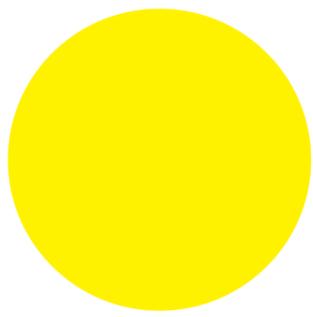


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## Iran's technical team to partake in 4th round of US talks: *FM spox*

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### Saudi Arabia sincere in backing Iran-US talks



By Mohammad-Ali Sobhani  
Iran's ex-ambassador to Lebanon, Jordan, and Qatar

#### OPINION

Iran's current foreign policy is hardly a breaking new ground, rather it rests on two main pillars of indirect talks with the United States and beefing up ties with neighboring countries—an agenda that President Masoud Pezeshkian has flagged as a top priority. The first three rounds of Iran-US negotiations got off to a careful and measured start, with both sides laying out the framework, protocols, and main talking points. But, as expected, as the talks moved into the nitty-gritty, complications and specific requirements have come to the fore. One such requirement is the need to keep in the loop those countries enjoying good or improving relations with Iran, especially where multiple agreements are on the table.



Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (L) shakes hands with his Saudi counterpart Prince Faisal bin Farhan in the city of Jeddah on May 10, 2025.  
IRNA

These states must be kept abreast on the details of the Iran-US dialogue, as the outcome is tied up with their interests and cooperation, demanding close coordination. For example, the Persian Gulf Arab states—especially Saudi Arabia—are keeping a close eye on these developments, given that the Iran-US talks are directly link to regional security.

A thaw in Iran-US relations could shore up regional security and reassure these countries that the risk of conflict or flare-ups is on the wane. Thus, as Iran pushes ahead with talks with the US, it also clarifies its positions to its neighbors and even sets out avenues for regional cooperation. This is not just obvious, but essential. Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi's recent regional tour ahead of a fourth round of talks with the US in Oman underscores this constructive approach. For analysts and stakeholders tracking these negotiations, a nuanced understanding of the process is critical.

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## Leader urges global resistance against Israeli-US crimes in Gaza

### Ayatollah Khamenei prioritizes domestic goods over foreign products

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Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei meets a group of Iranian workers in Tehran, Iran on May 10, 2025.  
khamenei.ir



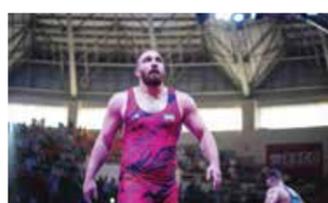
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# Iran's technical team to partake in 4th round of US talks: *FM spokesperson*

## International Desk

Iranian Foreign Ministry's spokesman said on Saturday that a technical team will accompany Iran's delegation in the fourth round of nuclear talks with the United States in Oman today, which was originally scheduled for May 3 in Rome. Esmail Baqaei made the remarks after a CNN report said that the Sunday talks will only be high-level, suggesting that the two sides would discuss a broader framework for moving forward. A source familiar told CNN that the technical team, which negotiates on more granular aspects of a deal like sanctions relief, is not expected to attend. On Friday, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi announced that the fourth round of the talks will be held on Sunday. It was scheduled to be held on May 3 but was postponed for "logistical and technical reasons." The top Iranian negotiator emphasized that the Tehran-Washington talks are progressing. "Naturally, the more progress we make,

the more consultations and reviews will be required," he said, adding, "The delegations need more time to examine the issues raised."

"But it is important that we are moving forward in a way that will gradually lead us into the details," he explained.

Mediated by Oman, Iran and the US have held three rounds of talks in the Omani capital of Muscat and Italian capital of Rome on April 12, 19, and 26 with the aim of reaching a deal on Iran's nuclear program and the removal of sanctions on Tehran.

The previous rounds of talks ended with notes of optimism, with the two sides saying the atmosphere was friendly despite the countries' four decades of enmity.

## Uranium enrichment

Ahead of the Sunday talks, the US negotiator Steve Witkoff, who had initially suggested flexibility on Tehran maintaining low-level enrichment of uranium for civilian purposes, in an interview published Friday, gave his clearest message that the US administration

would oppose any enrichment.

"An enrichment program can never exist in the state of Iran ever again. That's our red line. No enrichment," he told right-wing Breitbart News.

"That means dismantlement, it means no weaponization, and it means that Natanz, Fordow and Isfahan – those are their three enrichment facilities – have to be dismantled," he said.

"We're inviting Iran to be a member of the league of nations," he said. "We're saying to Iran: You can be a better nation. We can do business with you. We can have strategic relationships with you. But you can't be a provocateur," he said.

Witkoff said Iran has told the US it does not want a nuclear weapon – a position Tehran has long maintained.

He warned that if Sunday's talks with Iran are not productive, "then they won't continue and we'll have to take a different route."

## Iran's redlines

Iran has repeatedly said it must be allowed



This photo released on Nov. 5, 2019, by the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran shows centrifuge machines in the Natanz uranium enrichment facility in central Iran.

to enrich uranium, that it's non-negotiable. "Iran has every right to possess the full nuclear fuel cycle," Araghchi wrote on X a week ago.

Trump in his first term withdrew from a nuclear agreement with Tehran negotiated by former president Barack Obama that allowed Iran to enrich uranium.

## Leader urges global resistance against Israeli-US crimes in Gaza

Ayatollah Khamenei prioritizes domestic goods over foreign products

### National Desk

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei urged the Muslim world not to allow the issue of Palestine to sink into oblivion, emphasizing the need to confront the Israeli regime's ongoing genocide in the blockaded Gaza Strip. Ayatollah Khamenei made the remarks during a meeting with a large group of workers from across the country in the capital Tehran on Saturday.

"The biased policies that are being implemented in the world today against nations are aimed at making issues related to Palestine forgotten; Muslim nations should not allow this; they should not allow it to happen," the Leader said.

"Through various rumors, different kinds of statements, and by bringing up new, irrelevant, and meaningless issues, they try to distract minds from the issue of Palestine. Minds must not be diverted from the issue of Palestine."

Pointing to the all-out Western support for Israel in its atrocities in Gaza, Ayatollah Khamenei called on the international community to rise and confront the occupying regime and its sympathizers.

The leader also emphasized that the US and its allies, such as Britain, are complicit in the Israeli regime's oppression of the Palestinian people, particularly in Gaza, and, despite public statements that may appear critical, these nations actively support Israel.

Since October 2023, the Israeli regime has launched a devastating war on the Gaza

Strip. The Israeli attacks have so far killed nearly 52,000 Palestinians and injured nearly 120,000 others. Most of the victims have been women and children.

### Supporting domestic products

Elsewhere in his remarks, the Leader pointed to the government's support for the domestic products. He said that the consumption of domestic products is as an important support for the country's workers and investors.

However, he said that buying foreign products is actually helping foreign workers and investors.

Criticizing a recent decision by the government to lift a five-year ban on imports of goods that have domestic counterparts, Ayatollah Khamenei called the decision an easy choice but detrimental to the country and the working-class community.

"Even if a domestic product is not of good quality, try to improve its quality" he said.

According to a Wednesday report by the ISNA news agency, the Iranian Presidency's Legal Department said in a letter addressed to the Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade (MIMT) that the ministry will be able to place orders for foreign-made consumer goods and consumer durables that have domestically-produced versions.

The letter, dated April 30, said that a ban on imports of such products that had been enacted in 2019 to support domestic manufacturers has expired, adding that the MIMT would still be allowed to regulate imports by imposing tariffs on certain goods.

## India, Pakistan agree to cease-fire after weeks of escalation



AFP

India and Pakistan agreed to a full and immediate cease-fire after a fourth day of strikes and counter-strikes against each other's military installations.

Pakistan's foreign minister said both countries had agreed to a cease-fire "with immediate effect" and India's Foreign Ministry said it would start at 5 p.m. Indian time (11:30 GMT), Reuters reported.

"After a long night of talks mediated by the United States, I am pleased to announce that India and Pakistan have agreed to a FULL AND IMMEDIATE CEASEFIRE. Congratulations to both

Countries on using Common Sense and Great Intelligence," US President Donald Trump said in a post on Truth Social.

The sudden announcement came on a day when fears spiked that the countries' nuclear arsenals might come into play as Pakistan's military said a top military and civilian body overseeing its nuclear weapons would meet.

But Pakistan's defense minister later said no such meeting was scheduled.

At the same time, officials from both sides showed willingness to take a step back following the day's exchanges, as the combined civilian death toll on the two sides rose to 66.

"Pakistan and India have agreed to a cease-fire with immediate effect," Pakistani Foreign minister Ishaq Dar posted on X. "Pakistan has always strived for peace and security in the region, without compromising on its sovereignty and territorial integrity!"

India's Foreign Ministry said that the head of Pakistan's military operations

called his Indian counterpart on Saturday afternoon and it was agreed that both sides would stop all firing.

The two heads will speak to each other again on May 12, the ministry added.

The fighting began on Wednesday when India carried out strikes on what it said was "terrorist infrastructure" in Pakistani Kashmir and Pakistan, two weeks after 26 people were killed in an attack on Hindu tourists in Indian Kashmir.

Pakistan denied India's accusations that it was involved in the tourist attack. Since Wednesday, the two countries have exchanged cross-border fire and shelling, and sent drones and missiles into each other's airspace.

The countries have been locked in a dispute over Kashmir since 1947. Hindu-majority India and Islamic Pakistan both claim Kashmir in full but rule it in part.

They have gone to war three times since, including twice over Kashmir, and clashed several times.

## Tehran, Riyadh discuss latest developments in Iran-US nuclear talks

### International Desk

The Iranian and Saudi foreign ministers discussed bilateral relations as well as regional and international developments during a visit by Iran's top diplomat to Riyadh on Saturday.

Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi met with his Saudi counterpart, Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud, upon arriving in Jeddah on Saturday. His visit to Saudi Arabia is part of Tehran's ongoing policy of strengthening ties with neighboring countries.

The top Iranian negotiator updated his

Saudi counterpart on the latest developments regarding the Tehran-Washington indirect talks.

Speaking in an interview on Friday, Araghchi said his visit to Saudi Arabia would be in line with consultations between the two countries about regional issues and indirect negotiations between Iran and the United States. He added that since the beginning of the talks in April, Iran has been in constant contact with regional countries to inform them about the process.

"The sustainability of any potential agreement largely depends on the considerations and concerns of the regional

countries regarding the nuclear issue and their common interests with the Islamic Republic," the Iranian foreign minister emphasized.

Mediated by Oman, Iran and the US have held three rounds of talks in the Omani capital of Muscat and the Italian capital of Rome on April 12, 19, and 26, with the aim of reaching a deal on Iran's nuclear program and the removal of sanctions on Tehran. The Iranian and Saudi foreign ministers expressed the two countries' determination to promote their common goal of expanding mutual relations in all fields.

## Iran felicitates Pope Leo XIV as new Catholic leader



### International Desk

Iranian officials congratulated Pope Leo XIV on his election, stressing Tehran's willingness to expand relations with the Vatican.

Mahmoud Alavi, the special assistant to the Iranian president and chairman of the Council for Ethnic, Religious, and

Sectarian Affairs in a message to Pope Leo XIV on Saturday called his election an important event that is a turning point for millions of Catholics around the world.

He said that the election of Pope Leo XIV as the new leader of the world's Catholics reminds the importance of the role of religion in promoting peace, justice, and coexistence in the world.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi also in a message on Friday extended his congratulations to the newly elected Pope Leo XIV, expressing hope that the new papacy will strengthen the role of religious values in promoting justice, peace, and dialogue in an increasingly troubled world.

"At a time when the world is plagued as rarely before by injustice and cruelty, poverty and inequality, and war and bloodshed, the global attention to the

election of a new pope reflects a shared hope for religion and religious teachings to safeguard lofty moral and human values and to prevent the dominance of moral vices over humanity," he wrote.

Pope Leo XIV, who was elected on Thursday, is the first American to lead the Catholic Church in its 2,000-year history. "We pray for the soul of Pope Francis," Araghchi added, referring to the late pontiff, "And we are confident that your election as the leader of the Catholic faithful will be an important opportunity to promote spirituality, ethics, justice, and human dignity; to enhance tolerance among religions, ethnicities, and nations; and to protect peace and tranquility."

Reaffirming Iran's longstanding approach to promoting ethical values and human rights based on religious teachings, Araghchi emphasized Tehran's willingness to bolster ties with the Vatican.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi  
Cartoonist



# President calls for climate-aligned agricultural data, cropping patterns

## Economy Desk

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian underscored the necessity of establishing a precise agricultural data system for water and soil resources, developing cropping patterns tailored to regional capacities and climates across the country, and empowering both citizens and farmers to address challenges in the sector.

During an unannounced visit to the Ministry of Agriculture on Saturday, Pezeshkian held a meeting with the minister, Gholamreza Nouri Ghezjelaj, and senior officials of the ministry. Provincial heads of Agricultural Jihad organizations across Tehran Province also attended the session virtually, with officials from various departments presenting updates on their latest initiatives and programs, IRNA

reported. Addressing the discussions, the president emphasized that, "The issues raised must be comprehensively analyzed in consultation with the minister to resolve existing challenges."

"We face significant problems in water, soil, and agriculture. Timely and effective measures must be designed and implemented to prevent these challenges from escalating into crises," he stated.

Pezeshkian also urged agricultural and food security officials to contribute to developing "a thorough and accurate understanding of the country's water and soil conditions, the alignment of current cropping patterns with available resources, and adherence to productivity principles."

The president highlighted the critical importance of evaluating

whether agricultural production for export is rational and sustainable given Iran's water resources.

"Exporting agricultural products is effectively a covert export of water," he noted. "We must meticulously assess which crops can be produced and exported reasonably, considering our water constraints."

Pezeshkian posed a pointed question, "Is it wise to extract groundwater indiscriminately and cultivate water-intensive crops while ignoring the depletion of water resources, severe land subsidence, and soil degradation?"

Criticizing the lack of actionable data, Pezeshkian remarked, "Unfortunately, we lack a comprehensive and precise data system to map agricultural capacities and needs, which is essential for strategic planning."



President Masoud Pezeshkian (c) is briefed on the latest initiatives and programs of the Ministry of Agriculture during an unannounced visit to the ministry on May 10, 2025.

president.ir

He stressed that, "Cropping patterns must be defined based on this agricultural data frame-

work. If we fail to guide farmers on optimal practices, they will simply follow traditional meth-

ods. In such cases, the fault lies not with farmers but with our own inadequate planning."

## Over \$3b in new refining projects to be launched this year: Deputy minister



## Economy Desk

The Iranian Oil Ministry will inaugurate new refinery projects worth more than \$3.0 billion this year, despite years of

stagnation in the country's refining sector, a senior official from the ministry said on Saturday.

Head of the National Iranian Oil Refining and Distribution Company Mohammad Sadeq Azimifar said that the country's refining industry had faced stagnation over the past three years, adding, "This year, over \$3 billion in new projects will be inaugurated," IRNA reported.

Speaking at a press conference on Saturday during the third day of the 29th Iran International Oil, Gas, Refining, and Petrochemical Exhibition, Azimifar noted, "While Iran was a gasoline exporter in 2020, it has become a gasoline importer

in recent years."

He reported a 43% decline in power plant fuel reserves at the start of the current government's term (July, 2024), saying, "Major refinery overhauls were delayed in the past three years due to financial imbalances." Despite these challenges, the Deputy Minister emphasized, "Power plant fuel consumption has risen by 80% this year."

Azimifar also highlighted a reduction in CNG consumption from 23 million cubic meters in 2020 to 18 million cubic meters.

"Since the current government took office, nearly 8 million liters have been

added to the country's oil and gas production, with an additional 7 million liters added to gasoline output," he added.

## Gas production

Meanwhile, at a separate press conference on the sidelines of the exhibition, Touraj Dehqani, CEO of Pars Oil and Gas Company, addressed the Oil Ministry's gas production target for this year and said, "A production ceiling of 725 million cubic meters has been set."

Dehqani went on to say that, "In the Kish gas field, 14 wells have been drilled, with 10 completed and ready for production, yielding 28 million cubic meters—equiv-

alent to one phase of South Pars."

Also, Gholam Abbas Hosseini, CEO of the South Pars Gas Complex, underscored the facility's role in supplying 73% of Iran's gas, SHANA reported.

He announced the early commencement of major refinery overhauls and plans to boost daily gas production by 10-15 million cubic meters this winter.

"The South Pars Complex, the Middle East's largest gas facility, produces nearly 600 million cubic meters of sweet gas daily. It also supplies feedstock to the Persian Gulf Star Refinery," Hosseini stated.

## Taxes fund 70% of government's current expenditure

Contribution to GDP reaches 8.3%



Mohammad-Hadi Sobhanian  
ISNA

## Economy Desk

President Masoud Pezeshkian's government prioritized strengthening fiscal sustainability through increased tax mobilization, with new data revealing that 70% of the state's current expenditure was funded by tax revenues last year (began on March 20, 2024).

Head of the Iranian National Tax Administration (INTA) Mohammad-Hadi Sobhanian, stated, "Last year, nearly 70% of the government's current expenditure were funded by taxes, with tax collec-

tion exceeding both economic growth and inflation rates."

Speaking at the 14th Iran Fiscal and Tax Policy Conference on Saturday, Sobhanian noted, "The tax system is expected to provide sustainable resources for the country's current expenses, but due to high oil revenues, this had not materialized for decades."

"In recent years, taxes have become one of the government's stable resources for funding national expenses. The share of taxes in various ratios reflects reduced budget dependency, indicating significant progress in this area. Last year, despite challenges such as energy shortages and subsequent bank closures, we mobilized 1,229 trillion tomans (≈ \$15 billion USD) in tax resources, compared to 305 trillion tomans (≈ \$3.7 billion USD) in 2021," he added.

Emphasizing a fourfold growth in tax resource mobilization over four years, he said, "The tax-to-GDP ratio stood at approximately 5.7% in 2021, rising to 8.3% last year."

The deputy economy minister further stated, "Over the past two years, nearly 50% of the budget has been funded by taxes."

## Tehran, Moscow stress expansion of maritime transport cooperation

## Economy Desk

Iran and Russia stressed expansion of maritime transport cooperation during a phone call between the deputy ministers from both sides.

In a phone call between Iranian Deputy Minister of Roads and Urban Development Saeed Rasouli and Russian counterpart, Dmitry Azarov, the two sides emphasized strengthening maritime transport collaboration and agreed to hold a joint meeting in the port of Makhachkala, Russia, IRNA reported.

The two sides reached an agreement to convene a joint session within the next two months at the Russian port of Makhachkala, aimed at operationalizing the establishment of the Iran-Russia Maritime Transport Consortium.

The meeting will include officials from Iran's Ports and Maritime Or-

ganization alongside private sector representatives, as well as managers from Russia's Ministry of Transport, the Federal Maritime and River Transport Agency, and Russian private entities.

During the call, Rasouli underscored the critical importance of boosting combined transport and transit along the Caspian route, reflecting Tehran and Moscow's shared commitment to revitalizing the North-South Transport Corridor. The head of Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization stressed the need to streamline and enhance efficiency across all existing routes of the corridor, particularly by activating Caspian Sea transport operations — especially container shipping via northern Iranian ports and Russian ports. Rasouli thanked the Russian side for their cooperation in drafting and signing the 2025 roadmap for

expanding Iran-Russia transport cooperation, which was recently finalized.

He also urged the swift formation and launch of the Iran-Russia Maritime Transport Consortium with participation from both countries' private sectors, which he described as "instrumental in advancing transport and transit in the Caspian region."

The deputy minister noted that maximizing the use of logistical and transit capacities in the Caspian Sea and expanding commercial collaboration align with the directives of senior Iranian and Russian leadership. He also expressed Iran Ports and Maritime Organization's full preparedness "to engage in this specialized meeting to develop a comprehensive maritime roadmap and a joint action plan for maritime transport."

## Saudi Arabia sincere ...

Iran-US relations have been through many ups and downs over the past four decades,

Page 1 > ranging from outright hostility to limited dialogue and occasional breakthroughs in easing tensions. In such a climate, even establishing a normal relationship calls for a shift in approach and some tough, intricate negotiations.

The prevailing sentiment at home is one of support for diplomacy; while hardliners persist, their sway is minimal in the current climate. On the US side, internal

divisions run deeper. Yet, but with Donald Trump in the White House, congressional backing, and his distinctive style, many of Washington's statements come across as negotiating tactics rather than final positions. Therefore, observers should do well to ride out the highs and lows of the talks with patience and care, steering clear of jumping to conclusions. At this juncture, the spotlight should be squarely kept on official statements from the Iranian negotiating team, and unofficial opinions and commentary should be played down. Bolstering the Irani-

an team's confidence and creating breathing room for them can help bring about greater achievements. With this approach, it is hoped that talks will bear fruit in a more favorable atmosphere.

Despite the checkered history between Iran and Saudi Arabia—sometimes bitter, sometimes sweet—a calm and conflict-free Iran and region is, by and large, preferable for Saudi Arabia and all Persian Gulf Arab states. Riyadh would jump at such a scenario, though this does not mean any party will give up its interests for the other, espe-

cially Iran. Tehran must continue to define and pursue its interests on a win-win basis, in line with the shifting sands of today's international order.

Saudi Arabia is genuine in its stance on ironing out issues between Iran and the US, and stands to gain far more from this process than it might lose. Some pundits, both inside and outside Iran, argue that improved Iran-US ties could cramp Saudi Arabia's style in certain areas. Yet, what Riyadh stands to gain from a possible diplomatic breakthrough far outweighs any

potential loss.

Should Iran and the US strike a deal, Saudi Arabia is likely to fall into step with Iran. But should the talks fall flat, the landscape will be entirely different and must be addressed in due course. With Trump's regional tour and Araghchi's visit to Saudi Arabia now in play, it is hard to imagine that Iran-Saudi talks would sidestep the Iran-US negotiations. Iran will certainly have advice for Saudi Arabia, and Riyadh will have its own views to put on the table. Such consultations are not only timely, but absolutely vital.

## Nitrate controversy in Iranian watermelon exports

## Sorting fact from fiction

## PERSPECTIVE

The persistence of chemical residues and fertilizers in agricultural products has come under the spotlight in recent years, becoming a major concern for both domestic consumers and Iran's export markets. In the past, there have been instances where certain Iranian export shipments were sent back due to non-compliance with relevant standards, which only deepened public worries about the quality of agricultural goods.

Some experts point to the excessive use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers, insufficient oversight during production and export stages, and contamination of water and soil (due to industrial wastewater and polluted effluents seeping into farmlands) as the main culprits behind the contamination of Iranian agricultural products.

When it comes to the overuse of chemicals, the issue at hand is that Iranian farmers, due to a lack of awareness and easy access to pesticides, often go overboard and use these substances beyond permissible limits. Some of the pesticides in use are not even registered in destination countries. Furthermore, the government distributes fertilizers at subsidized or even free rates, but there is no oversight of their consumption.

These shortcomings crop up in the agricultural sector, where its products make up a significant portion of the country's exports, especially to neighboring countries and target markets. To keep a foothold in foreign consumer markets, greater attention to product quality is expected.

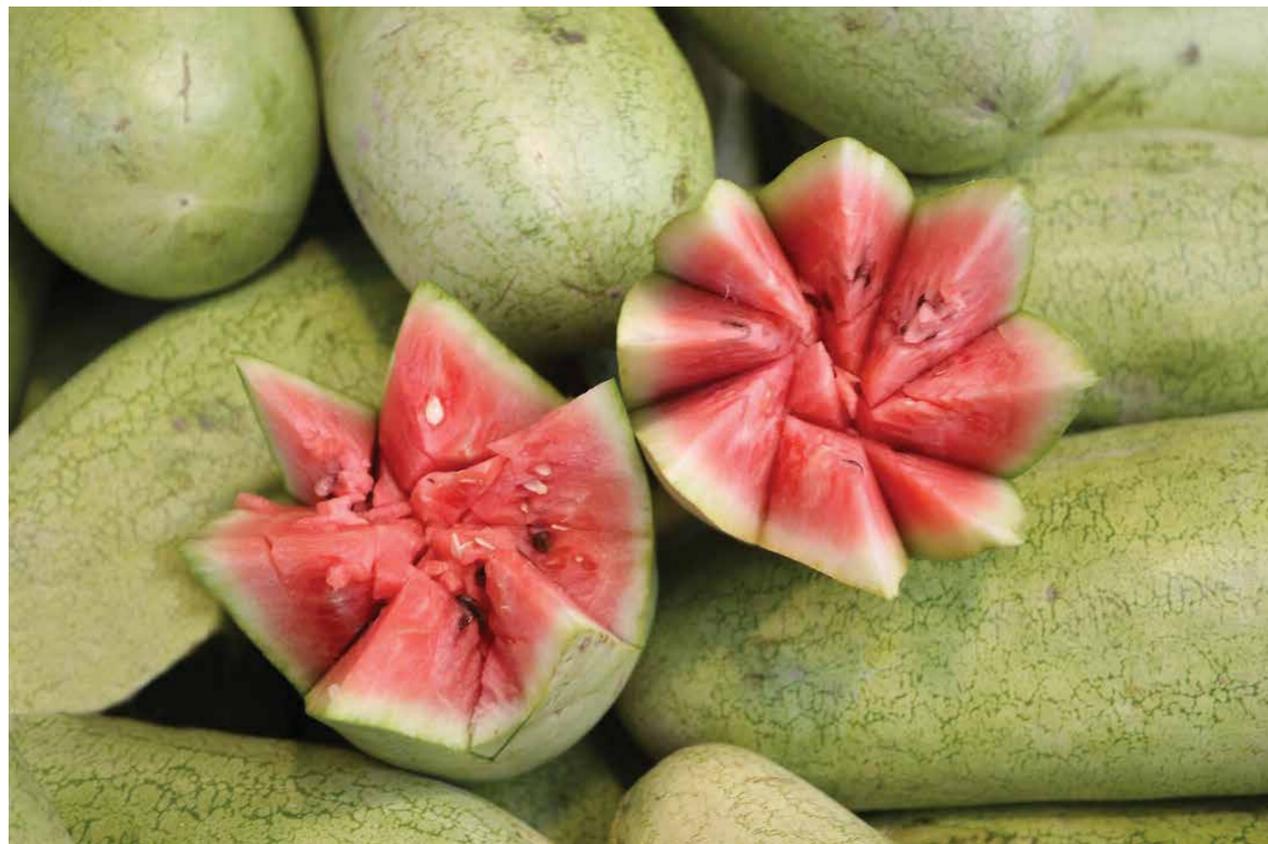
Customs statistics show that Iran's agricultural exports shot up by more than 35% in the last Iranian calendar year (started March 20, 2024), making it all the more crucial for authorities to step up quality control. Relevant bodies such as the Ministry of Agriculture, the Food and Drug Administration of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the National Standards Organization must work hand in glove to ensure that health and quarantine certificates are issued according to global and destination country standards.

#### Watermelon exports to Russia still going strong

Amidst these circumstances, the release of a video allegedly showing nitrate tests on watermelons imported to Russia — claimed to be from Iran and containing nitrate levels five times above the standard — sparked fresh concerns on social media about the quality of these products.

Although it was claimed following this video that Russia had banned Iranian watermelon imports, Hadi Tizhoush-Taban, president of the Iran-Russia Joint Chamber of Commerce, told IRNA that imports are still underway and no ban has been imposed on Iranian watermelons in Russia so far.

The National Standards Organization of Iran also weighed in with a statement, reminding the public that only six products — namely, cumin, saffron, pistachios, raisins, dried apricots, and dates — are subject to mandatory standards. The organization



● ADEL BAKHODA/IRNA

stated that the test used in the video was a Rapid Test, which is "scientifically inaccurate and legally invalid" unless verified by accredited laboratories.

It was further emphasized that Russia itself has a stringent quality control system and no product can make its way into its market without approval. The National Standards Organization urged citizens to take with a grain of salt rumors circulating on social media and to seek information on product quality and safety only from official and credible sources.

#### Nitrate levels well below limits

Hossein Asghari, director general of the Office of Vegetables and Cucurbits at the Ministry of Agriculture, told the media — without providing export figures — that the strictest global standards for nitrate residues are enforced in Russia, and Iranian agricultural products live up to these standards. This is why Russia remains a key export destination for Iranian produce, including watermelons.

He noted that the permissible nitrate residue in watermelons in both Iran and Russia is 60 mg/kg, adding, "It is not clear whether the watermelon in question was actually an Iranian export." Asghari explained that Russia, lacking sufficient domestic production, imports watermelons from various countries. He also pointed out that nitrate testing should be conducted on the edible part of the watermelon, not the rind, and that, in any case, the device used in the video was not reliable.

He went on to say that, according to a study by the Soil and Water Research Institute, the average nitrate concentration in Iranian watermelons is less than 10 mg/kg, based on samples from 433 watermelons collected from major producing provinces.

#### Media hype at play

Sadreddin Niavarani, a board

member of the Iran Union of Exporters of Fruits and Vegetables, told IRNA that the video was released without credible documentation and has stirred up more worries about the quality of Iranian agricultural exports than warranted. Closer examination suggests these claims may be more about making headlines than reflecting reality.

He added that unless official evidence emerges of Iranian watermelons being returned due to nitrate contamination, such claims cannot be confirmed. This exporter also stressed that the incident should serve as a wake-up call for authorities to tighten up oversight and improve export infrastructure to ward off any damage to the reputation of Iranian agricultural products.

Niavarani stated that so far, there have been no official reports from Iranian customs, the Plant Protection Organization, or Russian regulatory bodies regarding the return of Iranian watermelon shipments due to chemical contamination; nor have any importing countries, such as Iraq, the UAE, or India, confirmed such cases.

He emphasized that if such an incident had occurred, it would have shown up in official trade and quarantine reports.

#### Accurate measurement needs advanced labs

Niavarani pointed out that Iranian agricultural exports to Russia face infrastructure and logistics challenges, including limited numbers of trucks allowed to cross over the Astara border (with Azerbaijan) into Russia, a lack of direct and efficient sea routes during winter, and difficulties in transferring export revenues due to banking sanctions.

These hurdles have cut down Iran's share of the Russian agricultural market compared to competitors like China and Turkey. Nevertheless, there are no signs of declining demand for

Iranian products due to quality concerns.

He stressed that the video claims a portable device detected pesticide residues in watermelons, but agricultural lab experts maintain that precise measurement of pesticides and nitrates requires fully equipped laboratories, and handheld devices cannot provide immediate or reliable results.

He believes that if Russia possessed such advanced technology, it would certainly roll it out at all its borders for shipment control, rather than conducting such tests in the marketplace.

#### Agencies overseeing agricultural product contamination

Regarding the role of Iranian regulatory bodies in quality control, Niavarani explained that several agencies are responsible for monitoring the quality of these products. The Plant Protection Organization screens for pesticide residues before export permits are issued, while the Ministry of Health is tasked with monitoring product safety in the domestic market.

He reminded that customs authorities are responsible for plant quarantine and inspection of both exported and import-

ed agricultural consignments. During this oversight process, products are rigorously tested, and any shipment found to be contaminated beyond permissible levels is not allowed to leave the country.

#### Fierce competition in Eurasian market

Asked whether the media hype could be an attempt to shut Iran out of the Eurasian market — which is set to open on May 15, 2025 — Niavarani said that, given the stiff competition, some parties may be spreading unsubstantiated news to undermine the reputation of Iranian products.

He advised the media to check in with relevant organizations such as the Plant Protection Organization or the Ministry of Agriculture before publishing such reports, and urged exporters and farmers to focus on adhering to international standards rather than getting caught up in social media rumors.

He also called on the government to iron out logistical issues in exports to Russia by developing both maritime and border routes.

The article first appeared in Persian on IRNA.



The viral video by the deputy of the 8th State Duma claims a portable device detected pesticide residues in watermelons, but agricultural lab experts maintain that precise measurement of pesticides and nitrates requires fully equipped laboratories, and handheld devices cannot provide immediate or reliable results. If Russia possessed such advanced technology, it would certainly roll it out at all its borders for shipment control, rather than conducting such tests in the marketplace.



Biysultan Khamzaev (L), the deputy of the 8th State Duma, allegedly tests the nitrate levels of an Iranian watermelon with a rapid test device in Russia, claiming that the Iranian export is to be avoided in favor of Russian produce in this screengrab from a viral, undated video.

● IRNA



# Health warning or psychological warfare?

## ANALYSIS

Scientific studies and past reports indicate that certain agricultural products can, at times, end up with high levels of nitrates — especially when chemical fertilizers are overused or misapplied during cultivation. Previous research has shown that while elevated nitrate levels may pose risks to children in some cases, their threat to adults remains limited.

In recent years, there have also been reports of Iranian agricultural exports — such as bell peppers and kiwis — being sent back by Russia and India. The stated reasons? Excessive pesticide residues or heavy metals like nitrate surpassing permissible limits.

In the same vein, a viral video has recently made the rounds online, which showed a Russian Duma deputy inspecting Moscow's fruit and vegetable market. In the footage, he uses a nitrate tester on an Iranian watermelon; the result allegedly shows that Iranian-exported watermelons contain nitrate levels five times the legal limit. Addressing the issue, Iranian food safety expert Mehdi Sarvi said, "Exporting raw food products, especially agricultural goods, to other countries requires strict and serious oversight. There is also a strong emphasis on traceability, where producer cooperatives and trading companies can play a key role. Although concerns about nitrate levels in Iranian produce do exist, the claim that exported watermelons to Russia contain five times the legal nitrate limit hasn't been officially confirmed and still calls for further investigation."

### How much nitrate is natural?

Watermelon naturally contains nitrates (on average, 10–100 mg per kilogram). However, the amount typically remains low and falls within the safe range for human consumption. Compared to vegetables like spinach, lettuce, or beets — which can pack 1,000 to 3,000 mg of nitrate per kilogram — watermelon's nitrate content is relatively negligible.

An Iranian study (published on ScienceDirect) found that watermelons grown in certain regions of the country contained nitrate levels ranging from 20 to 200 mg per kilogram. While excessive use of nitrogen-based fertilizers can drive up these levels, the nitrate content is still considered safe for adults. Children, due to their lower body weight and higher sensitivity, may be more vulnerable to excess nitrate; nonetheless, moderate watermelon consumption poses no harm, even for kids.

Nitrates are natural compounds found in soil, which plants — including watermelons — take up through their roots. Nitrate levels in watermelon depend on various factors: soil type, agricultural practices, use of chemical fertilizers, and environmental conditions. Global standards, such as those



● IRNA

set by the European Union or the World Health Organization (WHO), typically do not establish a specific nitrate threshold for fruits like watermelon, since their nitrate content rarely reaches dangerous levels. However, some countries, like Russia, may enforce stricter rules — capping nitrate content for watermelons at 60–90 mg per kilogram.

### Challenge of meeting global standards

Importing countries like Russia have stringent standards for nitrates and pesticides in agricultural products. For Iran to hold onto its export markets, it must adhere to these requirements. "The above claim, which remains unverified, has also been made about onions from

southern Kerman, not just watermelons. Nevertheless, there are companies that stick to the necessary standards and export compliant products, which is highly important. It would be even better if such capacities in Iran were built up to both guide production and improve quality, as well as to defend the reputation of Iranian products in global export markets. This would allow for more successful exports and weed out unsupervised shipments by small traders, which often slip through without proper quality and safety checks," Sarvi notes.

### How to reduce nitrate residue in watermelons

• **Wash thoroughly:** Washing

the watermelon before cutting it can help get rid of surface contaminants. While nitrates are stored inside the fruit's tissues and can't be washed away, this step prevents external contaminants from getting into the fruit when sliced.

• **Choose organic produce:** Organic watermelons grown with natural fertilizers (like compost) tend to have lower nitrate levels because they are exposed to less nitrogen-based chemicals. When shopping, look out for organic labels or valid certifications. Buying from local producers who follow sustainable farming practices can also lower the chance of excess nitrates.

• **Moderate consumption:** Eating watermelon in moderation



⤴ Mehdi Sarvi

(for instance, a few slices a day) keeps the risk in check. Diversifying fruit and vegetable intake further reduces the risk of excessive nitrate exposure from any single food. For children — who are more sensitive — it is advisable to limit watermelon intake to moderate amounts and balance it with low-nitrate fruits like apples or bananas.

The article first appeared in Persian on KhabarOnline news agency.



A viral video has recently made the rounds online, which showed a Russian Duma deputy inspecting Moscow's fruit and vegetable market. In the footage, he uses a nitrate tester on an Iranian watermelon; the result allegedly shows that Iranian-exported watermelons contain nitrate levels five times the legal limit.



A lab expert tests the quality of products in an Iranian laboratory.  
● MEYDANESH.COM

## International Freestyle Wrestling Takhti Cup:

## Domestic rivalry settled as Zare' gets a shot at redemption in Zagreb

## Sports Desk

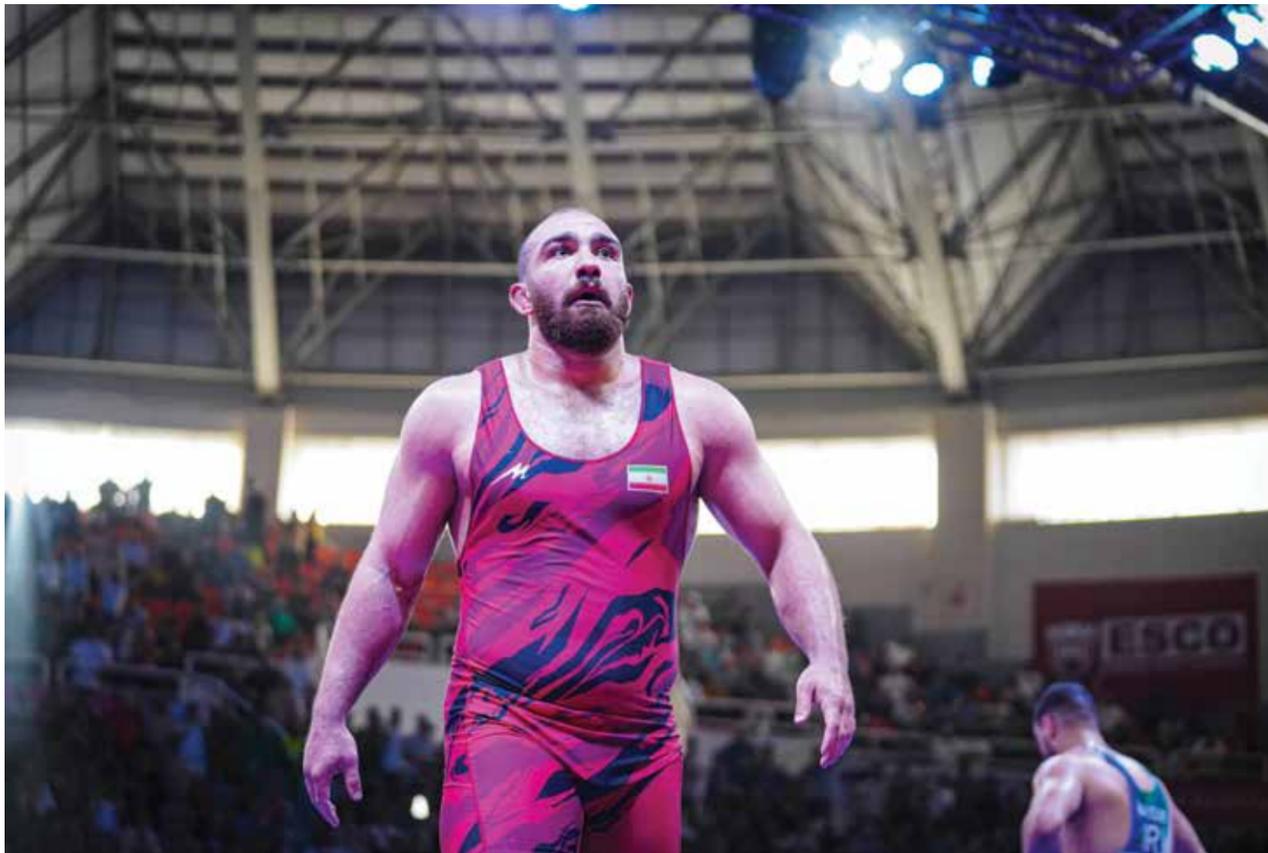
Amirhossein Zare' came out victorious against Amirreza Ma'soumi in the eagerly-awaited 125kg final at the International Freestyle Wrestling Takhti Cup on Friday to secure a spot in the Iranian squad for September's Wrestling World Championships in Zagreb.

All eyes were on the super-heavyweight showdown in Isfahan, where two of the division's finest international stars had their own reasons to go all out for a statement victory.

Ma'soumi, 20, was eager to build on his six world age-group titles in pursuit of the senior crown in September, though Thursday's result now gives Zare' a chance to redeem himself after last year's final setback at the Paris Olympics by adding a third world gold to his medal haul.

There was little to separate the two wrestlers in the first period, with Zare' taking a 1-0 lead at the break – after his opponent was cautioned for passivity – but the reigning world champion went on to clinch an impressive 8-2 victory, thanks to double takedowns and a gut-wrench.

"Amirreza is a top wrestler and a winner of several world golds in different age classes. I knew all about wrestling him as it was our fourth encounter in recent years. Thank God I prevailed in decisive moments of the contest to win the bout. I will just have to work hard and learn from my past mistakes to succeed at the World Championships," said Zare', who suffered a 10-9 loss to Georgian Geno Petriashvili in a



Amirhossein Zare' is pictured during a victory over Amirreza Ma'soumi in the 125kg final at the International Freestyle Wrestling Takhti Cup in Isfahan, Iran, on May 9, 2025.

● IAWF

Two-time world silver medalist Amir-Mohammad Yazdani put a lid on a dreadful run of late by claiming a 7-4 win against fellow-Iranian Younes Emami – a winner of two world bronzes – in the 74kg final.

The two will have to meet again in the coming months to decide who will represent the country at the World Championships.

Fariborz Babaei pulled off a stunning 5-3 victory over Asian champion Mahdi Yousefi in the 79kg final, though he will still have to see off four-time world medalist Mohammad Nokhodi for a place in the UWW Worlds. Abolfazl Rahmani made the most of Kamran Qassempour's absence – who was ruled out of the event with a positive Covid test result – and beat Amirhossein Kavousi 7-1 for the 86kg gold.

Mohammad-Mobin Azimi beat Behnam Sarabi 5-2 in the 92kg final, while Ahmad Bazri came out victorious (3-1) against Abolfazl Babalou in the 97kg showdown. Bazri will still face a tough task to secure a world spot as he will have to succeed in a Ranking Series event in May or July to get a head-to-head with Amir-Ali Azarpira, who has been sidelined with a knee injury since winning an Olympic bronze last summer, for the Zagreb ticket.

thrilling Olympic final in Paris. Meanwhile, Ali Mo'meni – a gold medalist in February's Ranking Series event in Zagreb – is guaranteed a return to the Croatian capital after a 9-4 victory over Milad Valizadeh in the 57kg final.

Joining Mo'meni and Zare' in the Iranian 10-man squad are Ahmad Mohammadnejad-Ja-

van, Rahman Amouzad, and Amirhossein Firouzpour. Mohammadnejad-Javan will be the Iranian 61kg wrestler at the world event, thanks to a gold-winning run at the Zagreb Open and an Asian bronze in March.

Amouzad, an Olympic silver medalist last year, has been given a shot at a second world 65kg

gold after domestic rivals Yassin Rezaei and Ali Khorramdel had below-par runs at the Ranking Series season-opener in February.

Firouzpour's impressive run of results in recent months, which has seen him win the Asian and Zagreb Open titles, convinced the Iranian coaching staff to pick him for the world 92kg contests.

Elsewhere in Isfahan, Reza Mo'meni settled for a 61kg silver following a 4-3 loss to Bekzat Almaz Uulu of Kyrgyzstan, while Yassin Rezaei suffered a criteria defeat (11-11) to Indian Jaskaran Singh in the 65kg final.

Russian Dalgat Abdulkadyrov came out on top against Iranian Mohammadali Amouzad by fall for the 70kg title.



● IRIHF

## Asian Men's Beach Handball Championship:

## Iran rallies past Jordan to advance to knockouts

## Sports Desk

Iran came from behind to beat Jordan 2-1 on Friday and maintain its perfect start to the Asian Men's Beach Handball Championship in Muscat, Oman, securing a place in the quarterfinals.

Having claimed back-to-back 2-0 wins against Pakistan and India, Iranian men fell to a 14-12 loss in the first period but bounced back to win the second 20-12, before coming out victorious (7-6) in the shootout.

Alireza Pirzadeh contributed

with a game-high 14 points for Iran, with Amin Kazemi and Ali Heidarian chipping in 10 and six points, respectively.

The victory left Iran on top of the five-team Group B table with six points – two clear of Jordan.

Iran will take on the Philippines – fourth on two points – in its final group game, before Jordan and India square off later today at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex. A 2022 Asian champion on home soil, Iran settled for a third-place finish in the previous edition on the Bali Island in Indonesia two

years ago, courtesy of a 2-0 victory over Vietnam.

Elsewhere in Muscat, Saudi Arabia defeated Maldives 2-0 on Friday to move level on four points with Oman in Group A, though the host country remained top of the table on goal difference.

The top spot of the group will be on the line when Oman – runner-up in 2023 – and Saudi Arabia go head-to-head today.

The two finalists at this year's competition will qualify for the 2026 IHF Men's and Women's Beach Handball World Championships.

## Azmoun on Al Ain radar for FIFA Club World Cup: Report

## Sports Desk

Shabab Al Ahli striker Sardar Azmoun could join fellow-Emirati club Al Ain on loan for the upcoming FIFA Club World Cup, according to media reports in the Persian Gulf country.

Asian champion in the 2023/24 season, Al Ain will be one of the four clubs, along with Saudi giant Al Hilal, Ulsan HD of South Korea, and Japan's Urawa Red Diamonds, to represent the continent at the

revamped 32-team competition – starting June 11 in the United States.

Al Ain will begin its campaign against Serie A heavyweight Juventus in Group G – also featuring Manchester City and Moroccan club Wydad AC – at the Audi Field, Washington, D.C., on June 18.

Having joined Shabab Al Ahli from Bundesliga club Bayer Leverkusen on a €5m contract last July, Azmoun have enjoyed a prolific debut season in the Asian club

football, bagging 26 goals and 10 assists in 37 appearances across all competitions.

"I would be honored to be part of the Al Ain squad at the Club World Cup, but I am currently under contract with Shabab Al Ahli, and the club will have the final say on the matter," Azmoun said, after his team came from behind to beat Sharjah 2-1 – courtesy of a Yuri Cesar's double – at the UAE President's Cup final in Abu Dhabi on Friday.

This was Shabab Al Ahli's fourth trophy of the season.

Azmoun and co. defeated Al Wasl in the shootout to lift the UAE Super Cup trophy last December, and then beat Al Rayyan 3-1 for the Qatar-UAE Challenge Shield in January.

Shabab Al Ahli clinched a second UAE Pro League crown in three seasons last week, with Azmoun making a massive contribution to the achievement with 11 goals and six assists in 19 top-flight outings.



● shababalahli.ae

# Geno Mountain blends nature, health, cultural heritage

## Iranica Desk

In southern Iran, in a land where the scorching sun and humid climate are intertwined with the lives of the people, a mountain rises to the skies, offering a cool, green, and vibrant nature to its inhabitants and visitors.

Geno Mountain, with its lush heights, bubbling springs, and unique ecosystem, is one of the most beautiful nature tourism destinations in Hormozgan Province, attracting travelers and nature enthusiasts from across the province and the country each year.

Geno Mountain is located 30 kilometers northwest of Bandar Abbas, in an area between the cities of Bandar Abbas and Hajiabad. This mountain, part of the southern Zagros Mountains, stands at an elevation of over 2,300 meters, making it the sixth tallest mountain in the province. Consequently, its temperature is always 7 to 10 degrees cooler than that of Bandar Abbas.

The climate in this region, especially in spring and autumn, is very pleasant and cool, making Geno Mountain the first destination for families from Hormozgan Province to escape the summer heat and spend a relaxing day in nature.

## Biosphere reserve

Geno Mountain was declared a protected area in 1972, and in subsequent years, due to its unique natural characteristics, it was listed as one of the thirteen biosphere reserves in Iran by UNESCO. This 43,000-hectare

region is home to dozens of rare plant and animal species, some of which are found only in this area. In the heights of Geno Mountain, a diverse range of vegetation grows, including sparse forests, shrublands, fruit-bearing trees, and medicinal plants. Trees such as figs, pomegranates, apples, apricots, grapes, as well as date palms, tamarisk, acacia, and wild almonds enhance the natural beauty of this region.

In terms of fauna, Geno Mountain is home to species such as the Persian leopard, hyena, jackal, mountain goat, ram, ewe, fox, rabbit, and wild boar. Birds of prey and migratory species such as partridges, golden eagles, rock partridges, and skylarks can also be observed in this area. Additionally, rare species of amphibians and reptiles live in the flowing waters and springs of Geno Mountain, indicating the ecological health of the region.

One of the most attractive features of Geno Mountain is its famous hot spring. With high temperatures and mineral-rich water abundant in sulfur, chlorine, and calcium, this spring is beneficial for treating various skin and joint diseases. The existence of separate pools for women and men, along with recreational areas around it, has made Geno Spring one of the most important health tourism destinations in the southern part of the country. Geno Mountain is a unique destination for nature lovers, climbers, and nature photographers. The diverse hiking trails, stunning landscapes at sunrise and sunset, camping in the heart of

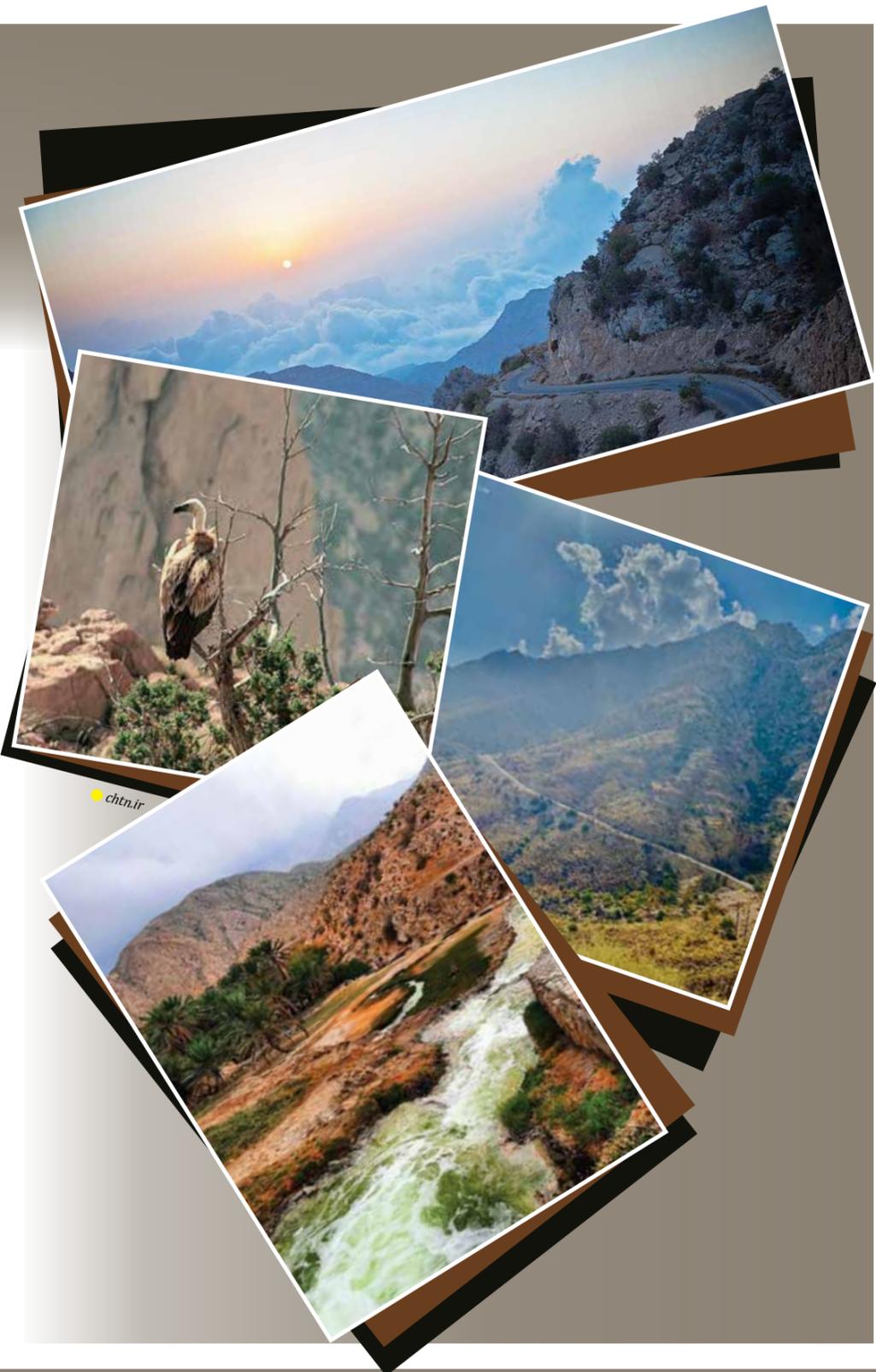
the mountains, and paragliding are among the activities available in this area.

This region is currently recognized as one of the priorities for ecotourism development in Hormozgan Province, and with the completion of tourism infrastructure in the Geno Mountain, it is expected that more tourists from other parts of the country will travel to this winter paradise in southern Iran.

The local people living around Geno Mountain are often engaged in cattle ranching, agriculture, and handicrafts. Many tourists, while visiting the nature of Geno, are also interested in learning about the lifestyle of the locals, their traditional music, local foods, and handicrafts. This aspect has transformed Mount Geno into a platform for promoting sustainable tourism, creating jobs, and enhancing local livelihoods.

Accessing Geno Mountain from Bandar Abbas is easy via the Bandar Abbas-Sirjan road. This route is paved and safe, and the secondary paths leading to the hot spring and tourist areas are also passable by car. Nature tours are also active in this area during the cooler seasons of the year.

Geno Mountain is not just a natural area; it encompasses a collection of climatic beauty, biodiversity, local culture, and tourism potential in the warm climate of southern Iran. If you find yourself in Bandar Abbas or are looking for a unique destination for nature tourism, Geno awaits you with open arms, a cool sky, and a warm heart.



## Amir Nezam House; an architectural, historical icon in Tabriz



Tabriz, the capital of East Azarbaijan Province, has a rich history marked by numerous struggles and significant historical events, particularly during the Persian Constitutional Revolution and later the Pahlavi era. Among the city's many historic buildings stands the Amir Nezam Garousi House, which dates back to the Qajar dynasty.

Amir Nezam, originally named Hasan-Ali Khan, was one of the most influential politicians during the Qajar era. During his mission in Tabriz, he constructed a mansion that exemplifies traditional Qajar architectural style. This house was so remarkable that Nasereddin Shah himself mentioned and described it during his third journey to Europe, visitiran.ir wrote. Hasan-Ali Garousi held several high-ranking positions in the Qajar government. In addition to serving as a steward, he was Iran's ambassador to France, where he brought back coin punch machines. He also played a pivotal role in the Tobacco Protest. In his later years, he was exiled to Kerman, where he eventually passed away. After Amir Nezam, subsequent rulers of Azarbaijan occupied his mansion. Recognizing its historical significance and cultural value, the Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, and Tourism Organization of East Azarbaijan took action to acquire the house in 1991. Following its registration as a national heritage site and subsequent restoration efforts, it was opened to the

public in 2006 as a specialized museum dedicated to the Qajar era.

The Amir Nezam House is a two-story structure set on a foundation covering approximately 1,500 square meters. The estate features two courtyards: one serving as the Andaruni (private quarters) and the other as the Biruni. Both courtyards are decorated with flower gardens, water pools, and intricate tile works. Sixteen pillars support the terrace ceiling. The second-floor windows are adorned with latticework and colorful glass, while the north and south facades feature stucco and mirror works.

Like many traditional Iranian mansions,

the basement houses a large Howz Khaneh, a columned water hall that is one of the main sections of the building. Its ceiling showcases masterful brickwork, adding to the mansion's architectural grandeur.

Today, the mansion's halls are filled with various displays. On the first floor, visitors can explore exhibitions of coins, weavings, ceramics, glassware, music, inlay works, and metal artifacts. The second floor features halls dedicated to stones, weaponry, politicians and their decrees, architecture, and urban development, offering a comprehensive insight into the rich history and culture of the era.



# Paleolithic artifacts unearthed in southern Iran



## Arts & Culture Desk

A team of Iranian archaeologists uncovered a set of Paleolithic stone tools along the Makoran coast in southeastern Iran, the country's Research Institute of Cultural Heritage and Tourism said on Saturday.

The discovery was made between the Kupal Mountain range and the Makoran shoreline in Sistan and Baluchestan Province. According to Morteza Hesari, who led the excavation, the tools include large pebbles with sharp edges and heavy flakes—signs of early human activity, ISNA reported.

"These artifacts are significant," Hesari said, noting they provide new clues about pre-historic settlements in the area. Until now, knowledge of Paleolithic presence along the Makoran coast was limited to a handful of finds from the 1970s. Those earlier artifacts, uncovered by British archaeologist Claudio Vita-Finzi in Konarak and Sadich, dated back to the Middle and Late Paleolithic. The newly found tools, however, may push the timeline further back. "They may reflect much earlier human occupation," Hesari said, suggesting a link to ancient migration routes stretching toward South and East Asia.

The work is part of an ongoing archaeological survey aimed at mapping the boundaries of the ancient site near Mount Kopal, close to the Chabahar-Beris highway in Dashtiari County. Past surveys there have also turned up items from the Bronze Age, as well as Parthian and Sassanian periods. Further findings are expected to be announced soon.

Hesari credited local authorities for their "full cooperation," especially Dashtiari governor Abdolaziz Miayee.

He also expressed hope for a future exhibition showcasing the discoveries, in partnership with regional cultural and tourism offices.

# Iran 'one of the safest' countries for travel: Hungarian envoy

## Arts & Culture Desk

Hungarian tourists returning from Iran often highlight the country's "safety" and warm hospitality, Hungary's ambassador to Tehran said during a visit to the central province of Yazd, according to the local governor's office. Ambassador Gyula Petho, in talks with provincial officials, pushed back against travel advisories listing Iran as high-risk, Tasnim News Agency reported.

He called such rankings misleading, saying they are "only based on the region's general climate" and do not reflect conditions in Iran, which he described as "one of the safest countries."

The meeting took place as part of plans to deepen ties between Hungary and Yazd, particularly in education and tourism.

Petho said the Hungarian Embassy's economic attaché would "actively pursue" these connections.

Hungary hosts more than 3,000 Iranian students, Petho noted, and plans to offer 100 full scholarships annually.

Many graduates, he said, become "honorary ambassadors" for Hungary back home.

He also praised Yazd University as a key academic partner and announced plans to meet its leaders and members of the local Chamber of Commerce during upcoming visits.

This year marks 100 years since Hungary and Iran formally established diplomatic relations. Petho described the milestone as



Hungarian Ambassador to Tehran Gyula Petho (L) meets with Yazd Province Governor-General Mohammadreza Babaei (R) to discuss bilateral cooperation, in Yazd, Iran, May 9, 2025.

● TASNIM

"a timely opportunity" to expand academic, economic, and tourism ties.

Yazd Governor Mohammadreza Babaei echoed that view, saying the province was eager to boost direct ties with foreign countries, including Hungary. He cited Yazd's deep historical and cultural appeal, calling it a "natural match" for European visitors.

Babaei criticized Iran's inclusion in red-listed travel warnings, calling it "unfair" and a deterrent to would-be tourists. "Many Hungarian travelers who visited Yazd brought up this very issue," he said. "It doesn't reflect the peace and calm of our cities."

He urged both sides to "find a solution" and remove such barriers to tourism.

## Legacy of Reza Vohdani

# Unveiling unpublished works, preservation of Iranian classical music



By Ali Najafi Maleki  
Freelance journalist

## INTERVIEW EXCLUSIVE

Reza Vohdani is a renowned name among tar (traditional Iranian instrument) players, especially within the Iranian music community that values the meticulous practice and teaching of traditional music. While Vohdani honed his skills in music theory and tar playing under the guidance of masters like Ali-Naghi Vaziri, Ali-Akbar Shahnazi, Hossein Dehlavi, and Ahmad Forutan-Rad, it is his unwavering dedication to studying, documenting, and teaching the Iranian classical music repertoire that has solidified his prominence in the field. Recently, Vohdani's family decided to make his preserved works accessible to the wider art and music community. In this regard, *The Persian-language newspaper 'Iran'* spoke with Sadjad Pourghanad, a musician, university instructor, and music researcher, who shared his opinion into the project, as detailed in the interview below.

**IRAN DAILY: Can you briefly explain how these works came into your possession?**

**POURGHANAD:** In March of last year, my old friend, Hamed Fat'hi (classical guitar player), told me that Parivash Daghi and her son Shahnam Ghasedi, who were neighbors of Vohdani, wanted to hand over his works on behalf of his daughter to those in the music community. I took up the responsibility, and along with my friends, we went to the professor's home, where we encountered a vast collection of music scores, books, and handwritten materials, which we are currently reviewing and organizing.

**Was this decision made by the family of the professor based on his will?**

As far as I know, Vohdani did not leave any specific will regarding this matter. However, based on his spirit, personality, and his lifelong dedication to preserving and promoting Iranian music, particularly the traditional repertoire, his family made this decision.

**How these works will be made accessible to the music community?**

We've set up a Telegram page, reza-vohdani@, where some of the professor's works will be shared. Also, there is an Instagram page, rezavohdani@, which will feature some photos and handwritten notes left by him. His 'Radif' (musical repertoire) book is also about to be published and will be available for sale soon.

**Which groups or individuals have agreed to collaborate with the professor's family on this project?**

So far, it's just myself, Fat'hi and Ghasedi working on this project.

**Will the preservation of these works be overseen by any specific organization or body?**

No, there is no specific organization or institution involved in this effort. A group of friends and music enthusiasts

is handling this responsibility. In the future, we may seek support from organizations such as Manzoomeh Kherad Institute to help with the publication of some works, but so far, we've only had initial discussions with the management of the institute.

**What kind of works and documents of the professor have been preserved?**

A number of works remain, particularly handwritten manuscripts by old masters, some of which are signed while others are anonymous. These need to be carefully examined and identified by experts to determine the exact origin of each piece. Also, there are numerous letters and notes from the professor, which I am currently categorizing for future publication.

**Can you describe the qualities and characteristics of the Radif that Vohdani published?**

There is much research to be done regarding the 'Radif' written by Vohdani. The notation of this Radif was done with exceptional care, reflecting his profound knowledge and attention to detail. This generation of musicians had a strong understanding of Western music notation and were meticulous in their efforts to accurately document and transmit the musical heritage. Today, alternative versions of the 'Radif' of Mirza Hossein-Qoli are available, which differ from Vohdani's version. So, it is crucial for researchers and especially tar players dedicated to this style to study and examine this version. It's also important to consider the accompanying commentary by the professor to gain a deeper understanding of his music. For example, it is important to know why Vohdani, despite having access to the 'Radif' of other masters, chose to focus solely on the 'Radif' of Mirza Hossein-Qoli and his son Ali-Akbar Shahnazi. The reasons for this choice can be discerned from his handwritten notes and critiques of other versions.

**Can you explain his vocal repertoire?**

In addition to playing the tar and setar (traditional Iranian instruments), Vohdani was also familiar with singing and had students in this field. There is a written vocal repertoire of his, though unfortunately it is not organized. We need to search through his handwritten notes to uncover all its pages. Once fully discovered, we will publish the sheet music in PDF format on his Telegram page.

**Are there any of his handwritten works that could help expand the existing Iranian music repertoire?**

Definitely! Many previously unknown works have been found at his home. Among these are handwritten versions of various Radifs that are not available to the public, but we need to fully review these to determine if they are complete and suitable for publication.

**Can you tell us about his recorded performances of the Radif?**

There is an audio file of his clear and educational performance, which was once released on a cassette alongside his book. Due to the lack of cassette players in many musicians' homes, we've decided to release the audio files on his Telegram channel. Also, there is a video of his performance, which will also be shared on his Telegram and Instagram pages.

**Looking at his works, lectures, and writings, there seems to be a dual and contrasting perspective towards Iranian music. How can this duality (modern vs. traditional) be evaluated?**

In Vohdani's view of tradition, it's important to note that he did not consider tradition to be immutable. However, he did place some limits on innovation, allowing it only for those who were deeply versed in Iranian music, or in his words, had "reached ijthad." He believed such individuals understood Iranian music in detail and could incorporate techniques

from non-Iranian music, such as Western harmony and counterpoint, without distorting the essence of Iranian music. For this reason, he composed works for large orchestras; some audio files of these are available. He studied Western music under masters like Forutan-Rad and Dehlavi.

**What are the characteristics of his composition style?**

Vohdani's compositions fall into a few distinct categories. The most important are those composed solely for the tar, influenced by his teacher Ali Naqi Vaziri. Besides these, there are two other styles: orchestral works in the style of the Golha programs and traditional forms of Iranian classical music such as Rang and Pishdaramad. The sheet music for many of these works exists in his handwritten notes, but the challenge in studying them is that many are without titles or identifiers. He used to write out works for his students, so there are compositions by earlier masters in his manuscripts that need to be identified. Additionally, numerous incomplete works are in his collection, which will need to be reviewed in due time.

**Has anything else been published from his works besides the Radif?**

Sadly, twenty-two years after Vohdani's passing, nothing beyond his 'Radif' has been published. First, his solo works need to be transcribed and published. After that, a large collection of pieces he gathered from earlier masters should be released. Along with these, some of his historical research, which he once taught as a professor of Iranian music history at the Tehran Conservatory, is also available. Once this collection is complete, I intend to publish it in the 'Harmonic Dialogue' online journal, which I edit. His letters, reviews, and important memoirs on various music-related events are also in his manuscripts and will be transcribed and published on the website.