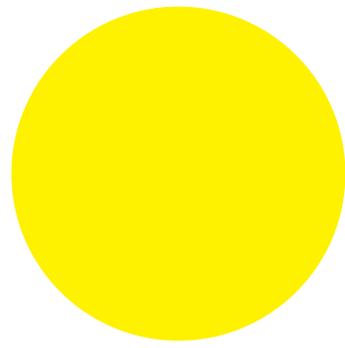


Leader's aide: US can pursue economic interests with Iran

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A young boy looks on as Palestinians stand amid the devastation in the yard of a school, a day after it was hit by an Israeli strike, in the al-Tuffah neighborhood of Gaza City on April 4, 2025. **OMAR AL-QATTAA/AFP**

### A lifeline for Iran's national, international development

By Reza Salehi Amiri  
Iran's minister of cultural heritage, tourism and handicrafts

OPINION EXCLUSIVE

In today's world, the tourism industry is seen not only as a cornerstone of economic and cultural development for countries but also plays a key role in promoting culture, expanding international relations, and creating job opportunities. Developing this sector will not be possible without investing in core infrastructure. With its unparalleled cultural, historical, natural, and geographical capacities, Iran can boost its global standing by scaling up its tourism infrastructure. In this vein, the opening of the five-star Araz Hotel in the northern city of Nowshahr on April 1—now the largest in the country—marks a major leap forward. The project, backed by a \$150 million investment, is not just a physical structure but a symbol of the government's commitment to supporting tourism investment and improving its infrastructure. The Araz Hotel, equipped with facilities that measure up to global standards, has created new opportunities for drawing in both domestic and foreign tourists, contributing to economic growth and job cre-

ation in the region. Expanding tourism infrastructure will not only open the floodgates to more visitors but will also help win over investors—both local and international. With its rich natural and cultural resources, Iran is well-positioned to carve out a hub for regional and global tourism. Yet this vision can only come to fruition with large-scale investments in hotels, accommodation centers, transport networks, and other supporting infrastructure. Global tourism has become a cutthroat battleground where countries are to maintain their competitive edge through modern technologies and the development of smart infrastructure. Iran, with its ancient heritage, has great potential for attracting tourists, but unlocking such potential needs establishing standard infrastructure that meets tourist expectations. Investment in tourism needs legal transparency and streamlined implementation. Creating suitable environments for both domestic and foreign investors, particularly in accommodation and leisure, is among the government's long-term goals. Slashing red tape and supporting the private sector are essential steps. Projects like the Araz Hotel are significant not only economically but also as a symbol of government support for private investors.

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### Marketers of treasure hunts send people on wild goose chase

One person single-handedly determined to destroy Iran



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### India's Holi festival unites cultures through color, tradition

INTERVIEW EXCLUSIVE

With a spirit of togetherness, Indian Ambassador Shri Rudra Gaurav Shresth hosted a lively Holi festival at his residence in Tehran on April 4. The event, steeped in ancient traditions, brought together neighbors and friends to celebrate the arrival of spring, casting away negativity with a bonfire and sharing lively colors. As the ambassador gave an overview of the festival's rich history and its parallels with Iranian celebrations, he highlighted how Holi transcends boundaries, fostering joy and community spirit among people of all faiths.

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# Pezeshkian: Iran neither seeks war nor hesitates to defend itself

## International Desk

The Iranian president said on Thursday that Tehran seeks no war with any country but is determined to defend itself against any aggression, amid US president's threats to launch strikes against Iran over its nuclear program. "The Islamic Republic of Iran has never pursued war or conflict," Masoud Pezeshkian said in a phone call with Saudi Arabian Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman on the occasion of Muslims' Eid al-Fitr, which marks the end of the holy fasting month Ramadan. Pezeshkian stressed that the non-peaceful use of nuclear energy has no place in the country's security and defense doctrine. The Iranian president said that the inspections carried out by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)

have verified the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear activities. It is possible for the nuclear activities of Iran to remain fully subject to verification as they have been in previous years, added the president. He also expressed Iran's readiness to engage in dialogue "based on mutual interest and respect" with the aim of easing tensions over the program. "We seek no war with any country, but will also not hesitate to defend ourselves. And our readiness and capability in this regard is at the highest level," he emphasized. US President Donald Trump threatened over the weekend that he might order military strikes against Iran if Tehran refused to enter negotiations to "make a new deal" on its nuclear program. During his first term in office, Trump withdrew the United States from a previous agreement on Iran's nucle-



Mohammed Bin Salman



Masoud Pezeshkian

ar program, officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), and launched a maximum pressure campaign against the country. Trump restored that policy after re-

turning to the White House for a second term in January. On March 12, Trump sent a letter to Iran's leadership, asking for negotiations to reach a new deal and threat-

ening military action if Tehran refused. Iran has ruled out direct negotiations with the US under pressure and threats but says indirect talks remain an option.

## Dozens killed in Israel's fresh strikes on Gaza

### International Desk

Israeli strikes on Gaza killed dozens of Palestinians on Friday as the occupying regime announced the launch of a new ground offensive in Gaza City and ordered new evacuations in the besieged Palestinian territory. Rescuers said on Friday that Israel's military aggression had killed at least 30 people across the Palestinian territory since dawn. A single Israeli strike on Khan Yunis killed at least 25 people, a medical source at the southern city's Nasser Hospital told AFP. "The situation is very dangerous, and there is death coming at us from every direction," Elena Helles told AFP via text message, adding that she and her family were trapped in her sister's house in Shujaiya. Israeli minister of military affairs Israel Katz said on Wednesday that the regime would bolster its military presence inside the Gaza Strip to destroy the resistance forces' infrastructure. The operation would "seize large areas that will be incorporated into Israeli security zones," he said, without specifying how much territory.

Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu also said the occupation army was dividing Gaza and "seizing territory" to force Hamas to free the remaining Israeli captives seized in the group's October 2023 attack on the occupied territories. On Thursday, Gaza's civil defense agency said more than 30 people, including children, were also killed in an Israeli strike on Dar al-Arqam school serving as a shelter for displaced Palestinians in the al-Tuffah neighborhood, northeast of Gaza City. "One of the missing was a pregnant woman who was expecting twins," the agency's spokesman Mahmud Bassal said. The Israeli military claimed it had struck a " Hamas command and control center in the area of Gaza City." "It was like the Judgement Day. They bombed us with missiles and everything went dark. We started looking for our children and our belongings but everything was gone. We couldn't find our children," sobbed Raghda al-Sharafa, who was among the displaced civilians sheltering in the school buildings.

According to Palestinian medical authorities, at least 100 Palestinians were killed in Israeli airstrikes

across Gaza on Thursday. Hamas condemned the strike on the school, calling it a "heinous massacre" of innocent civilians. The health ministry in Gaza said 1,249 people have been killed in the Palestinian territory since Israel resumed intense bombing on March 18, bringing the overall death toll since the war began to 50,609. In Lebanon, Hamas's military wing, the Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades, said that two of its members were killed in an Israeli strike after the Israeli military said the strike had killed a Hamas commander. Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam condemned the strike as a "flagrant attack on Lebanese sovereignty" and a breach of the November 27 cease-fire in the war between Hezbollah resistance group and Tel Aviv. Israel has also issued evacuation orders to residents in parts of northern Gaza, instructing civilians to move west and south to shelters, warning that it planned to "work with extreme force in your area." The UN humanitarian office said around 280,000 Palestinians have been displaced since Israel ended the cease-fire with Hamas last month.

## Trump says favors 'direct talks' with Iran on nuclear dossier



Donald Trump  
AFP

US President Donald Trump said Thursday he wanted "direct talks" with Tehran on a nuclear deal, after he threatened to bomb Iran over its nuclear program. Trump has given Iran's leaders a two-month deadline to reach an agreement on the country's nuclear program, which has strained relations with Western nations for decades. Western countries including the United States have long accused Iran of pursuing a nuclear weapon, which Tehran has denied, insisting its enrichment activities were solely for peaceful purposes, AFP reported. "I think it's better if we have direct talks," he told reporters onboard the presidential plane Air Force One. "I think it goes faster and you understand the other side a lot better than if you go through intermediaries." Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said last week that Tehran would not engage in direct talks with

Washington "until there is a change in the other side's approach towards the Islamic republic." On Wednesday, Araghchi reiterated Tehran's readiness to take part in indirect negotiations with the US, warning that US threats are "complicating" the current situation. "The Islamic Republic, as in the past, is ready for real negotiations from an equal position and indirectly," Araghchi said in a phone call with his Dutch counterpart, Caspar Veldkamp. He stressed that this "requires a constructive atmosphere and the avoidance of approaches based on threats, intimidation and blackmail." Trump in his first term ripped up a 2015 nuclear deal negotiated by predecessor Barack Obama and reimposed crippling sanctions on Iran. "They wanted to use intermediaries, I don't think that's necessarily true anymore," Trump said. "I think they're concerned, I think they feel vulnerable. I don't want them to feel that way," he added. "I think they want to meet." Trump said last month he had written to Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei to call for nuclear negotiations and warn of possible military action if Tehran refused. Ayatollah Khamenei responded by saying that US threats "will get them nowhere" and warned of reciprocal measures "if they do anything malign" against Iran.

## Iran 'strongly' criticizes approval of anti-Iran resolution at UNHRC

### International Desk

Iran strongly slammed the approval of an anti-Iran resolution at the UN human rights council, calling it a discriminatory move that undermines the credibility of the council. Addressing the UN Human Rights Council's (UNHRC) 58th regular session, Iran's ambassador to the UN headquarters in Geneva Ali Bahraini said the move "bogs down the council into a new quagmire of inefficiency and waste of resources" and diminishes trust in the work of the agency. The council passed the resolution against Iran that extended the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran and decided that the Fact-Finding Mission should continue with a mandate to "monitor and investigate allegations of recent and ongoing serious human rights violations in the Islamic Republic." Bahraini urged the council to focus on the catastrophic situation of human

rights in the Israeli-occupied Palestinian territories. "In a situation where the most severe rights violations are being committed in Palestine and their perpetrators enjoy the highest level of immunity and impunity, the sponsors of draft resolution A/HRC/58/L.20/Rev.1 are trying to mislead the council by portraying a false picture of the human rights situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran," the envoy said. He warned that the Western sponsors of the resolution, including the UK and Germany, should be held accountable for all their oppression against the Iranian people and humankind. Iran's Foreign Ministry's spokesman Esmail Baqaei also expressed regret over the continued exploitation of human rights mechanisms by the UK, Germany, and certain other Western countries to exert political pressure on developing nations. He condemned the two countries' leading role in pushing an anti-Iranian resolution at the UN Human

Rights Council, saying that they lack the moral standing to lecture others on human rights. Baqaei emphasized that the resolution's content is factually incorrect, relying on unsubstantiated claims attributed to unnamed individuals, rendering it legally baseless and invalid. The Foreign Ministry spokesperson also pointed to the hypocritical approach of the UK, Germany, Canada, and other sponsors of this anti-Iran resolution over the past two years regarding the Israeli regime's genocide in Gaza and the crimes of the regime against the people of Lebanon and Syria. He pointed out that the UK is one of the biggest political, financial, and military backers of the Israeli regime. Baqaei also said Germany is the second-largest arms supplier to Israel, with its foreign minister openly justifying the killing of innocent Palestinian women and children. These two countries have no moral authority to preach human rights to others.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi  
Cartoonist



# Abadan refinery gasoline output up by 20%: CEO

## Economy Desk

Gasoline production at the Abadan refinery in southwestern Iran has risen by 20% since the start of the current government's term in July, according to the refinery's CEO.

"Gasoline production at this refinery has increased by 20% since the beginning of the current administration's term," said the CEO of Abadan Oil Refining Company, SHANA reported.

Fardin Rashidi noted that from the start of the Iranian calendar year (began on March 20, 2024) until the end of the previous administration, Abadan refinery's daily gasoline production stood at 14.9 million liters. With the start of the sitting administration, this figure rose to 17.8 million liters per day, reflecting a 20% growth in the refinery's gasoline output in recent months.

This increase in production is attributed to expanded crude oil refining capacity, the use of received octane-boosting additives, and the commissioning of an alkylation gasoline production unit, he added.

"Abadan refinery supplies approximately 17% of the country's gasoline, 22% of its gas oil,

and 42% of its fuel oil," Rashidi told reporters on Thursday, referencing last year's rise in gasoline production.

Emphasizing that this production boost has played a key role in addressing fuel shortages nationwide, he added, "Feedstock for petrochemical plants in Tabriz, Bandar Imam, Shazand in Arak, and Bu-Ali Sina is supplied through Abadan refinery." The CEO highlighted that increasing the refinery's capacity to over 530,000 barrels per day, efforts to operationalize Phase 2, Section 2 units, and launching the Flare Gas Recovery Unit (FGRU) project are among the company's key priorities this year.

"The newly commissioned units in Phase 2, Section 1 were built using the latest energy-efficient technologies for comparable facilities. Similar advanced technologies will also be deployed in Phase 2, Section 2 units," he said.

Rashidi added, "Once all Phase 2 units are fully operational, gasoline, gas oil, and kerosene products will meet Euro 4 and Euro 5 standards, with the refinery's daily gasoline output rising by approximately 10 million liters."



## Rise in gasoline consumption

Meanwhile, the National Iranian Oil Products Distribution Company (NIOOPDC) announced that the average daily gasoline consumption in the country during the period from the first 13 days of the new

year (March 21–April 1) reached 131.1 million liters.

According to a report by ILNA citing the Oil Ministry, statistics released by the NIOOPDC indicate that 118.5 million liters of gasoline were distributed nationwide on Wednesday (April 1). This represents

a 14.5 million-liter increase—equivalent to 14%—compared to the 104 million liters consumed on the same day last year.

Gasoline consumption on March 30 and 31 was recorded at 140.2 million liters and 150.2 million liters, respectively.

## Leader's aide: US can pursue economic interests with Iran



## International Desk

A senior advisor to Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei said the United States, under Donald Trump, can opt for economic interests with Tehran instead of a military action as any attack bears consequences for Washington.

"Mr. Trump is a talented individual who has managed to accumulate such wealth through his business endeavors. The United States can establish economic interests with Iran," Ali Larjani, sharing an excerpt from his recently televised interview, wrote on X.

"Trump says he is a peace advocate, so he ought not to speak of threats or war. An attack on Iran will not be without consequences, and we possess experienced military commanders."

In an interview with NBC News late last week, Trump threatened that, "If they (Iranians) don't make a deal, there will be bombing."

On Monday, Ayatollah Khamenei warned that if the US commits any hostile act against the Islamic Republic, "it will certainly receive a heavy blow in return."

On Monday, Larjani warned that if the United States and Israel bomb Iran under any nuclear pretext, the Islamic Republic may have no choice but to acquire a nuclear weapon.

"Iran has gained a distinguished position among major powers, and most Western countries want to establish independent relations with Iran. However, due to US pressure, they have not taken a definitive stance," he said in an interview.

## Iran: Three power exchange plans underway with neighbors

Electricity imports from Azerbaijan, Armenia, Turkey during peak load periods



## Economy Desk

An official with the Ministry of Energy announced three plans for electricity exchange with neighboring countries to manage peak demand in the current Persian calendar year (began on March 20, 2025).

Director general of the foreign trade office of Iran's Power Generation and Distribution Company (TAVANIR) high-

lighted ongoing projects for cross-border electricity exchange aimed at addressing peak summer demand and expanding regional energy infrastructure, ILNA reported.

"Numerous measures are underway to facilitate electricity exchange with neighboring countries, both to manage the upcoming summer peak load and to develop energy transmission infrastructure and regional cooperation,"

Mehrdad Eqlimi said.

Eqlimi reported the completion of the third 400-kilovolt Iran-Armenia power transmission line and efforts to secure an additional 400 MW of electricity imports from Iran's northwestern neighbor during peak periods.

"To develop energy transmission infrastructure, the third 400-kilovolt Iran-Armenia power line has been constructed up to the Iranian border, with the external section of the project being implemented by an Iranian contractor using financing from the Export Development Bank of Iran," he added.

According to the official, necessary measures, including accelerating the completion of the external section, finalizing agreements to increase imports by 400 MW during peak periods, and establishing a monitoring plan to ensure timely project completion are currently prioritized.

The TAVANIR chief also said, "Negotiations with the Republic of Azerbaijan to import 140 megawatts of electricity this summer, as well as to sign a new annex for electricity imports during

this summer, are being pursued."

"The Azerbaijani side has also welcomed a proposal to hold in-person talks in Baku to explore connecting the power grids of Iran, Azerbaijan, and Russia," he added.

On Turkey, Eqlimi outlined coordination efforts to exchange electricity via a Back-to-Back (BtB) system, targeting up to 300 MW this summer.

"An agreement to operationalize interconnection lines between the two countries has been signed. However, despite TAVANIR's readiness to commence electricity trade — including appointing an Iranian broker — the Turkish side has delayed allocating capacity and insists that Iran cover the costs of the Van HVDC (high-voltage direct current) station, a demand Iran has not accepted," he said.

"Negotiations continue to resolve these issues, including finalizing allocated capacity and addressing investment cost disputes. Additionally, discussions are ongoing to secure Turkey's response, select a suitable broker, and establish operational infrastructure to begin exchanges."

## Wastewater to replace fresh water in Iranian industries

## Economy Desk

Iranian industries across the country's provinces are replacing their fresh water usage with treated wastewater, according to the deputy of planning and economic affairs of Iran's National Water and Wastewater Engineering Company.

Emphasizing that a directive on water reallocation has been issued to all provincial industries, Masoud Alavian said, "Under this framework, industries nationwide are to substitute

their fresh water supply with treated wastewater."

"Iran's Seventh Development Plan explicitly mandates industries to utilize non-conventional water sources," he added.

Alavian noted that industries currently consume 3.7 billion cubic meters of fresh water annually. "Efforts in the initial phase aim to redirect 1.6 billion cubic meters of this demand to treated wastewater," he stated.

The chairman of the board of the National Water and Wastewater Engineering Company

stated that wastewater treatment plants can be a substitute for conventional water resources, adding, "Currently, approximately 87 million cubic meters of treated wastewater are sold annually, and contracts for approximately 312 million cubic meters have been concluded with industries on a reciprocal sale basis."

He stressed that implementation hinges on scheduled timelines, adding, "Priority in reallocation is given to industries with geographical feasibility for non-conventional water use."

"Studies on this initiative are complete. Identifying industries eligible for the shift will simultaneously create opportunities for expanding treatment plant capacity and infrastructure," Alavian clarified.

"Steel, petrochemical, mining, and refinery sectors — the largest water consumers — have already signed reallocation contracts," he said.

According to Alavian, "Industries such as food production and sanitary goods lack reallocation options and will continue using fresh water."



# Marketers of treasure hunts send people on wild goose chase

*One person single-handedly determined to destroy Iran*



A cameraman holds a mobile phone showing the map of a buried loot.  
● PETER DEJONG/AP

”

With the approach of treasure hunters, all valuable pieces of information are destroyed. Everything is struck by a pickaxe and discarded. There is no testing, no publication, and no one will ever find out what has been unearthed that could be studied at a national or international level.

## No place left untouched in Iran

In Iran, there is almost no place that treasure hunters have not dug up. There is no undamaged ancient site in Iran without a single exception. All of them have been damaged, based on the assumption that there is gold or some other story lying there. However, there are very important points that I always repeat to raise awareness.

One of these is about buying and selling treasure maps, the same fake maps that you will find. The second source of income for the creators of these maps is identifying treasure locations. They come and look at walls and see shapes that, in their view, indicate something, but we know these shapes do not exist. For example, they might say the profile of a mountain looks like an eagle, and its beak points to a tree, so you dig ten meters there, and they charge a hefty fee for this “expertise”. The third way they make money is by selling treasure-hunting or metal-detecting devices. These devices cost hundreds of millions of tomans to billions, and you can rent them for millions of tomans daily. Even if they get confiscated, it’s still a major income source for those involved.

No device can visualize the shapes of treasures. The most advanced ground-penetrating radar devices show you the depressions and elevations of soil sediments, which are useful for our archaeological work, not for showing you a jar full of coins. These are all illusions.

The fourth method of income generation for these people is offering courses and workshops. A rational person might ask, “If you have the treasure map and are selling it, why don’t you go and retrieve it yourself? Why sell it to me?” The answer is that they claim they have clients who don’t allow them to do so, which leads us into the realm of superstition.

## No treasure? Client moved it

The treasure hunter pays for the map, pays for the expertise, risks everything to dig at night, and in the process, destroys all the information that we archaeologists could have obtained to understand the site. Then they tell the promoter, “I went there and found nothing.” The promoter responds, “The client must have moved it.” These people have justifications for everything; they have billions of tomans in income and millions of followers and they even operate openly.

## Top officials mistake archaeologists for treasure hunters

We formed a task force in the Organization of Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, and Tourism called the Task Force to Combat Online Treasure Hunting. Instead of chasing those who dig in the deserts, we should go after those who openly provide their phone numbers and addresses, and destroy sites in view of everyone online. At the very least, their Instagram and Telegram accounts should be blocked.

The task force did not achieve any results. After much effort and many lawyers, an arrest warrant was issued for one person. I know this warrant will eventually go to an appeals court and turn into a fine. The warrant was not even for destroying ancient sites but for physically assaulting a guard at one of these sites. The issue of pro-

**INTERVIEW** *The methods of treasure hunt marketers have changed with the advent of social media. Treasure maps and treasure-hunting tools like metal detectors are now being sold openly on Instagram, Telegram, and other social media platforms without any fear. However, in this process, it is only the treasure marketers who pocket huge sums of money through deception and fraud. Treasure hunting in ancient sites and every corner of Iran has existed for a long time. However, treasure maps are no longer exchanged with the same level of secrecy as in the past. Treasure hunters now sell such means of destroying history through their social media accounts without any fear, and their followers are increasing day by day. The mere thought that even a small number of people who follow them might be deceived and, in the hope of finding treasure, dig up ancient layers of stone and soil is terrifying.*

*Hamed Vahdati Nasab, the head of the Society of Iranian Archaeology and a paleoanthropologist, explores the issue of treasure hunters and the damage they have caused to Iran’s ancient sites in the interview translated below.*



↑ Hamed Vahdati Nasab



The photo shows a site at Mount Savalan (Sabalan) in the Ardabil province of northwestern Iran where stone has been roughly shaped to resemble the head of an eagle. Promoters of treasure hunts spin such natural phenomena as signs indicating treasure in maps they sell.



The photo shows historic pots and a human skeleton that were damaged through using probably non-delicate measures.  
● ILNA

A worker shows the findings of her team's archeological endeavors at an ancient site in Shahr-e Sukhteh, Sistan and Baluchestan, southeastern Iran.  
● SOMAYEH HASANLOU/ISNA

moting treasure hunting was not even addressed.

The two million people who follow this individual are not all bad people; many of them are not aware. They say, "He goes around digging things up, and you go around digging things up, what's the difference?" I say the difference is like going to a bathroom barber downtown for your appendicitis pain or going to a highly specialized doctor at a hospital. How much difference is there between these two? That's how much difference there is between those two.

Another issue, which is very painful, is that those who promote treasure hunting push forward the notion that all of us archaeologists are affiliated with the government and that everything we find is transferred abroad through the government. This is absolutely not the case. Every province has a custodian of properties, and all our work is meticulously recorded and documented. In fact, it is overseen, handed over, and received under very complex regulations.

**Public thinks of them as heritage saviors**

Cultural smuggling happens in all countries. But the claims that the Iranian government, now or in the past, has been officially transferring Persepolis abroad are false. Treasure hunt marketers portray themselves as the saviors of Iran's heritage, and we become the villains. In this duality they create, people are drawn to them. What people need to realize is that they should just search online for a moment and see how we work with brushes and why everything should remain in its place.

We have done experiments that trea-

sure hunters have never heard of: dating tests in world-renowned labs costing millions, sedimentology, soil science, pottery experts, stone experts, biology experts, DNA extraction, isotopic analysis, and elemental analysis. Twenty types of expertise come together to evaluate what we have cleaned with a brush and what 15 people have worked on for a month in a one-meter square.

Please note that in one month, we go down one meter by one meter, and we carry out this work so delicately and meticulously that it takes this long. It is a task that they complete in two hours. The result of our work is that we find out, for example, when humans began living in Iran. An inscription is discovered, providing us with extremely valuable information.

With the approach of treasure hunters, all of this is destroyed. Everything is struck by a pickaxe and discarded. There is no testing, no publication, and no one will ever find out what has been unearthed that could be studied at a national or international level.

**'Cultural development' deferring to uncertain future**

Sites are protected in Iran, but the issue is that when you have nearly a million ancient sites in the country, you can't place a million Conex boxes with water, electricity, and food for guards. It's not practical. Some prominent sites like Persepolis, Takht-e Soleyman, and Tepe Hissar in Damghan have permanent guards, but the Organization of Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, and Tourism can't place someone on every ancient hill and say, "Guard this place."

"Cultural development" is a term that has become overused. When you hear

"cultural development," it means "let it go;" Cultural development means deferring to an uncertain future. In my opinion, the hands of treasure hunt marketers must be cut short. This is also part of cultural development. We are in an emergency stage now, and in this stage, regulatory bodies like the Organization of Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, and Tourism must act seriously. Provincial security forces must step in, and through cyber police, these accounts must be shut down. Their main source of income is their accounts. If their Instagram and Telegram accounts are closed, they will be almost destroyed. To the people who have spent their money — and some have sold their car — to pay for "expertise," I say, "No statue in Iran's history has ever been as large as a mountain. No human group in Iran has ever carved a mountain into 'the shape of an eagle'. All these 'treasure signs' are superstitions; all these clients and maps are superstitions."

**Saddam scared all from digging**

Treasure hunters do exist in other countries, but they are very few. It depends on the protocols of those countries. For example, I worked for years in the US, Canada, and Russia in Siberia. A large part of it is that people know that what they call a jar of gold coins has a very low probability. More importantly, there are very strict laws. That is why we had to study the laws of neighboring countries. Iraqi Kurdistan is terrifying. If you are caught digging with a device or a pickaxe, you could easily face five years in prison. No one dares to do this. In Saddam Hussein's Iraq — I don't want to say he did a good thing, I disagree with many

of his actions — the Baathists were so sensitive about cultural heritage that Saddam ordered 12 illegal diggers to be hanged on an ancient hill and left there. Naturally, this is inhumane, but it made no one even think of doing such a thing.

In Egypt, when you visit the pyramids and other places, if you have even a piece of pottery in your pocket, you won't get to leave the country easily. The same goes for Turkey, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

**No budget to buy all ancient artifacts**

Some give examples like in the UK, where they say you can go dig and sell your findings to the government. This is absolutely not true. If you are out in the desert with a pickaxe, you must have a permit that specifies who you are — whether you are an archaeologist, geologist, or from the environment department. The best-case scenario is that you are gardening in your backyard and find something. There is a website where, by law, you must immediately inform the local cultural heritage representative that you have found something.

Our law states that if you find something on your private property, the government is obliged to buy it from you at a good price, even higher than the market rate, provided you found it on your property, not through archaeological excavation, but by chance during construction or similar activities. In that case, since your ownership of the property takes precedence, the government is obliged to buy it at a price that satisfies you.

But even here we have a problem. The government often doesn't have the money. You hear in the news that his-

torical houses are being demolished because, in principle, the Organization of Cultural Heritage should buy them, but it doesn't have the budget. We would need to allocate a year's worth of oil revenue to the organization so that it could buy all of Iran's old houses.

**All Iranian mayors have 'bulldozer' mentality**

I am friends with some of the cultural activists there in Isfahan, where a discovery was made during the construction of the metro, and I can tell you that they stepped forward. They brought it to the media and stood by many things to prevent destruction. I don't know what has happened in the selection of mayors in Iran. Why do all mayors have a bulldozer mentality? It's rare to see a mayor who says, "This historic district is beautiful. Let's revive it, give it a beautiful function, and build the parking somewhere else."

There is a destructive mentality in the mindset of some mayors, especially in sensitive areas like Isfahan. Everywhere you touch in Isfahan is historical. The same goes for cities like Shiraz and Yazd. If we look at Yazd, it has had a more intelligent approach to historical sites, leading to significant income generation. Tourists go to Yazd because of its preserved historic district. But in Isfahan, the current situation is due to the mayor being ineffective, and other individuals who stand to gain huge wealth from the construction of towers. The number of influential entities that bypass even the minister of Cultural Heritage is countless.

The article first appeared in Persian on Khabar Online.



The illustration shows a metal detector used to search for buried pots of gold or silver from above the ground.  
● MEHMET ABBAS/TURKIYE TODAY

Holes potted the countryside where treasure-hunting has become a profession in Archar, northwestern Bulgaria.  
● VALENTINA PETROVA/AFP

## Two-week wrap-up: Iranian sport enjoys continental glory



Iranian players and coaching staff celebrate qualification for the 2026 World Cup after a 2-2 draw against Uzbekistan at the Azadi Stadium, Tehran, Iran, on March 25, 2025.  
● MOJTABA SALEH/AFC

### Sports Desk

Iranian athletes and teams had a busy schedule during the Persian New Year's national vacation, tasting glory across various Asian competitions.

Iranian national football team secured a comfortable qualification for the FIFA World Cup, while the country lifted a record fourth trophy at the AFC Beach Soccer Asian Cup. Meanwhile, Iran made a clean sweep of the freestyle and Greco-Roman crowns at the Asian Wrestling Championships despite sending new-look, young squads to the event in Amman, Jordan.

### Fourth in a row

Iran began the FIFA international break with a 2-0 victory over the United Arab Emirates at Tehran's Azadi Stadium on March 20 to move within touching distance of a place at the World Cup finals

– cohosted by the United States, Mexico, and Canada in 2026.

Prolific striker Sardar Azmoun headed home to put Team Melli in front deep into first-half stoppage time, before FC Rostov winger Mohammad Moezzi guaranteed all points with a composed finish in the 70th minute.

A sixth win in seven games meant Amir Qalenoie's men needed a draw in the home fixture against Uzbekistan on March 25 to secure a top-two finish in Group A of the Asian qualifiers with two games to spare.

Iran still had to come from behind twice for a hard-fought 2-2 stalemate against the Central Asian opponent.

Inter striker Mahdi Taremi's sensational volley seven minutes after the break canceled out Hojimat Erkinov's 16th-minute opener for the visitors. The parity, however, only lasted a min-

ute as Uzbekistan regained the advantage after Abbosbek Fayzullaev's curling free-kick from the left was completely missed by a line of Iran players as it bounced straight into the net.

Iran's relentless pressure for a second equalizer paid off with seven minutes remaining, when substitute Ali Qolizadeh swung in a deep cross which Uzbekistan failed to deal with, allowing Taremi the chance to steer in from close range to take Iran to a fourth consecutive World Cup.

Iran remained top of the group with 20 points – three clear of second-placed Uzbekistan and seven points above the UAE before the final two games in the qualifiers against Qatar (away) and North Korea (home) in June.

### Wrestling domination

Iranian wrestling cemented its status as the dominant force in the continent after collecting a remarkable 17 medals – includ-

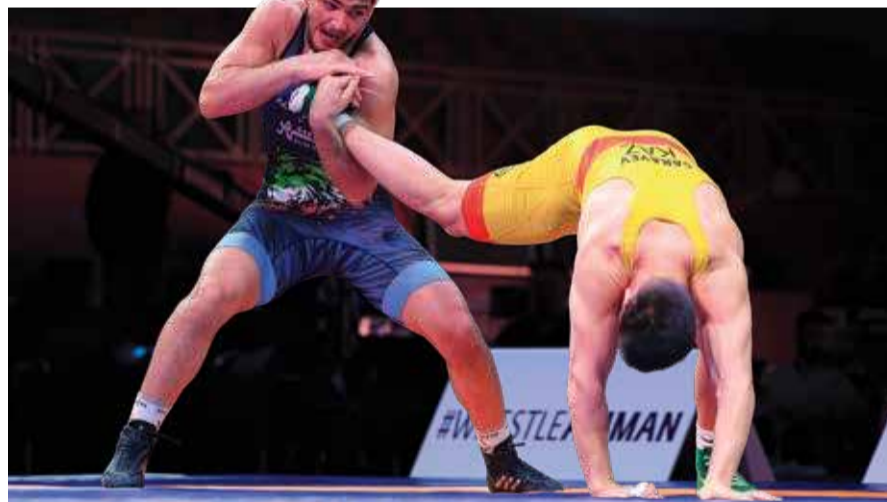
ing nine golds – across 20 weight classes at the Asian Championships.

Five gold medals and three silvers saw Hassan Ranzraz's 10-man squad finish atop the Greco-Roman standings with 201 points, with Uzbekistan (168 points)

mad-Mahdi Keshkar (63kg), Alireza Abdevali (77kg), and Yasin Yazdi (87kg) added three runner-up prizes to Iran's medal haul.

In the freestyle competitions, Pejman Dorostkar's squad, comprising under-23 wrestlers,

Amirhossein Firouzpour (92kg) and Amirreza Ma'soumi (125kg) dominated their divisions, not giving away a point on their way to the gold, while world U23 champion Mahdi Yousefi (79kg) and Abolfazl Rahmani (86kg) also en-



Iranian Abolfazl Rahmani (L) is seen in action during a victory over Kazakhstan's Bolat Sakayev in the freestyle 86kg final at the Asian Wrestling Championships in Amman, Jordan, on March 30, 2025.  
● UWW

and Japan (131 points).

In their first international appearance since grabbing the Olympic golds last summer, Saeid Esmaili (67kg) and Mohammad-Hadi Saravi (97kg) walked away with the ultimate prize in their respective events, while reigning world under-23 champion Fardin Hedayati was in his own league in the 130kg event, claiming three wins by superiority – without conceding a single point – before easing to a 7-0 victory over Alimkhan Syzdykov of Kazakhstan in the final.

Danial Sohrabi and Mohammad Naqousi also finished their campaigns with final victories in the 72kg and 82kg events, respectively, while Moham-

grabbed four gold and bronze medals apiece, plus Milad Valizadeh's 57kg silver, to lift the team trophy with 190 points.

Japan finished second 146 points – courtesy of three gold and bronze medals apiece – with Kazakhstan in third on 123 points.

Iranian players celebrate lifting the AFC Beach Soccer Asian Cup trophy after an 8-1 win against Oman in the final in Pattaya, Thailand, on March 30, 2025.  
● FFIRI

joyed thrilling campaigns to leave Amman with a gold medal.

Ahmad Mohammadnejad Javan (61kg), Abbas Ebrahimzadeh (65kg), Sina Khalili (70kg), Mohammad-Mobin Azimi (97kg) settled for four bronze medals.

### Jubilations on the sand

An 8-1 triumph over Oman in the final showpiece on Sunday summed up an emphatic run for Iran at the Beach Soccer Asian Cup in Pattaya, Thailand.

The final victory was the sixth in as many games for Ali Naderi's men, who defended their Asian title to book a place in May's World Cup in Seychelles.

Iran began the competition with comfortable victories over Indonesia (12-2) and Afghanistan (14-0) and then edged out the UAE 4-3 to progress to the quarterfinals as the Group C winner. An 11-0 rout of Bahrain was followed by a 6-0 last-four win against Saudi Arabia.

There was further glory for Iran in the awarding ceremony as Ali Mirshekari – the leading marksman in the competition with 12 strikes – was named the Most Valuable Player of the tournament, while Seyyed Mahdi Mirjalili won the Best Goalkeeper prize.

### Water polo title

Iran ended China's unbeaten run to win the men's title at the Asian U-20 Water Polo Championships in Singapore.

A 15-11 victory at the OCBC Aquatics Centre on March 30 saw the Iranian boys make amends for the 13-11 loss to the Chinese in the group phase earlier in the competition.

Iran eased past Sri Lanka (40-1) and Malaysia (28-6) either side of the China defeat and then came out on top against Uzbekistan (32-7) and the host country (15-10) in the knockouts to progress to the finals.

Iranian skipper Arman Shams, meanwhile, won the MVP and top scorer awards.



Fardin Hedayati celebrates with the Iranian flag after winning the Greco-Roman 130kg gold medal at the Asian Wrestling Championships in Amman, Jordan, on March 25, 2025.  
● UWW



# Vali Castle; the confluence of artistry and heritage

## Iranica Desk

*In the heart of the mountainous plain of Ilam, atop a hill, stands a robust structure from the Qajar era — the Vali Castle. This prominent edifice, a relic of history and a testament to the authentic architecture of Iran, harbors stories and secrets that remain hidden within the impressive silence of its walls.*

*Once, nearly a century ago, this castle served as a refuge for the governor and a secure base in the backwoods of Ilam. Today, it shines like a brilliant jewel at the heart of Ilam, where hundreds of tourists seek solace beneath the shade of its ancient trees. The Vali Castle is not merely a reminder of the past but also a vibrant tableau of art and civilization. From the intricate designs adorning the plastered walls of the royal chamber to the fountain-spouting pools in the central courtyard, each element quietly whispers sweet tales of history.*



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## Architectural mastery

This architectural masterpiece embodies not only the delicacy of artistry and craftsmanship from that era but also signifies the cultural and social grandeur of the people of this land, gleaming like a precious gem in the annals of Ilam's history. Over time, the edifice — once a bastion of power, art, and life — has evolved into a sanctuary for its people's culture and a reservoir of social heritage, safeguarding a rich collection of customs, traditions, and the lives of Ilam's past inhabitants.

Every time tourists step into this castle, they walk through the heart of Qajar history, reconnecting with their Iranian identity through the display of the culture of this land. The Vali Castle tells a story to be heard, presents a landscape to be seen, and evokes tranquility to be felt. Its grandeur lies not only in its stones and bricks but also in the rich history and deep essence of its people. This enduring tale unfolds with each season, enchanting every listener.

Crafted in 1908, this magnificent building is a testament to Iranian architecture harmoniously nestled amidst nature. Within its stony walls lie countless stories of the region's ups and downs. The clear water of the Bibi Spring, which once infused life into the central courtyard, showcased the ingenuity and advancement of its people through the use of clay pipes. This irrigation system stands as a symbol of harmony between nature and humanity, transforming the castle from a mere residence into a haven of comfort and serene living.

The Vali Castle has now become one of Iran's most significant national monuments, earning a place on the country's national heritage list in 1997. It majestically stands on the northern side of Pasdaran Street, showcasing its restored grandeur and reconstructed facade. Today, the Anthropological Museum of Ilam resides within the heart of the castle, with each corner narrating the culture, art, and traditions of the people from this land. Amid the bustle of today's city, Vali Castle resonates with the proud echoes of the past, inviting everyone to pause for a moment and reflect on history and authenticity; it embodies not just a lasting structure but also an eternal spirit in Ilam's history.

## Creation of Vali Castle

The Hosseinabad neighborhood, later known as "Deh Bala," was the retreat of Gholamreza Khan during hot summer days. He chose this pleasant location to build the castle, entrusting its construction to two skilled architects, Haj Darvish Ali Kermanshahi and Reza Gholi. The castle's formidable towers and walls, intricate plasterwork, lush gardens, and bathhouse reflect the ingenuity and creative artistry of its builders.

Standing tall in history, Vali Castle is magnificent and imposing, resembling a beautiful painting on a canvas that seamlessly connects the past with the present. Spanning an area of 4,687 square meters, it takes on a trapezoidal shape

in the heart of the mountainous plains, showcasing authentic Iranian art in every corner.

On the southern side of the castle, a vast green space covering 1,792 square meters has been developed, which, in conjunction with the castle's architecture, creates a captivating display. Originally built in an open area, this castle has gradually been surrounded by residential and administrative buildings due to urban development over time. To the north, a narrow alley borders the castle, while to the west a busy street and to the east a government office encompass the structure. Pasdaran Street to the south serves as the main access route to the castle.

## Shahneshin Hall

Within this structure lies a hall known as the shahneshin, located on the northern side, which exhibits a grandeur surpassing that of the other parts of the building. At the center of this hall, there is a small pool that, in times past, was adorned with marble stones and filled with clear water from a plentiful spring; however, over time, as the spring dried up, it lost its symbolic significance.

portals, connecting history to the present. The turquoise railings shine like ornaments on the southern terrace, and the porticoes filled with intricate designs have transformed this structure into a masterpiece worthy of admiration. As an example of Qajar architecture, Vali Castle stands as a steadfast monument to history, symbolizing the harmonious coexistence of nature and art. It continues to narrate a glorious past while preserving a lasting identity in the heart of the city of Ilam.

## Restoration

The Vali Castle, which once shone in the heart of the vast plains of Pashkau, suffered deep wounds during the storm of the Iran-Iraq War. Half of the glory and grandeur of this structure was claimed by the flames of war, leaving scars of destruction and oblivion in every corner.

However, the love for cultural heritage and the determination to restore this historical monument to its former glory revived this castle. In 1988, thanks to the efforts of the Cultural Heritage Organization, restoration work commenced, and after two years of relentless effort,



During the restoration, the skill and artistic sensibility of the restorers revitalized this section, infusing it with symbolic beauty and modern plumbing to help it preserve the charm of the past.

But the beauty of Vali Castle does not end here. When gazing at the southern facade, the covered terraces, adorned with latticed windows and colored glass, captivate the eyes of every viewer. The sturdy circular columns and ornate capitals showcase the craftsmanship of the masters of that era, while the arched designs and decorative woodwork embellished with colorful tiles narrate a tale of everlasting authenticity.

The tall trees and ancient pines that embrace the rectangular pond in the courtyard reflect a beautiful bond between architecture and nature. The bright and colorful windows of the castle serve as

in 1990, this valuable edifice was reintegrated into the cultural fabric of Ilam.

In the restoration process, an unwavering priority was given to the authentic style of Iranian architecture and the integrity of the arches and vaults. The ceilings of the rooms were constructed using traditional materials like plaster and brick, while the arches, which served both as load-bearing and decorative elements, were crafted with precise patterns throughout the building.

The restoration of Vali Castle was more than just the revival of a historical structure; it was the revitalization of a heritage spirit within the heart of Ilam's culture. Today, every step taken within this building narrates a harmonious blend of history, art, and architectural genius that comes to life before the eyes of visitors.

# India's Holi festival unites cultures through color, tradition



By Hamideh Hosseini  
Staff writer

## INTERVIEW

*With a spirit of togetherness, Indian Ambassador Shri Rudra Gaurav Shresth hosted a lively Holi festival at his residence in Tehran on April 4. The event, steeped in ancient traditions, brought together neighbors and friends to celebrate the arrival of spring, casting away negativity with a bonfire and sharing lively colors. As the ambassador gave an overview of the festival's rich history and its parallels with Iranian celebrations, he highlighted how Holi transcends boundaries, fostering joy and community spirit among people of all faiths. The full text of the interview follows:*

**IRAN DAILY:** Can you provide an introduction to the traditional ceremony of Holi? What is it, and how is it celebrated as an ancient Indian tradition?

**SHRI RUDRA GAURAV SHRESTH:** Holi is essentially a two-day festival, beginning with a night of festivities that culminates in lunchtime celebrations the following day. It starts with a bonfire, where neighbors gather to burn a large fire, dancing around it. This aspect is quite similar to Iran's Chaharshanbe Suri, where

we symbolically cast away negativity by throwing it into the fire. We believe that everything bad in the home or community—resentments, anger—can be purged through this act.

The next morning, everyone takes to the streets to adorn each other's faces and clothes with vibrant colors. The day is filled with music, dancing, and an abundance of sweets specifically prepared for the occasion. This continues until lunchtime, when the festivities wind down. Holi is fundamentally a spring festival celebrating color and the rejuvenation of nature, akin to Nowruz. It marks a transition: The night signifies the end of negativity, while the following day is a fresh start filled with joy and beauty. In my view, there are many similarities between Holi and Iranian festivals like Chaharshanbe Suri, Nowruz, and Sizdah bedar, which all celebrate nature and the arrival of spring. It's an ancient festival, much like Nowruz and Persian traditions, highlighting our shared cultural heritage.

**Are there any specific symbols associated with this ceremony, similar to the "Haft Seen" in Nowruz, where each element holds significance?**

Unlike Nowruz, we don't create a thematic display for Holi. It is primarily a street festival, celebrated outdoors rather than indoors. Typically, it's a neighborhood celebration, with people from

the same village or city coming together. The symbols of Holi manifest in the colors we use, the bonfire from the previous night, and the special foods prepared for the occasion. There are also traditional songs and dances unique to Holi that are performed during the festival. However, we do not have a static symbol like the "Haft Seen" in Nowruz.

**How long has Holi been celebrated, and what are its roots and the stories behind this tradition?**

Holi is a very ancient festival, and no one is exactly sure when it started; it likely predates even the arrival of the Aryans in India. Over time, many stories have become associated with Holi in different regions of the country, each with its own mythological significance.

One story related to the bonfire on the previous night comes from ancient religious texts and revolves around a powerful demon king. He received a boon from the gods that made him invincible—he couldn't be killed during the day or night, indoors or outdoors, on earth or in the air. This led him to become arrogant, demanding that his subjects worship him as a god. However, his young son challenged this notion, insisting that his father was merely human. Enraged, the king ordered his sister to take the boy and sit in a fire, believing she was protected by a special shawl. As the fire blazed, the shawl fell from her shoulders, protecting the boy while she perished. This tale symbolizes the triumph of good over evil, as the boy survives while the evil is consumed by fire.

For the colors, there is a charming story from the 'Mahabharata,' which is a significant text in Indian mythology. It features Krishna, a young god who has a crush on a fair-skinned girl in his village. Feeling insecure about his own darker complexion, Krishna hesitates to approach her. The girl, aware of his feelings, tells her mother about Krishna's shyness. The two mothers decide to create a playful game where the children can color each other, conveying the message that skin color is superficial. Through this playful interaction, Krishna gains the confidence to approach the girl, leading to a blossoming romance. This story emphasizes the idea that love transcends external appearances.

There are also regional stories associated with Holi, such as one from South India involving Shiva, a principal god in Hinduism.



TAHA IMANI

After the death of his wife, Shiva renounces the world and enters deep meditation. The gods fear that if Shiva relinquishes his desire for union with his wife, the universe will cease to exist. To prevent this, they reincarnate his wife as a beautiful woman to attract him. However, she struggles to break his meditation, prompting the god of love to intervene. Despite Shiva's anger at being distracted, the reincarnated wife ultimately teaches him about the importance of love and desire, leading to their reunion.

While there are numerous stories associated with Holi, it is not primarily a religious festival. There are no formal prayers or rituals; it is a community celebration that people of all faiths participate in. The third Mughal king famously walked through the streets during Holi, encouraging people to throw colors on him, measuring his popularity by the amount of color on his clothes when he returned home. Many famous Holi songs were penned by Persian poets, including Amir Khusrow. Even the last Mughal king composed beautiful songs about Holi that are still sung today.

Holi is celebrated by people of various religions, including Sikhs, who have their own distinctive way of marking the occasion, often incorporating martial elements. Because it is a street festival and lacks religious ceremonies, it is primarily seen as a social celebration rather than a religious observance. While there are some religious stories associated with it, the essence of Holi lies in enjoyment and community spirit.

**I understand that Holi is not a state-sponsored celebration; it's primarily a grassroots event. Can you elaborate on that?**

That's correct. We don't have any official ceremonies for Holi, but

typically, people visit the homes of political leaders during the festival. Whether it's the prime minister or the president, these leaders welcome people into their homes, where they celebrate by applying colors and serving food. While Holi is acknowledged by political leadership, it is not officially recognized as a state celebration. Anyone is free to participate, and it's common for people to visit their local members of parliament as well.

**Is Holi celebrated in other countries?**

Yes, as I mentioned, there are about 36 million Indians living abroad, and Holi is now celebrated in nearly every country worldwide. For instance, the White House recognizes the festival to show appreciation for Indian

culture.

Countries like Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka also celebrate Holi, as they share historical ties with India. In Thailand, which is a close neighbor, there is a similar festival, but they primarily play with water instead of colors. While it resembles Holi, it focuses on water play.

There are other festivals around the world, such as a tomato-throwing festival in Spain, but I don't believe there's any direct connection to Holi. While it may share similarities in terms of playful celebration, it is distinct from Holi. Overall, Holi is a festival rooted in the Indian subcontinent, with its primary celebrations occurring in India, Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka, which were historically part of one region.



## A lifeline for ...

Despite Iran's vast tourism potential, challenges such as inadequate lodging and recreational infrastructure, land use issues, and restrictions on tapping into natural resources continue to hold things back. However, focusing on sustainable development principles and leveraging local and regional capacities will

not only take the pressure off natural resources but also open new avenues for tourism growth. Sustainable tourism development will only come through collaboration among policymakers, the private sector, and local communities. The government's role is to support investors and facilitate laws, but strategic cooperation with the

private sector is an undeniable necessity. Investors play a crucial role not only in developing infrastructure but also in creating jobs and strengthening the national economy. The government is working hard to clear the runway for Iran to break into the global tourism market, aiming to attract massive investments and develop tourism.

For the country, boosting tourism infrastructure is more than an economic choice—it is a national strategy to cement Iran's foothold in the region and the world. This path will not only bring economic growth and employment but will also serve as a bridge for stronger links between national identity and international interactions.