external pressures, Salehi Amiri said that Iran's tourism sector remains unaffected. However, he acknowledged the chal-

lenge posed by negative portrayals in Western media. "There is a false narrative about Iran," he noted, adding that if international tourists visited Iran and witnessed its attractions, the misleading propaganda would naturally lose its impact. Addressing the measures taken to counter anti-Iran propaganda, Salehi Amiri outlined several initiatives, including promoting Iran's cultural and natural attractions globally. He stressed the need for strategic advertising, content creation, and collaboration with influential platforms. Efforts are underway to produce multilingual content, with plans to disseminate it through influential figures, particularly celebrities with a broad following. "We are also focusing on publishing appealing content on regional airlines and international news agencies," he explained. In addition, Iran is actively participating in international tourism events to reshape its global image. This includes attending Spain's FITUR 2025 and the upcoming Berlin travel fair.



Salehi Amiri stressed the importance of presenting an accurate image of Iran, asserting, "Iranophobia is a long-standing project. It cannot be countered overnight; it requires a strategic and sustained effort."

Winners of 40th International Fajr Music Festival announced

Celebrating legacy of composer Javad Maroufi



Arts & Culture Desk

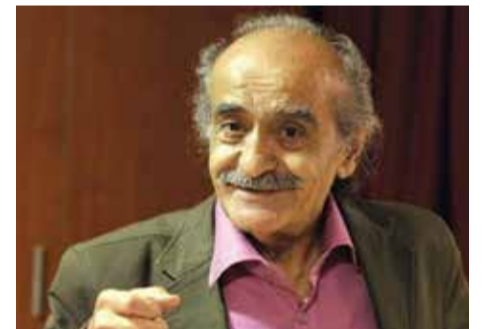
The 40th International Fajr Music Festival concluded with the announcement of its winners, underscoring the importance of mentorship in nurturing young talents. At the closing ceremony, held at Tehran's Vahdat Hall, the festival's secretary, Reza Mahdavi, emphasized the cultural significance of music, stressing the need to believe in and strengthen these cultural assets, Tasnim News Agency reported. He said the festival's continuous efforts to enhance the quality of performances, aiming for a 20 percent annual improvement while investing in better infrastructure. Mahdavi mentioned the festival's growing influence in the region, pointing to its advanced technical and organizational capabilities. He said that with more agility in

organizing awards like the Barbad Awards, named after a prominent figure in Iranian music, the festival could further elevate its status on the international stage. Acknowledging the crucial role of youth participation, Mahdavi said, "We believe that empowering the younger generation is vital for festivals like this." He expressed hope for the event to expand each year, becoming both a celebration and a competition, provided that experienced masters participate and mentor emerging artists. "Young musicians need the guidance and support of seasoned maestros," he said. Nadereh Rezaei, Deputy Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance for Artistic Affairs, noted that the festival, which marked its 40th year, serves as an event "by the people and for the people." She emphasized efforts to rebuild

trust and strengthen social capital despite existing challenges. She pointed to the increased participation of young talents alongside veteran artists, as well as the presence of international groups, as steps towards fostering national unity and enhancing Iran's cultural diplomacy. Rezaei stressed that restoring public trust and enhancing social capital are strategic assets, particularly amid sanctions and international isolation. She expressed optimism about continuing the festival at a higher standard with increased participation, leveraging the power of cultural diplomacy. This year's festival showcased a notable rise in female participation, with women's groups delivering significantly more performances compared to previous editions. Collaborative performances between Iranian and international groups also received widespread acclaim. Rezaei expressed hope that the festival, now a mature cultural event, would continue to grow in quality, featuring influential artists and a new generation full of promise. Ahmad Sadri, Director General of the Music Office at the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, highlighted the festival's diversity, showcasing Iran's rich musical heritage. "We aimed to present a comprehensive tableau of Iran's musical genres, from traditional folk music to contemporary adaptations," he said, noting the increased presence of regional music, both in its pure form and in modern arrangements. During the ceremony, Abbas Salehi took the stage at the host's request, delivering the closing remarks: "We are grateful to have shared the 40th

edition of the International Fajr Music Festival with you. With Iran, always for Iran, may the melody of Iran remain eternal." The event also honored female musicians through the Mana Award, presented by the Vice Presidency for Women and Family Affairs. The jury recognized the participants' artistic excellence, highlighting the role of women in Iranian music as a testament to their individual and collective talents. The statement emphasized the importance of empowering and supporting women, whose contributions are deeply rooted in Iranian cultural heritage. After thorough evaluation based on singing, musical arrangement, stage presence, lighting, and costume design, the Mana Award winners were announced. First and second winners are Mahani Ensemble, led by Maria and Mandana Hossein Ghafari; Rastaan Ensemble, directed by Azadeh Amiri, respectively. The third winner is Ivar Quchan Ensemble, under the leadership of Toktam Molaei. The closing night also paid tribute to the legendary Iranian composer and pianist Javad Maroufi with a special piano performance by Mohammadreza Amirghasemi at Tehran's Rudaki Hall. Maroufi's legacy, deeply intertwined with Iran's musical history, was celebrated through his lesser-known compositions, offering a nostalgic yet fresh experience for enthusiasts. This year's festival, held from February 11 to 17, featured performances by 100 Iranian bands, comprising over 1,400 musicians, alongside international participants.

Veteran Iranian voice actor Iraj Rezaei dies at 89



Arts & Culture Desk

Veteran Iranian voice actor and dubbing director Iraj Rezaei died at the age of 89 due to old age on February 17. Born in 1935 in the village of Gurab, Rezaei began his dubbing career in 1959 and took on the role of dubbing director in 1979. His voice became iconic through his work in memorable roles, including Albert Foiret (played by Bernard Hepton) in the series 'Secret Army', Charnier (played by Fernando Rey) in 'The French Connection II', and the deputy sheriff in the animated series of the same name, IRNA reported. Rezaei's talent for bringing characters to life made him the voice behind renowned actors such as Bud Spencer in 'Ace High', Robert Duvall in 'True Grit', Richard Harris in 'Robin and Marian', and Peter Sellers in 'The Party'. His portrayal of Hercule Poirot in the television series 'Poirot', featuring David Suchet, remains etched in the memories of Iranian audiences. He also voiced "Muhammad ibn Hanafiyah," played by Mohammad-Reza Sharifinia, in the historical series 'Mokhtarnameh'. In addition to his extensive dubbing career, Rezaei contributed to Iranian cinema by writing screenplays for films such as 'Spring in Autumn', 'Greedy', and 'The Story of Mahan'. He also supervised the dubbing of numerous Iranian films, including 'Zero Heights', 'Toy', 'The Evil Call', 'Temptation', 'Travellers of Moonlight', 'Helpless', 'Grandfather', 'The Command', and 'Border'. His work was not limited to Iranian productions. Rezaei also directed the dubbing for foreign films like 'Gunfight at the O.K. Corral', 'The Snows of Kilimanjaro', and 'The Towering Inferno', solidifying his legacy as one of the most versatile figures in the industry.