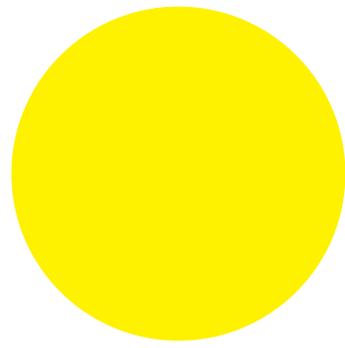


Tehran, Moscow stress full implementation of partnership agreement

2 >



## Iran, US to reconvene for talks in Oman over weekend: *Report*

2 >

### Yemen says Israel crossed redlines with attacks on Sana'a airport

Iran calls for action against US, Israeli 'destruction' in Muslim states

2 >



Smoke billows on the horizon following an Israeli air strike on Yemen's capital Sana'a on May 6, 2025. **MOHAMMED HUWAIS/AFP**

#### Israel seeks to derail nuclear talks



By Fazlollah Ranjbar  
Iranian lawmaker

**O P I N I O N  
E X C L U S I V E**

The indirect negotiations between Iran and the United States over Iran's nuclear issue have so far moved forward smoothly, raising hopes that, if the momentum holds up, both sides may strike a deal.

When it comes to talks between Iran and the US, all necessary precautions must be taken into account, and at every stage, the Leader's guidance should serve as the final word. Excessive optimism about the negotiations and the prospect of a deal should be kept in check, just as unwarranted pessimism must be steered clear of. In such talks, everyone ought to stand united in backing the Iranian negotiators so they can hold their ground with confidence and defend the rights of the nation. It appears that, in addition to the two main players—Iran and the United States—a third party is playing a hand: the Israeli regime. Israel is doing its utmost to make sure the negotiations would not bear fruits. One of the most significant stumbling blocks

Page 2 >

a potential deal is now the Israeli regime, whose leaders are bent on brining the talks to a stalemate.



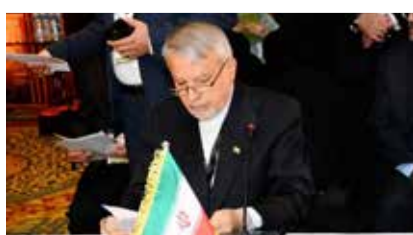
#### Iran, Tajikistan ink five economic cooperation documents

3 >



#### From memories to melodies Regional music on brink of oblivion

4 >



#### Tehran offers comprehensive roadmap to enhance ties at D-8 summit

8 >

#### Kick-and-Rush or Tiki-Taka?

### US foreign policy, national security strategy toward Iran



By Abed Akbari  
International affairs analyst

**O P I N I O N  
E X C L U S I V E**

Recent shifts in the US national security and foreign policy team under President Donald Trump have once again raised a key question among observers of US-Iran relations: Is Washington rethinking its strategic approach toward Tehran, or are we simply witnessing a reshuffle of players without any fundamental policy change?

Since Trump's return to the White House in January 2025, US policy toward Iran has resembled the "kick-and-rush" style of football — quick, forceful plays without a structured buildup. Sanctions layering, inconsistent signaling, ad-hoc mediation through regional actors, and media-centric diplomacy all point to a confrontational yet disjointed strategy. It looks active on the surface but lacks strategic depth and long-term coherence.

Page 3 >



# Tehran, Moscow stress full implementation of partnership agreement

## International Desk

Iranian and Russian presidents emphasized their countries' resolve to fully implement a comprehensive partnership agreement signed between the two countries in January. Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin also discussed bilateral relations and the latest regional and international developments in a telephone conversation on Tuesday.

They expressed satisfaction with the level of relations between Tehran and Moscow and praised the progress of cooperation in joint projects, especially in the fields of banking, rail and road transportation, and energy.

The two presidents also hailed the signing of the Comprehensive Strategic Cooperation Agreement as a turning point in strengthening political, economic, trade and security cooperation between the two coun-

tries.

Putin also wished success for the ongoing nuclear negotiations between Tehran and Washington, saying that Russia is ready to facilitate dialogue between Iran and the US to reach a "fair agreement."

The Russian president expressed regret over a deadly explosion in an Iranian port on April 26 and offered condolences to the government and people of Iran for the loss of dozens of Iranians in the tragic incident.



Vladimir Putin

Masoud Pezeshkian

## Iran, US to reconvene for talks in Oman over weekend: Report



## International Desk

The fourth round of indirect nuclear talks between Iran and the US, initially scheduled for May 3, is set to be held in Oman on Sunday, Iranian media and the US negotiator said.

According to Iran's Nour News, the upcoming negotiations will focus on humanitarian issues and security concerns.

The latest round of the negotiations was postponed, with mediator Oman citing "logistical reasons" for the delay.

US President Donald Trump's Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff, who leads the US delegation in the talks, called the negotiations with Iran "positive," saying efforts are underway to take the process into another round this weekend.

"We are making some progress," he said on Tuesday.

"I hope it is moving in the right direction. The president wants to see this solved diplomatically if possible, so we're doing everything we can to get it going."

Witkoff also said any delay in the apparent underway push to continue the process would be due to Trump's upcoming visit to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar next week.

Since April 12, the two countries have held three rounds of talks in Oman and Italy, that have been described by the two sides as "pos-

itive and constructive."

## Contradictory remarks

However, Iranian Foreign Ministry's spokesman Esmaeil Baqaei on Monday denounced some contradictory remarks by the US officials on a possible nuclear deal with Iran, saying that they are not helpful.

Baqaei made the remarks after Trump and his Secretary of State Marco Rubio called for total dismantlement of Iran's nuclear program while stressing the path of diplomacy to resolve a decades-long dispute over the issue. "Such conflicting messages does not affect our determination to stand by our fundamental positions," Baqaei said.

"If there is sincerity in the claim that the American side's demand is for the Islamic Republic of Iran not to possess a nuclear bomb, then I believe many issues can be worked out, as we have already declared - and demonstrated in practice - that we are not in any way seeking to weaponize our nuclear program," the Iranian official said.

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi also reacted to Trump's remarks.

"If their ultimate goal is, as President Trump has repeatedly said, the only thing they can't have is nuclear weapons, an agreement is achievable, but there is only one

way to achieve it: diplomacy, based on mutual respect and mutual interests," Araghchi said on X. Donald Trump said on Sunday that his goal in discussions with Iran is "total dismantlement" of that nation's nuclear program.

He also said that he is willing to listen to arguments for allowing Iran to pursue civilian nuclear energy while ending what he called its nuclear weapons program.

The US Secretary of State Marco Rubio has also called on Iran to "walk away" from uranium enrichment. In a Thursday interview with Fox News Rubio claimed that "the only countries in the world that enrich uranium are the ones that have nuclear weapons."

## Sanctions embody US insincerity in talks

The Iranian government spokesperson said on Tuesday that the sanctions imposed by the US against the Islamic Republic impact the lives of the country's ordinary people while epitomizing Washington's insincerity in negotiations with Tehran.

Speaking at a press briefing, Fatemeh Mohajerani excoriated the unilateral and arbitrary sanctions the Trump administration has since taking office in January imposed on Iran concomitant with indirect talks on the Islamic Republic's nuclear program.

"These sanctions are not being imposed for the first time; these sanctions target the Iranian people and put pressure on people's medicine, healthcare, and lives. We have taken the necessary measures to counter the sanctions. These sanctions indicate America's lack of sincerity for negotiations," Mohajerani said.

"The necessary measures to counter the sanctions have been taken; we are prepared for all scenarios and we are completely ready," she added.

## Yemen says Israel crossed redlines with attacks on Sana'a airport

Iran calls for action against US, Israeli 'destruction' in Muslim states

## International Desk

Yemen's Ansarullah resistance movement vowed to retaliate against Israel after the regime's two rounds of strikes on the Arab country, with a Yemeni official saying that Tel Aviv has crossed red lines and should await a response.

In a statement on Tuesday, the Ansarullah's political bureau denounced the Israeli attacks as "further evidence" of the country's "bankruptcy."

"Targeting Yemeni ports, Sana'a airport, cement factories, and power plants aims to impose a blockade on the Yemeni people," the statement said.

The Ansarullah added that Israeli and American attacks on Yemen "will not go unanswered and will not deter Yemen from continuing its support for Gaza."

"We tell the US, the British, and the Zionists that our military operations in support of Gaza will continue, no matter the sacrifices. The Zionists have crossed redlines and must await Yemen's response," Yemen's Supreme Political Council member Muhammad al-Bukhaiti told Al Mayadeen. "The US and the Zionist regime's resort to attacking civilian facilities indicates their failure and defeat," he said.

## Yemen ready for any scenario

The Yemeni official said that his country is ready to face all scenarios designed by the US, Israel, and Britain.

Since Monday, the Israeli warplanes have launched rounds of strikes on Yemen in retaliation for a missile strike by Yemen's Armed Forces that targeted Israel's key airport.

The Yemeni missile penetrated the perimeter of Tel Aviv's Ben Gurion International Airport for the first time on Sunday, leaving a large crater and wounding six people.



AFP

On Tuesday, the Israeli fighter jets bombed the airport in the capital Sana'a. Residents reported power outages in Sana'a and the port city of Hodeida, after the Israelis struck three electricity stations in and around the capital.

Three people were killed and 38 wounded in Israeli strikes on Tuesday.

Israel's military claimed it took the airport "fully" out of action after hitting runways and aircraft.

Yemeni authorities said on Monday four people were also killed and 35 wounded as Israel's strikes hit a cement factory and targets in Hodeida.

Yemen's Armed Forces have been attacking Israeli-bound ships in the Red Sea trade route since the start of the Gaza war in October 2023 in solidarity with the Palestinians.

As well as the airport and power stations, the latest raids also hit a cement factory in Amran, Yemeni media said.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said retaliation "will not happen in one bang, but there will be many bangs."

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmaeil Baqaei on Tuesday denounced the strikes as "a blatant crime and a gross violation of the principles and rules of international law."

Baqaei urged international and regional powers to act against ongoing US and Israeli "destruction" in Islamic countries.

## Israel seeks to ...

From the outset, Israel has harbored deep-seated hostility toward the Islamic Republic of Iran. Israelis will not let up in their animosity toward Iran, and at every opportunity, they try to stir up trouble and derail the talks. Whenever it becomes clear that the two sides are closing in on common ground, Israel resorts to various tactics to drive a wedge between the negotiating parties.

Therefore, vigilance is required to ensure the enemy is not hand-

ed an opening for exploitation, and efforts must be made to push ahead with the talks based on the principles of dignity, wisdom, expediency, and the preservation of Iran's strength, while standing by the negotiating team.

Extremism, in the current climate, is not in the country's best interest. According to the Leader's guidance, the government should be supported, and trust should be placed in the negotiating team. Care must be taken so that statements do not play into the hands of adversaries

or undermine the negotiators. Ultimately, officials and the negotiating team should level with the public about the realities of the nuclear talks, as transparency is crucial for maintaining public support and ensuring that the people stand with the negotiators. Preserving such a spirit of unity between the people and the authorities is vital, as it will ensure that, whatever the outcome, the country's interests and welfare are kept intact and Iran can carry on along the path of strength, pride, and progress.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi  
Cartoonist



OM4



# Iran, Tajikistan ink five economic cooperation documents

## Economy Desk

Five economic cooperation documents were finalized between Iran and Tajikistan during a meeting held on the sidelines of the 17th Joint Economic Cooperation Summit in Shiraz, Fars Province, on Tuesday.

The agreements encompass various areas, among them the establishment of the Iran-Tajikistan Joint Commission and a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between Iran's National Standards Organization and Agency of Standardization as well as cooperation agreements of investment organizations between the two sides.

During the meeting, Iran's Energy Minister Abbas Aliabadi underscored key elements of the agreements, stating, "The documents signed today aim to expand trade relations in technical services, engineering, and goods. A framework has been established to support Iranian and Tajik businesses and economic actors, which is crucial for deepening bilateral cooperation."

"The MoU prioritizes active collabora-

tion in the textile industry and facilitates the establishment of joint economic ventures in handicrafts. Additionally, it outlines plans for targeted conferences, seminars, workshops, and educational events to engage businesses and investors from both nations. Strengthening ties and identifying mutual opportunities are foundational steps for future collaboration, particularly in current and upcoming circumstances," Aliabadi emphasized.

He further noted that the agreements include training programs in cartography, customs, cultural heritage, handicrafts, tourism, agriculture, and water resource management.

"Critical points on continued cooperation in banking, finance, healthcare, labor welfare, urban development, IT, agriculture, technical services in water and electricity, and environmental protection were also outlined — all of which can broaden collaborative prospects," he added.

As head of the Iran-Tajikistan Joint Economic Commission, Aliabadi said, "The MoU enables the dispatch of Iranian



Iran's Energy Minister Abbas Aliabadi (L) and Tajik Minister of Energy and Water Resources Daler Juma attend a meeting to sign five economic cooperation documents on the sidelines of the 17th Joint Economic Cooperation Summit in Shiraz, Fars Province, on May 6, 2025.

● REZA QADERI/IRNA

technical experts to Tajikistan to assess their needs, ensuring optimal utilization of both countries' capacities."

Expressing optimism, the minister concluded, "These agreements and the 17th Joint Economic Summit should pave the way for concrete, actionable steps in future meetings, moving beyond generalities."

Also during a press conference, Aliabadi noted that over 250 cooperation documents have now been signed between the two nations.

Meanwhile, Tajik Minister of Energy and Water Resources Daler Juma stated, "Our MoU focuses on shared cultural, economic, and commercial cooperation. Parallel to this summit, experts and officials from both sides held joint



sessions to identify and outline avenues for collaboration."

Juma expressed satisfaction with the outcomes of the summit's committees, expressing hope that, "These meetings lay a robust foundation for consolidating and expanding bilateral cooperation."

He highlighted mutual benefits in trade,

investment, science, health, customs, construction, and culture, calling the agreements "vital for sustaining bilateral ties."

Closing the session, Juma remarked, "This joint meeting opens new doors for economic, commercial, technical, and cultural cooperation — a step that will undoubtedly yield significant impact."

## ORICA announces boost in daily gasoline output to 120m liters



### Economy Desk

The secretary-general of the Oil Refining Industry Companies Association (ORICA) announced that Iran's gasoline production increased from 107 million liters per day during the second Iranian month of Ordibehesht (began on April 21).

Nasser Ashouri stated during a press conference on Tuesday that the production surge came despite the refining industry's lack of profitability, emphasizing its

role as a key national sector and calling for greater government and parliamentary support, IRNA reported.

"The refining industry remains unprofitable, yet it is one of the country's pivotal industries. We expect the government and Parliament to bolster their backing," Ashouri said.

He highlighted that the total capital value of Iran's refineries exceeds \$100 billion, stressing, "Under current conditions, we demand facilitation and the removal of barriers to ensure this mas-

sive industry retains its profitability."

Ashouri also revealed a 100% decline in oil refinery profitability for the year 1403 (began on March 20, 2024), noting that profits from Iran's 10 refineries dropped to approximately \$525 million in the latter half of the previous year.

The secretary-general warned that the "freefall in refining industry profits" would soon jeopardize 18 refinery development and quality improvement projects, valued at approximately \$18 billion. "Given the profitability downturn, the likelihood of halting these projects has increased significantly," he said.

He attributed the sharp decline in refinery profitability to the Oil Ministry's failure to implement the "feedstock and petroleum products bylaw," adding, "Due to the lack of amendments and enforcement of this bylaw, the financial statements of refineries for the year 1403 remain unadjusted."

## Iranian roads minister, Qatari PM meet to expand transport ties



Iran's Minister of Roads and Urban Development Farzaneh Sadegh meets Qatar's Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani in Doha on May 6, 2025.

### Economy Desk

Iran and Qatar expressed agreement to develop their freight and transit infrastructure within the framework of the North-South International Transport Corridor.

The matter was the central topic of discussion during a meeting on Tuesday in Doha between Iran's Minister of Roads and Urban Development Farzaneh Sadegh and Qatar's Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani.

The Ministry of Roads and Urban Development of Iran reported that the meeting focused on the signing of an international transport agreement between the two countries, increasing freight cooperation between Iran's Bushehr port and Qatari ports, and the creation of new cargo and passenger ferry routes.

During this meeting, discussions were held on the development of Dayyer Port, enhancing transport cooperation between Bushehr Port and Qatari ports, establishing new cargo and

passenger shipping lines, signing an international road transport agreement between the two countries, and collaborating on the construction and development of transport and transit infrastructure under the North-South, Ashgabat, and Turkey-Iran-Qatar corridors, as reported by IRNA.

Other key topics included bilateral cooperation in air transport and other matters of mutual interest. The foundation of the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) was laid on the basis of an intergovernmental agreement signed between Russia, Iran, and India on September 12, 2000.

In total, 13 countries have ratified the agreement, including Azerbaijan, India, Iran, Russia, Turkey, etc. The aim of setting up the corridor is to cut down the delivery time of cargo from India to Russia, along with Northern and Western Europe. The delivery time on the current route is at over six weeks; however, it is anticipated to be trimmed down to three weeks through the International North-South Transport Corridor.

## Direct flights from Tehran to rise; Saudi flights to resume after decade

### Economy Desk

Director General for International Affairs at the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development Amin Taraffo announced plans to increase direct flights from Tehran and establish a new direct route from Tabriz to Baku in the near future.

The move follows efforts by Roads and Urban Development Minister Farzaneh Sadegh, who serves as Iran's chair of the Joint

Economic Cooperation Commission with Azerbaijan, IRNA reported.

Taraffo stated that during President Masoud Pezeshkian's recent visit to Baku, "It has been agreed that Tehran-Baku flights will increase to four days per week, and direct Tabriz-Baku flights will operate two days per week."

Separately, Mehdi Ramezani, spokesperson for Iran's Civil Aviation Organization, con-

firmed to ILNA that Saudi Arabia's Flynas airline will resume flights to Iran after a 10-year hiatus, beginning in two days, to transport Hajj pilgrims.

Ramezani explained, "This year's Hajj pilgrimage will be facilitated by both IranAir and Flynas, following agreements between the Hajj organizations and aviation authorities of Iran and Saudi Arabia. Flynas' participation marks the first such collaboration in nearly a decade."





## From memories to melodies

## Regional music on brink of oblivion

## ANALYSIS

Iran's regional music, stretching from north to south and east to west, stands as one of the oldest and most indigenous expressions of the country's auditory culture. Rooted in the climates, languages, rituals, and lifestyles of local communities, it has been passed down orally through generations, shaping the cultural identity of diverse societies over centuries.

Unlike urban or courtly musical forms, Iran's regional music has rarely been written down or recorded, surviving instead through oral tradition within local communities. Yet today, amid sweeping social changes, mass migration, globalization, media homogenization, and neglect by cultural institutions, this musical heritage teeters on the brink of oblivion.

Contrary to popular belief, regional music is not merely an artistic format. It mirrors the life, struggles, joys, rituals, history, and myths of Iran's ethnic groups — from Azeris to Kurds, Gilaks to Turkmens, Bakhtiari to Lors, and the people of Sistan and Baluchestan and southern Iran. Each region, with its distinct language and dialect, holds on to its music through distinctive patterns of storytelling and performance as an essential part of its collective identity. In Kurdish regions, music is deeply tied to mystical and religious rites. In northern Iran, melodies are often bound up with farming and nature. In Khorasan, ballads carry the weight of epic tales, while southern Iran's seafaring music echoes journeys, migration, and labor. The functions of regional music are vast: ritualistic and ceremonial, used in weddings, funerals, rain-invoking prayers, and healing rituals; narrative and historical, employed to hand down stories, epics, and myths; therapeutic and mystical, from Khorasani devotional chants to Gvati healing rites in the southeast; and aesthetic and social, livening up evening gatherings, teamwork, and communal celebrations.

Yet despite this diversity, common threads run through these traditions: the oral transmission of musical knowledge, heavy reliance on local socio-cultural environments, a lack of formal documentation, and the overwhelming threat of mainstream urban commercial music.

### Why are ancient voices falling silent?

Despite its rich background and irreplaceable role in preserving Iran's cultural identity, regional music has come up against serious challenges in recent decades, threatening not only its survival but also eroding cultural memory and diversity. Key threats include:

**1. Generational gap and broken transmission chains:** For centuries, regional music was handed down through master-apprentice oral traditions. But in today's fast-paced, digitally hyped-up world, younger generations show little interest or opportunity to take up this music. Many elderly musicians have passed away without training successors, taking with them vast musical knowledge and oral tradition.

**2. Exclusion from formal education:** Iran's education system, from schools to universities, has given short shrift to regional music, focusing instead on classical Persian or Western music. Even textbooks leave no room for local instruments or melodies. Without a formal curriculum to record and transmit regional music and structured documentation, these traditions survive only in the memories of a few, edging closer to extinction.

**3. Commercialization and shift in**



**function:** Some regional music has been watered down for commercial entertainment — festival performances and urban concerts often stray far from their authentic forms, offering sanitized, lifeless versions. This superficial, uncritical use of folk traditions does more harm than good, distorting and even ridiculing indigenous styles.

**4. Policy gaps and media neglect:** Despite cultural rhetoric in support of the arts, no clear policies prop up and promote regional music. Funding for research, production, or documentation is scarce, and key institutions like national media, the Ministry of Culture, and the House of Music fall short in sustained support. Official media pay little attention to local artists or critical analysis, missing a key platform for revival.

**5. When voices die, memories fade:** Beyond aesthetics, the erosion of regional music spells a threat to the lived culture of Iran's ethnic groups. These melodies carry unwritten stories of love, war, migration, and ritual. Their disappearance wipes out a piece of historical memory and cultural diversity.

**6. Language and cultural erosion:** Many regional pieces are performed in endangered languages and dialects. When this music falls silent, these languages and dialects also lose a living channel of survival and are more quickly marginalized.

**7. Weakened local identity and cultural homogenization:** Music is a pillar of collective identity. Losing it chips away at communities' selfhood, accelerating cultural homogenization, and dulls the bonds linking ethnic groups to their roots.

**8. Collapse of traditional cultural networks:** Regional music once existed within a web of people, rituals, and places — from communal singing

to healing ceremonies, from farming festivals to village gatherings. As these networks fall apart, it's not just the sounds that vanish but also human connections, shared narratives, and forms of cultural participation. It must be said that the disappearance of Iran's regional music is not merely the loss of instruments or voices, but a sign of a far broader trend in which a land's historical and cultural memory is slowly slipping away. While countering this decline is no easy task, it is certainly possible — provided that media, cultural institutions, educators, and policymakers join forces.

The decline of Iran's regional music signals not just silenced instruments but the broader unraveling of a land's historical and cultural memory. While reversing this trend is no easy feat, it is possible — if and only if media, cultural institutions, educators, and policymakers step up and join forces.

In light of these challenges, an interview was conducted by IRNA with Foad Tohidi, a regional music scholar and secretary of Iran's 17th Regional Music Festival, to discuss threats to this cultural treasure. The important parts of the text follow.

### Diagnosing wounds of Iran's regional music

According to Tohidi, regional music stems from the customs, climate, and culture of each area, making it unique to its own geography. The diversity of melodies mirrors the cultural, linguistic, religious, and environmental differences across the country.

"We are witnessing a trend where life in various parts of Iran is being streamlined," he says. "Villages have drawn closer to cities, and similar amenities have become widely available. Local



Foad Tohidi

words, languages, and dialects have been edged out by urban and official vocabulary. Traditional clothing and customs have also fallen by the wayside. This has watered down the distinctive features of each region and pushed people toward mainstream music. Moreover, the rise of new arrangements for regional music ensembles has stripped away the authenticity of traditional instrumentation. Incongruous fusions and the introduction of instruments from other Iranian regions or even foreign instruments have only added fuel to the fire. The media, especially social networks, play a major role in these changes. Sadly, the information picked up from the internet has fanned the flames of urban lifestyles and blurred the unique identities of local communities."

Tohidi also believes that "cracking down on" these trends is no easy task. "The only effective solution is to raise awareness and shed light on the value of regional music. Unfortunately, there are times when cultural heritage is overlooked, and anything coming from the city is taken for granted as superior."

He takes issue with the role of the media, especially national radio and television in recent decades, stating: "These outlets could have put out specialized programs to introduce the instruments, styles, and features of regional music, driving home the value of this treasure for the public. Sadly, the opposite approach has been taken up, and regional music has been pushed to the sidelines. Nowadays, we are seeing regional music morph into pop and fusion genres in many areas."

Tohidi, calling attention to the damage caused by amateur and ill-informed research, explains: "Unfortunately, some people pass themselves off as researchers, head out to different regions, and roll out misguided models that chip away at the authenticity of regional music. By forcing musical terminology and popularizing non-native techniques and behaviors, they have steered regional music toward a bland, festival-oriented style. What is needed is the training of knowledgeable, specialized researchers. The first commitment of a researcher should be impartiality and non-interference in the musical customs of a region. Sadly, there isn't even a single dedicated venue for regional music anywhere in Iran. The absence of a space for exchanging views, tackling problems, and holding research sessions speaks volumes about the neglect of this cultural asset."

### How can priceless musical heritage be preserved?

He also paints a bleak picture of the state of regional music festivals, saying: "In the past, artists threw themselves into these events with passion, but over time, we have seen a shift in attitudes and the rise of unreasonable expectations. Some artists treat the festival as their personal property and demand participation and payment through threats, while some of the true masters of regional music, owing to their hum-

Two musicians perform an Iranian regional tune live at a concert.  
● IRNA



Iran's education system, from schools to universities, has given short shrift to regional music, focusing instead on classical Persian or Western music. Even textbooks leave no room for local instruments or melodies. Without a formal curriculum to record and transmit regional music and structured documentation, these traditions survive only in the memories of a few, edging closer to extinction.

Two musicians play the Iranian woodwind instrument Ney (L) and the percussion instrument Tonbak.  
● SHAHROUZ ESMAEILI/TASTEIRAN



ble and genuine nature, are never even invited to a single festival.” Tohidi, while holding out hope for the future of regional music, underscores that “raising awareness, supporting authentic artists, and creating spaces for dialogue and performance can go a long way toward safeguarding this priceless treasure.” The regional musician, stressing the importance of training skilled researchers, adds: “The Ministry of Culture, music faculties, and especially the Cultural Heritage Organization all have a key role to play. These bodies should stage specialized training courses and show researchers the ropes in proper research

methods, accurate documentation of instruments, and recording regional music. On the other hand, non-experts must be kept out of this field.” He also calls out the misuse of certain terms in regional music, explaining: “Words like ‘maqam’, more common in official and Turkic music, should not be lumped together with all regional music. This only highlights the lack of expertise among researchers.” While acknowledging the positive impact of recording and documenting regional music, Tohidi insists on the need to take stock of past research, noting: “Although ethnomusicology is now

taught at universities, many professors lack hands-on experience and apply the same research models to every region, even though each area calls for its own unique approach.” He brings up his own proposal for developing music tourism across Iran, stating: “By putting on small music festivals in villages and drawing in tourists, it is possible to boost the local economy and bring home the importance of music to local people. This approach is far more effective than large, centralized festivals, which have veered off course into commercialization and mass appeal, moving away from the

true essence of regional music.” This researcher emphasizes, “To keep regional music alive, young people must be given the chance to pick up and learn. Free classes, instrument donations, and even paying students can breathe new life into this cultural heritage.” He also voices concern over the dire state of regional music following the passing of veteran artists, stating: “Even though many great masters — who were the storytellers of their regions’ musical culture — have passed away, there is still hope. By drawing inspiration from recorded works, it is possible

to revive regional music.” Tohidi also criticizes the sluggish performance of the House of Music in establishing a regional music association, urging immediate action and the creation of a think tank and gathering place for dialogue and solutions. In conclusion, he highlights the unparalleled diversity of regional music in Iran, expressing hope that with the right catalyst, this valuable legacy can be brought back to life and handed down to future generations.

*The full article first appeared in Persian on IRNA.*

# Iranian regional music at crossroads of modernity, authenticity

## OPINION

Iranian regional music stands as one of the oldest cultural and artistic hallmarks of the land — a tune springing from diverse climates, oral traditions, and the collective experiences of its people. Over the centuries, this music has been passed down from generation to generation, handed over from one heart to another. It is not merely an art form, but a living chronicle of history, geography, rituals, myths, and the joys and sorrows of those who have lived through their culture and entrusted it to the future in the form of melody and song. Across Iran’s varied geography, regional music takes on many forms: from the dutar playing of Khorasan Province to Kurdish maqams, from Azeri love songs to the driving rhythms of Lorestan, from southern ritual music to the epic ballads of Baluchestan. This diversity is not a sign of fragmentation, but rather bears witness to the cultural cohesion of the Iranian nation, which, despite ethnic and linguistic differences, has pulled together a unified cultural identity. Regional music can be seen as the auditory memory of a nation, which, even without formal notation or documentation, has managed to recount local and national history.

Many of Iran’s musical greats trace their roots back to these regions and oral traditions. Masters such as Gholamali Pourataei, Haj Ghorban Soleimani, Shahmirza Moradi, Ashegh Shojaei, Morad Bakhshi, Mohsen Jalilzadeh, Mojtaba Mirtahmasb, Yadollah Semmani, and many more were not only musicians or singers, but also cultural bearers who conveyed profound meanings of life and human experience beyond mere melodies. Throughout history, Iranian regional music has come up against numerous challenges — from being overlooked in official cultural policy to losing ground to urban and commercial music. In recent decades, a new concern has cropped up for enthusiasts: how can the authenticity of this music be preserved in an age of globalization and technological change? Should regional music remain strictly traditional, or can it move with the times while holding onto its essence?



↑ Peyman Bozorgnia

Answering these questions is no easy task. Unlike some other musical forms, regional music is deeply tied up with its social context, language, rituals, and environment. Any ill-informed intervention can tear it away from its roots and reduce it to a shallow, rootless commodity. In an interview with IRNA, musician and researcher Peyman Bozorgnia painted a comprehensive and concerning picture of the current state of regional music, warning of eroding authenticity. His analysis makes it clear that while Iranian regional music is still alive, its survival hinges on prudent management, understanding, solidarity, and stronger support. The following is the text of the interview with Bozorgnia, which has been edited for clarity and concision. Today, Iranian regional music is facing two major challenges: first, managing the inevitable changes brought about by globalization, the rise of digital media, and

foreign music; and second, preserving its authenticity and intangible heritage. For 30 years, these have been pressing concerns for those in the field, and the passing of veteran artists has only ramped up the worry. The lack of suitable successors has set off alarm bells for the future of regional music.

Regional music, as the national and folk music of Iran, is inherently subject to change. The influence of other musical pieces — whether from neighboring countries or the West — on instruments, techniques, and maqams is undeniable. Traditional instrumentations are shifting, and some techniques and maqams are falling by the wayside. These changes are evident across wind, string, and percussion instruments. Without proper planning to keep these changes in check, the identity of regional music is under threat.

Preserving the authenticity and heritage of regional music is very important. The traditional oral transmission, once carried out through maktab schools and masters, is now giving way to Western notation systems and new teaching methods, which have undermined some masters’ confidence and broken up the chain of knowledge transfer. In the past, music was

taught within families and inherited, with students putting in long apprenticeships under strict masters. Today, this tradition is falling out of favor, and formal education often works against the authenticity of the music. Notating traditional pieces sometimes strips away their spirit and core characteristics.

Education is the main concern for those involved. The current educational system does not measure up to the needs of the field. There is, in fact, no comprehensive educational system for regional music. Efforts to set up a university for regional music have so far come to nothing. While some masters stick to traditional teaching methods, many students, lacking proper instruction, drift toward blending regional music with other genres. Although the new generation needs to get to grips with modern music theory, the culture and authenticity of regional music must not be left behind. Combining modern musical knowledge with a deep understanding of traditional maqams and instrument use is essential.

The lack of a proper educational system has led many artists to settle for learning just a few pieces, rather than mastering the full range of traditional techniques and maqams, and thus they cannot live up to their role as regional musicians. The shortage of veteran teachers and the failure to tap into their experience only adds fuel to the fire. There must be a fundamental rethink, and a systematic approach that brings together traditional and modern methods to ward off the destruction of this valuable cultural heritage.

Regional music in Iran is in a critical state and needs special attention. Although efforts are underway in current festivals, they are not paying off. The key question remains: Is this music dying out or simply undergoing change? Musicians must band together and bounce ideas off each other. Regional music has not been entirely wiped out, but it is certainly in flux. There are more regional musicians than ever, but unfortunately, the soul and authenticity of the music are fading away. Repertoires, melodies, stories, and the original culture of regional music are slipping from memory.

To preserve regional music, a forward-looking approach is needed to get the ball rolling for the new generation. This does not mean throwing authenticity out the window; rather, by making changes that strike a chord with today’s youth, the music can be made attractive to them. For example, local instruments can be used to create new and appealing sounds — using the bass sound of the dutar instead of a Western bass guitar, for instance. Unnecessary dogmatism should be set aside so that regional music can move forward with innovation while holding onto its roots. Iranian regional music is deeply rooted and does not need to borrow from rootless elements of other genres to be appealing.

*The full article first appeared in Persian on IRNA.*

↑ A musician plays Tanbur, an Iranian traditional music instrument.  
● AMIN KARIMI/TASTEIRAN



The influence of other musical pieces — whether from neighboring countries or the West — on instruments, techniques, and maqams is undeniable. Traditional instrumentations are shifting, and some techniques and maqams are falling by the wayside. These changes are evident across wind, string, and percussion instruments. Without proper planning to keep these changes in check, the identity of regional music is under threat.

↑ Musician Peyman Bozorgnia (standing) makes a speech at the unveiling of the music orchestra of the regions of Iran, held at Vahdat Hall, Tehran, in March 2022.  
● SEYED SAEED REZA RAZAVI/MEHR





## IWF World Youth & Junior Championships: Heavyweight dominance as Iran seals men's junior title



Iranian weightlifter Hamidreza Mohammadi-Tanha competes in the men's junior +109kg event at the IWF World Youth & Junior Championships in Lima, Peru, on May 5, 2025.



Iran's Alireza Nasiri is seen in action in the men's junior 109kg contests at the IWF World Youth & Junior Championships in Lima, Peru, on May 5, 2025.

### Sports Desk

A medal-laden final day of the IWF World Youth & Junior Championships saw Iranian weightlifters grab three golds and double silvers to complete one-two finishes in the men's junior 109kg and +109kg contests in Lima, Peru.

Monday's heroics took Iran's haul to eight gold and silver medals apiece, plus triple bronzes as Sohrab Moradi's 10-man squad won the team title with 725 points, with Colombia and Venezuela in the following spots, respectively.

Hamidreza Mohammadi-Tanha

brought the curtain down on a glittering campaign for the country by making a clean sweep of three superheavyweight (+109kg) golds.

The Iranian had three successful attempts in the snatch event with a final lift of 181kg giving him the edge over compatriot Taha Ne'mati-Moqaddam, who took the silver with 180kg, while Russian Georgii Myand, competing as a neutral, settled for the bronze with 175kg.

Mohammadi had a rather shaky clean & jerk event later in the day, failing with two attempts, though a 213kg lift was still enough to secure a second gold

for the Iranian young gun, who went on to clinch the total title with a 181-213-394 record.

Ne'mati again finished one kilogram shy of his fellow-Iranian in the C&J contest, before collecting a third silver with 392kg in total. Polish weightlifter Marek Mateusz Gugala won the C&J bronze with 208kg, while Myand took his second bronze medal with 382kg in total.

Earlier on Monday, Iranian Alireza Nasiri was in a league of his own in the 109kg contests, dominating with three gold medals. Nasiri has been making 230kg clean and jerks in training – enough for the junior world re-

cord – but he declined his final attempt after five successful lifts and finished 30kg clear in total on 180-220-400.

"I was tired and because it was one lift straight after the other I didn't feel ready for the world record today – but I know I can do it," Nasiri said.

Nasiri competed at 102kg last year, when he was second in the Asian Juniors to the junior world record holder Shahzadbek Matyakubov on 171-218-389. "I felt better at 102 but I wanted to come up in weight because I want to be going for gold at the Los Angeles Olympics," said the Iranian. "The category will be

110 there. I am 19 and I can improve a lot in three years."

Meanwhile, Nasiri's compatriot Farhad Qolizadeh, who won the Asian youth title on his last international appearance two years ago, had a slow start in the 109kg event, finishing fourth in snatch, but still managed to finish on 165-205-370 for the C&J and total silvers.

Monday's medals came after Abolfazl Zare' had registered a 176-210-386 tally to walk away with the snatch gold, plus double silvers, in the 102kg event on the preceding night.

Hamidreza Zarei lifted 203kg for the clean & jerk gold in the

96kg event, while Amirhossein Sepah collected the snatch and C&J bronzes, before winning the total silver of the weight class with 165-199-364.

Iliya Salehipour added a bronze medal to Iran's junior haul when he raised 195kg above his head in the 89kg C&J category.

Hossein Yazdani was the only Iranian in the men's youth competitions, grabbing double golds and a snatch bronze (144-190-334) in the +102kg division.

Iran was also represented by three girls in the Peruvian capital, with Alma Hosseini winning the clean & jerk silver and total bronze in the youth 64kg contests.

### Sports Desk

Iran suffered a 7-5 defeat against Portugal at the FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup in Victoria, Seychelles, on Monday to finish runner-up to the two-time champion in Group B with six points.

Having already secured a last-eight spot – thanks to victories over Mauritania (5-4) and Paraguay (5-1) – Ali Naderi's men started on the front foot at the Paradise Arena as goals from Mohammadali Nazarzadeh and Reza Amiri, either side of an Andre Lourenco's equalizer, gave the Asian champion a 2-1 lead by the end of the first period.

The European powerhouse, however, dominated in the second period, with Coimbra, Jordan, Lourenco, and Be Martins on target. Be Martins netted his second of

the night early in the third period, before Mohammadali Mokhtari pulled one back in style, only for Miguel Pintado to restore Portugal's four-goal cushion.

Nazarzadeh and Mokhtari reduced the deficit in the closing stages, but the late rally proved too little, too late for the Asian powerhouse, which finished third in its last two World Cup appearances in 2019 and 2024.

"We were mentally prepared for this match. We had analyzed Portugal well and started the match well with two goals. Ultimately though, we let ourselves down defensively with some individual and some team mistakes, but it's not the end for us," Nazarzadeh, the youngest player in the Iranian squad, said after the game.

The defeat meant Iran will take on Belarus in the quarterfinals

on Thursday – a repeat of last year's third-place contest, which Iran won 6-1 in Dubai.

Belarus routed Guatemala 12-3 earlier on Monday to finish the group campaign with a clean sweep of three victories, beating Japan to the top spot in Group C. The loss to Portugal may ultimately prove to be a blessing in disguise for Naderi's men, as it saw them avoid defending champion Brazil in the knockout stages until the final.

The most decorated team in the competition with six trophies, Brazil defeated Iran 3-2 in the semifinals last year.



Portuguese skipper Coimbra (red) scores during a 7-5 victory over Iran at the FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup in Victoria, Seychelles, on May 5, 2025.

● FIFA

## FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup:

### Iran beaten by Portugal

### in final group game, gets Belarus in last eight



Shahrdari Gorgan captain Arsalan Kazemi hold aloft the Iranian Basketball Super League trophy after a Game 3 victory over Tabiat in the Finals in Gorgan, Iran, on May 5, 2025.

● MOHSEN VANAEI/IRNA

## Iranian Basketball Super League Finals:

### Shahrdari Gorgan crowned champion after Game 3 victory

### Sports Desk

Shahrdari Gorgan claimed the Iranian Basketball Super League title, thanks to a 98-95 home victory over Tabiat Eslamshahr in the second overtime in a thrilling Game 3 on Monday. Arsalan Kazemi stole the show with a double-double (14 points and 24 rebounds) as Shahrdari won the best-

of-five series 3-0 to send a packed home arena into frenzy and make up for last year's loss to Tabiat in the Finals.

Desperate for a lifeline in the third game, Tabiat got off to flying start and won the first quarter 23-20 before leading by 60-54 at halftime.

Shahrdari rallied from behind to take a 76-74 lead

with 14 seconds remaining, before a couple of free throws with seven seconds left helped Tabiat force the game into overtime.

The first overtime finished at 85-85, but Mobin Sheikhi dropped a three-pointer with 31 seconds left in the second OT to open a five-point gap for the host, which held on to win 98-95.

Shahrdari had won the first game of the finals 81-78 last Wednesday, before routing Tabiat 100-73 in Game 2 on Friday – with both games staged at Tehran's Mahmoud Mashhoun Arena.

Having finished fourth in the regular season standings, Shahrdari eased past Golnour Isfahan 3-0 in the first round of the playoffs,

and then came from behind to beat Kaleh Mazandaran 3-1 in the best-of-five semifinal series.

Tabiat, meanwhile, stood runner-up to Kaleh in the 11-team table and went on to beat Payesh Part Shahrud for a last-four spot.

Mehran Shahintab's men won the semifinal series 3-1 against Palayesh Naft Abadan.



# Insights from Salt Men discoveries in Zanzan



● Zolfaqari Mansion

## Iranica Desk

Although in ancient times the Zolfaqari Mansion in Zanzan served as a residence and administrative center for the city's rulers — never open to ordinary people — today it has been transformed into a museum that is accessible to the public. Visitors can explore a significant part of their identity and history by visiting this museum, where they have the opportunity to see the mummies known as the Salt Men, which were discovered from the Chehrabad Mine in Zanzan, and learn about the lifestyle of that era through artifacts uncovered alongside these ancient remains.

The Chehrabad Salt Mine of Zanzan is the only known archaeological site in Iran that provides extensive evidence of salt mining activities dating from both pre-Islamic and post-Islamic periods. Thanks to its unique geological features, this historic mine contains significant quantities of organic materials, ancient mining tools, and natural mummies referred to as the "Salt Men."

According to experts in cultural heritage from Zanzan, a total of six Salt Men have been discovered so far within the Chehrabad Salt Mine near Zanzan. Archaeologists believe that all of these individuals were miners who, due to accidental collapses within the mine, were trapped under a salt avalanche and subsequently buried alive, IRNA wrote.

Currently, the remains of two Salt Men are stored in the Salt Men artifacts repository because of their fragmented condition. Three additional mummies are kept at the Zolfaqari Mansion in Zanzan, and one is housed in the National Museum of Iran.

Until recently, there was no evidence of clothing typical of the Achaemenid era; however, the discovery of a mummy buried in the Chehrabad Salt Mine provided valuable artifacts dating back approximately 2,350 years, shedding light on the attire and material culture of that period.

The Zolfaqari building in Zanzan was designated as a national heritage site in 1996. It underwent several phases of restoration before opening to the public in 1999, eventually becoming the repository for artifacts excavated from the Chehrabad Salt Mine. In

2007, a temporary museum dedicated to the mummies was established within the building, and in 2009, the first official Archaeological Museum of Zanzan was inaugurated inside the Zolfaqari Mansion.

In 2004, during mining operations, miners encountered not only disintegrated human skeletal remains but also discovered several artifacts alongside them. Today, the hidden historical secrets of the Salt Men are showcased at the Archaeology Museum of Zanzan, which is housed within the historic Zolfaqari Mansion.

Despite the significant discovery of the Salt Man 1 in 1993, little effort was initially made to halt mechanized extraction or to cease mining operations altogether. However, in autumn 2004, miners once again found human skeletal remains while operating a bulldozer; yet, these remains had been largely disintegrated due to the machinery used.

While sifting through the disturbed soil, the miners collected parts of the fragmented human remains along with several artifacts. These were later transferred by the operator to the Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organization of Zanzan Province for further analysis.

Initial examinations of the remains led to the designation "Salt Man 2." These remains belonged to a middle-aged man, approximately 180 centimeters tall, who had died during a collapse of the tunnel walls and ceiling. Among the objects found with Salt Man 2 were fragments of a basket, wooden nails, plant-based ropes, and textiles.

The accidental discovery of Salt Man 2 and its associated artifacts revitalized archaeological research at the Chehrabad Salt Mine after a hiatus of 11 years. Excavations were first carried out in December-January of 2004 to recover remaining artifacts and remains, and a second phase continued in autumn 2005.

Similarly, the remains of Salt Man 3 were also discovered during another accidental excavation in 2004. Due to the discovery of this mummy by a bulldozer, it was also found in a fragmented and dismembered state.

The remains of Mummy No. 3 include bones, clothing, and parts of soft tissue belonging to an indi-

vidual who, like other miners, was killed due to a tunnel collapse and the fall of a several-ton boulder onto him.

Salt Man 4 is the most complete mummy discovered from the Chehrabad Mine. Despite the damage sustained at the time of death, most parts of his body remain intact, including bones and soft tissues that have become entirely dried out due to water loss. At the time of discovery, the body was found in a prone position, with the face and front of the body directed toward the ground. The arms were bent at the elbows — the left hand resting on the ground, and the right hand almost clenched into a fist. The right leg was positioned half-open, while the other leg was folded beneath the abdomen. Despite several fractures to the skull, the cause of death, as determined through CT scan investigations, was attributed to pressure exerted on the chest and a torn heart, likely caused by tunnel collapses and falling debris.

Research indicates that this natural mummy belonged to a young man approximately 16 years old at the time of death, with an estimated height ranging from 170 to 175 centimeters.

Salt Man 5, due to the low salt content present in the environment and water seepage from above the mountain, has undergone more decay than the other mummies. Silver rings are visible on his ears, and his hair is short and reddish-brown in color.

Along with this young man, several interesting artifacts were also uncovered. One notable item is a metal knife with a bone handle, attached to his leather belt with a leather sheath. Other objects include two intact small clay pots, plant-based ropes, a small glazed bead, and eleven pieces of pottery that were found in association with the body.

A particularly significant feature of this natural mummy is the presence of complete clothing, which is still visible on the remains. The attire consists of a long tunic, trousers, and leather shoes.

This mummy was discovered during the second season of excavation, buried beneath large rocks and rubble, with the exception of the head. The shape of the body indicates that, like the previous

specimens, this individual was killed and buried as a result of an incident involving tunnel destruction and collapse. Unlike Salt Mummy No. 4, the soft tissues of Salt Mummy No. 5 have decayed significantly, with only small portions remaining on the hands, feet, parts of the face, chest, and pelvis.

The low salinity of this environment, combined with water infiltration from above the mountain, is among the main reasons for the extensive decay observed in Salt Mummy No. 5.

Before the excavations conducted in 2004 and 2005 at the Chehrabad Salt Mine, it was generally believed, based on findings from 1993, that the mine was the location where a Sassanid prince or a representative of the ruling elite of the Saka tribes in the 8th century BCE had been killed.

However, recent excavations over the past two seasons have revealed that all the mummies discovered in the mine belonged to workers and miners who were killed and buried as a result of collapses, with walls, ceilings, and tunnels caving in.

Furthermore, archaeological evidence suggests that the mine has been active since roughly the first half of the first millennium BCE. Radiocarbon dating tests indicate that Salt Mummies 3, 4, and 5 date to the Achaemenid period, approximately 2,300 years ago. In contrast, Salt Mummies 1 and 2 belong to the Sassanian period, around 1,500 to 1,700 years ago.

Based on existing evidence and documents, the collapses of the tunnels at Chehrabad Mine occurred at least twice: the first around 2,300 years ago during active mining when a significant portion of the tunnels collapsed and Salt Mummies 3, 4, and 5 were killed and, after several centuries, another incident happened in the mine, resulting in the deaths and burials of Salt Mummies 1 and 2.

Currently, aside from Salt Man 1, which is housed at the National Museum, all other bodies and artifacts recovered from the Chehrabad Mine are stored in the Zolfaqari Museum under appropriate conditions. These artifacts are carefully overseen by relevant experts to preserve their integrity and facilitate ongoing research.



● Shoe of Salt Man 1



● Head of Salt Man 1



● Remains of Salt Man 3



● Salt Man 4



● Salt Man 5



# Tehran offers comprehensive roadmap to enhance ties at D-8 summit

## Arts & Culture Desk

Iran presented a sweeping roadmap for transforming tourism into a pillar of Islamic cooperation and economic diplomacy at the D-8 Ministerial Meeting on Tourism in Cairo, describing the sector as a "strategic lever" for shaping a new global order, according to the Iranian Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Reza Salehi Amiri introduced an initiative to boost intra-Islamic tourism, tighten economic ties, and position Iran as a hub for innovation-led governance and investment. The proposal includes annual tourism expos, visa waivers between member states, a joint investment fund, and the creation of a regional tourism database. Calling for a break from outdated approaches, Salehi Amiri said the Islamic world must "redefine tourism" as a driver of sustainable development and social capital. He stressed the need to bridge the digital divide without sacrificing cultural identity, noting that "we cannot develop at the cost of authenticity." He urged D-8 nations—including Turkey, Malaysia, Egypt, Pakistan, and Nigeria—to embrace soft-power tools like tourism to "tell their own stories"

amid intensifying global competition over narratives and civilizational influence. The summit concluded with the Cairo Declaration, a 15-point agenda focused on digital transformation, cultural branding, AI integration, and infrastructure growth. The declaration endorsed Iran's proposals and emphasized coordinated efforts to brand Islamic heritage, share knowledge, and empower local communities. Iran also reiterated its commitment to the D-8 Comprehensive Tourism Strategy, calling for cross-border tours, more direct flights, and joint training in digital marketing and destination management. In a bilateral context, Salehi Amiri told Russia's Sputnik on the sidelines of the summit that Iran is ready to "open a new chapter" in tourism cooperation with Moscow. While calling Russia a "strategic partner," he acknowledged that current figures—roughly 60,000 Russian tourists annually—"don't reflect the potential." He outlined Iran's unique tourism offerings, from health and desert tours to cultural and culinary packages, and said Tehran is ready to host Russian visitors "in a more professional and targeted manner." Salehi Amiri called for improved infrastructure and reciprocal incentives



Iranian Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Reza Salehi Amiri attends the D-8 Ministerial Meeting on Tourism in Cairo, Egypt on May 6, 2025. ● IRNA

to unlock what he described as "new horizons" in tourism diplomacy. Both Iran and Russia, he noted, are politically aligned to revive disrupted tourism flows and build a model part-

nership that could inspire broader regional engagement. The D-8 group, or Developing Eight, was established in 1997 to foster economic cooperation among major

Muslim countries. Its fourth tourism summit in Cairo gathered ministers from all member states and signaled a growing focus on culture-led integration.

## Podcasting seen as 'key tool' for media's future, says ABU official



Programs Festival known as "Pazhvak" in Tehran, Davies highlighted podcasting's growing reach, noting that more than 450 million people worldwide now tune in.

Citing global trends, he said 47% of individuals aged 12 and older listen to at least one podcast a month. "Indonesia is one of the leading countries in this field," Davies remarked, underlining Southeast Asia's rapid digital media expansion. Davies also pointed to the economic momentum behind the format. "Global podcast

ad spending is expected to hit \$4 billion by 2024," he said. He flagged the rise of video podcasts, stating that 30% of US podcast listeners now watch them as well. Drawing a line between traditional radio and on-demand audio, Davies explained that podcasts require the listener to make a deliberate choice. "Radio is bound by schedule," he said, "while podcasts are free from fixed timing and offer archival access." He emphasized the versatility of podcasting technology, stressing that it's not limited to a single platform. "It appears across Spotify, Apple Podcasts, YouTube and beyond," he said. Davies distinguished podcasts from audiobooks, saying that while both are on-demand formats, podcasts focus on interviews,

storytelling, and informal conversations. "Audiobooks are often adapted from published works, whereas podcasts are episodic and more regularly produced," he noted. He listed learning, entertainment, and up-to-date information as major draws for podcast listeners. Radio, in contrast, still offers a sense of companionship and a way to "pass the time." Artificial intelligence and personalized technology, Davies added, are poised to shape a "new future" for the medium. The professional forum was held online as part of the international section of the Pazhvak festival, in Tehran. The festival, which opened on May 5, also honored winners in categories such as digital platforms, on-air programs, and media

professions, according to the official IRIB news agency. The closing ceremony is scheduled for May 12. Ali Bakhshizadeh, deputy head of Iran's state radio, praised the event for fostering creativity and announced structural changes for future editions. "We won't produce content just for the festival anymore. We'll draw from our main broadcast schedule," he said. Festival secretary Hamidreza Eftekhari said 1,250 submissions were received this year, with 701 entries in the documentary category alone. He noted a "significant leap" in radio quality and paid tribute to colleagues lost over the past year.

## Arts & Culture Desk

Podcasting is fast becoming a "key tool" in the global media industry, Andrew Davies, head of radio at the Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union (ABU), told a professional gathering on Tuesday. Speaking at the 4th International Radio

## Iranian doc 'Legacy of the Wind' heads to Oscar-qualifying Mountainfilm festival



## Arts & Culture Desk

The short documentary 'Legacy of the Wind' by Iranian director Nasim Soheili was officially selected for the 47th edition of the Mountainfilm Festival in the United States, a key Oscar-qualifying event, according to ISNA. Founded in 1979, Mountain-

film is known for spotlighting stories that champion "adventure, activism, social justice, environment, and indomitable spirit." The 2025 edition will take place from May 22 to 26 in Telluride, Colorado. 'Legacy of the Wind' tells the story of Mohammad Vali Gandomi, the last living artisan who knows how to build and restore the ancient windmills—known locally as Asbads—of Nashtifan, Iran. The documentary also features Mount Sinai, the only mountain where the specific stone used in these mills can be sourced. Gandomi has kept the knowledge alive through hands-on

experience, carving the stones by memory and skill alone. The film has already picked up several international awards, including Best Indigenous Documentary at Serbia's 33rd Ethnological Film Festival and Best International Documentary at the 40th Tehran International Short Film Festival. It also won Best Short Documentary in the Teachers-as-Film-makers category at the 54th Roshd festival. Soheili's work has traveled widely, making appearances at documentary and animation festivals in the US, Portugal, Uruguay, Italy, Russia, China, and Turkey.

## Iran sees 63% drop in maternal mortality rate: UNFPA

## Social Desk

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) representative in Iran reported a 63% reduction in maternal mortality rates in the country. The maternal death rate dropped from 43 per 100,000 live births in 2000 to 16 per 100,000 in 2023, marking a remarkable decline. Speaking at an event on International Day of the Midwife (May 5), Ayna Seyitliyeva credited the achievement largely to Iran's primary healthcare system, which integrates prenatal and postnatal care, IRNA reported. She emphasized the critical role of health workers, including mid-

wives and health experts, in delivering essential services. "Without a doubt, this progress is largely due to the effective structure of Iran's health network," Seyitliyeva said. However, she cautioned that challenges remain, particularly in certain regions. "While some areas are thriving, disparities persist, especially in provinces like Sistan and Baluchestan, where maternal mortality rates are among the highest." In contrast, provinces such as Tehran and Zanjan report the lowest rates. Seyitliyeva noted that inadequate care accounts for half of maternal deaths worldwide. She also highlighted the global shortage of es-

sential medicines, medical equipment, and skilled personnel. The UNFPA has been working to improve maternal health since 2008, supporting midwives in over 120 countries. Seyitliyeva reaffirmed the agency's commitment to supporting Iran in enhancing its reproductive health services and further reducing maternal deaths. "Midwives are the backbone of safe childbirth," Seyitliyeva said, underscoring their pivotal role in improving the health of mothers and infants. She stressed their significant contribution to the decline in preventable deaths and complications during pregnancy and childbirth.