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Iran-IAEA re-engagement hinges on technical mandate, political neutrality

By Delaram Ahmadi
Staff writer

INTERVIEW
EXCLUSIVE

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has requested access to sites in Iran that were damaged during the 12-day war in June, repeatedly underscoring the importance of monitoring these facilities due to the presence of highly enriched uranium stockpiles and other equipment. Iran, however, argues that any visit to such sites requires a special protocol, noting that it is unprecedented for facilities under IAEA safeguards to come under attack. Iranian officials have raised safety and security concerns and stressed that inspections cannot take place without a dedicated framework.

Previously, Iran and the IAEA had reached an understanding in Cairo on post-war cooperation, which Tehran later declared null and void after the three European parties to the Iran 2015 nuclear deal – Britain, France and Germany – triggered the snapback mechanism under the accord to reinstate UN sanctions on the Islamic Republic. In his latest remarks, Mohammad Eslami, head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, said that if the IAEA had designed a guideline for monitoring and inspections, Iran would review it.

In an interview with Iran Daily, international affairs expert Abed Akbari explored the technical dimensions of the issue and the expectations on both sides. According to Akbari, the future of Iran-IAEA engagement depends above all on the agency's adherence to its technical mandate and its avoidance of political considerations.

IRAN DAILY: Iran insists that a special protocol must be drafted for inspections of sites damaged during the war. What features should such a protocol have to satisfy Iran?

AKBARI: Iran's position is grounded in well-established legal principles within the non-proliferation regime. Any inspection beyond standard safeguards obligations can only be considered under a special, case-specific and time-bound protocol. Such a protocol must, first and foremost, be based on full respect for Iran's national sovereignty and national security. Second, it should prevent technical inspections from being turned into tools of pressure or mechanisms for collecting irrelevant information.

Under such a framework, the scope of inspections must be precisely defined, strictly limited to clearly specified technical objectives, and free from any expansive interpretation. The presence of inspectors should be controlled, based on an agreed list of names, and carried out under Iran's direct supervision. In addition, sampling procedures, access to documents, and the use of monitoring equipment must be designed in a way that ensures no sensitive information, particularly non-nuclear military or industrial data, is put at risk.

Another key element is the provision of clear legal guarantees by the agency regarding data confidentiality and accountability in the event of any potential misuse. Without such guarantees, expectations of cooperation beyond safeguards obligations would neither be realistic nor reliable.

Given that these sites were damaged in US and Israeli attacks, why is the agency insisting on inspecting them?

From both legal and political perspectives, the IAEA's insistence on inspecting sites that were damaged in military attacks by the United States and Israel requires careful redefinition. The agency argues that it needs to examine these locations to maintain "continuity of knowledge" regarding past nuclear materials and activities.

However, it should be noted that responsibility for any ambiguity surrounding the status of these sites lies with those parties that illegally attacked safeguarded nuclear facilities in violation of international law. It cannot be expected that a country which has been the victim of military action should also bear the political and security costs through unlimited inspections.

Iran has repeatedly stated that the physical destruction of a site does not necessarily imply the emergence of a new unresolved safeguards issue. Any review must therefore be based on credible documentation, clear technical justifications, and within the framework of defined rights and obligations, not on assumptions or political pressure.

Tehran, Moscow agree to expedite implementation of strategic INSTC

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Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council Ali Larijani (R) meets with Russian Deputy Prime Minister for Transport Vitaly Savelyev in Tehran, Iran on December 16, 2025.
● IRNA



Iranian envoy calls for 'fair process' in selecting next UN chief

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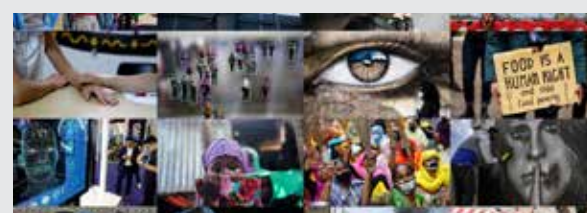
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Europe's 'hostile' acts against Iran 'stain' on diplomacy: *Russian FM*

International Desk

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov on Monday criticized Europe's "hostile and illegal acts" against Iran over the past year and a half, describing them as "deceptive" and a "stain" on European diplomacy. Despite Iran's adherence to the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the European parties – Britain, France and Germany (E3) – to the accord have tried to put the blame for the collapse of the agreement on the Islamic Republic, Lavrov said in an interview with the Iranian state broadcaster IRIB. Lavrov, who is scheduled to host his Iranian counterpart Abbas Araghchi in Moscow today, said

that the JCPOA "was thrown into the trash" by the United States after it walked out of it in 2018 and then the European trio followed in the footsteps of the US and began to accuse Iran of not complying with the deal. "It was clear that the West resorted to deceptive tactics to pressure Iran," he said. The top diplomat added that Europe's decision to restore international sanctions on Iran by instigating the so-called snapback mechanism under the JCPOA was a "stain" on European diplomacy. Back in August, the E3 triggered the mechanism that restored UN sanctions against Iran. The trio accused Iran of not honoring its obligations under the nuclear deal, though they had been unable to fulfil their own

commitments after the US unilateral withdrawal. Tehran has repeatedly said it was the US and its European allies who undermined the JCPOA by failing to honor their commitments, not Iran. Iran's nuclear program has been a source of contention with Western countries for more than two decades. While Iran insists that its nuclear activities are entirely peaceful and aimed at civilian purposes such as energy production and medical research, Western powers have long expressed concern that Tehran could be seeking the capability to develop nuclear weapons.

Sergey Lavrov
TASS



Iranian envoy calls for 'fair process' in selecting next UN chief



Amir Saeid Iravani
AFP

International Desk

Iran called for a fair process to select the next UN secretary-general, warning that candidates who remained silent on unlawful military attacks against Iran's peaceful nuclear program are unfit — in an apparent reference to the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Rafael Grossi. In a statement during a Security Council session on Monday, Iran's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Amir Saeid Iravani, articulated Iran's vision for principled and effective UN leadership, grounding his remarks in the core provisions of the UN Charter, Press TV reported. He stated that the power granted

by Article 99, allowing the Secretary-General to bring threats to international peace before the Council, has been "paralyzed by the veto of a permanent member over the past two years." This period, he said, included "the genocidal war and grave war crimes committed by the Israeli regime in Gaza, the killing of UN humanitarian personnel and UN peacekeepers, and acts of aggression against regional countries." He added that in these critical moments, the exceptional authority entrusted to the Secretary-General under Article 99 of the Charter "has not been exercised fully, in a timely manner, or with the rigor required by the circumstances." Turning to Article 100, Iravani emphasized that the next Secre-

tary-General must embody "independence and integrity." He warned that "a candidate who has deliberately failed to uphold the UN Charter—or to condemn unlawful military attacks against safeguarded, peaceful nuclear facilities ... undermines confidence in his ability to serve as a faithful guardian of the Charter and to discharge his duties independently, impartially, and without political bias or fear of powerful States, as required under the Charter." The envoy was referring to the June strikes carried out by the US and Israel against Iran's peaceful nuclear facilities, which were under the UN supervision. These illegal acts of aggression also targeted Iranian nuclear scientists. Yet the IAEA, whose director general, Rafael Grossi, has now announced his candidacy for the role of UN Secretary-General, chose not to condemn the attacks. The ambassador also highlighted Article 105 of the Charter, stating that the Secretary-General has a clear responsibility to safeguard the rights and privileges of representatives and to ensure the full and equal participation of all Member States. He said violations such as visa denials, movement restrictions, or harassment must be addressed decisively and without selectivity by the UN Secretariat, noting that such protections are legally binding on the host country.

Tehran urges 'serious' int'l action to counter Israeli threat to global peace, stability

International Desk

Iran called for serious action by regional countries and the international community to confront Israel's constant threat to peace and stability in the region and the world. Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei strongly condemned the continuation of the Israeli genocide in Gaza through the regime's incessant bombardments and the blockade of humanitarian aid entry into the war-torn territory, saying Israel's backers are complicit in the genocide. He said the international community, topped by the United Nations, is responsible for taking immediate and effective measures to stop Israel's crimes and hold the perpetrators to account. He categorically condemned Israel's blatant violations of international humanitarian law, and the regime's war crimes, and crimes against humanity, stressing the need to end its impunity. Baqaei said the US and other countries providing Israel with arms and political



AFP

support are complicit in the regime's crimes in the occupied Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria. He added that despite its ceasefire agreements with Gaza and Lebanon, Israel continues to commit savage crimes against both nations due to Washington's unbridled support and the inaction of the ceasefire guarantors. "Despite the declaration of an alleged ceasefire in Gaza and Lebanon, the Zionist regime, with the full support of the US and the indifference of the guarantors of the ceasefire in Lebanon and Gaza, continues to commit brutal crimes in occupied Palestine and Lebanon," Baqaei said. He called for serious mea-

sures to confront Israel's threats to regional and international peace and security. Despite the ceasefire, Israeli attacks have persisted, resulting in at least 390 Palestinian deaths since October 10. Large areas of Gaza remain inaccessible due to the continued presence of Israeli occupation forces. Baqaei's statement came after Israel's weekend assassination strike that killed Raed Saad, a high-ranking Hamas military commander. Senior Hamas official Osama Hamdan said that the movement reserves the right to respond to the Zionist occupation's violations of the ceasefire agreement, notably the assassination of Saad.

Iran-IAEA re-engagement ...

Would agreeing to visit these sites under a specific protocol amount to a revival of the Cairo understanding?

As to whether an agreement to visit these sites could be construed as reviving the Cairo understanding, this must be addressed with legal precision. The Cairo understanding was the product of specific temporal and political circumstances, and Iran has consistently stressed that no understanding can be revived automatically or implicitly. If discussions today concern limited visits to certain sites, this can only be defined as a new, independent and clearly specified executive arrangement, not as a return to past agreements. The line between voluntary cooperation and the acceptance of obligations beyond established legal

frameworks must remain clear and not open to interpretation. Iran will not allow ad hoc technical cooperation to be turned into a precedent for permanent demands or the creation of a new practice that undermines the country's established rights.

What impact will this issue have on the future of Iran's cooperation with the agency, as well as on nuclear negotiations or Iran's relations with other countries?

There is no doubt that the way this issue is managed will have a direct impact on the future of Iran-IAEA cooperation and on the broader atmosphere surrounding nuclear negotiations. If the agency adopts a technical, impartial approach, refrains from political pressure, and recognizes Iran's legitimate rights and concerns, the con-

tinuation, and even strengthening, of cooperation is possible. Such a path could help dial down tensions, wrap up outstanding allegations, and foster a more rational environment in international interactions. Conversely, if inspections are turned into instruments of political pressure or a means to recycle settled accusations, it is only natural that this will negatively affect the level of cooperation, mutual trust and the negotiation process. Iran has consistently shown that it is willing to engage and cooperate, but this cooperation is neither unlimited, nor one-sided, nor outside the framework of international law. In sum, the future of Iran-IAEA engagement depends above all on the agency's commitment to its technical mission and its avoidance of political considerations, a course which, if chosen wisely, will serve the interests of all parties.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist

CARTOON



Tehran, Moscow agree to expedite implementation of strategic INSTC

Economy Desk

Secretary of Iran’s Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Ali Larijani and Russia’s Deputy Prime Minister Vitaly Savelyev underlined the need on Tuesday to accelerate the implementation of North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) as they described the project as a key strategic undertaking for both countries. The two senior officials met in Tehran as part of follow-up to high-level agreements reached between the presidents of their countries, with the talks focusing on removing existing barriers and moving the INSTC into its practical implementation stage. During the talks, both sides hailed the strategic project as a key geopolitical component shaping regional connectivity. Larijani said the Islamic Republic has taken a clear and final de-

cision to operationalize the corridor, adding that all executive and institutional impediments would be addressed within a short timeframe. The SNSC chief underlined that the required agreements would be finalized to provide a solid legal and operational framework for the project. “Following directives by President Masoud Pezeshkian, ownership of all lands located along the corridor’s route will be transferred to the Iranian administration within the next few months to ensure the project proceeds without disruption,” Larijani said. Savelyev, for his part, welcomed Iran’s determined stance and announced Russia’s readiness to speed up the project and commence practical operations. Both sides emphasized that the INSTC forms part of a shared Iran-Russia strategy to deepen sustainable cooperation and



establish independent regional connectivity routes. They also agreed to activate mechanisms for continuous high-level follow-ups and to

maintain regular coordination among relevant institutions in both countries. In a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin on the

sidelines of the International Conference on Peace and Trust in Turkmenistan’s capital of Ashgabat on Friday, Pezeshkian expressed Iran’s full readiness

Iran’s Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, Ali Larijani (R), meets with Russian Deputy Prime Minister Vitaly Savelyev in Tehran, Iran, on December 16, 2025. ● IRNA

for implementing the project by the end of the year. “Joint cooperation, particularly in the fields of power generation, transportation, and transit corridors, is currently being pursued. Regarding the [North-South] corridor, Iran will fully prepare the grounds for the project’s implementation by the end of the year,” he added. Stretching over seven thousand kilometers, the INSTC is an emerging cargo transit route connecting Indian Ocean countries to Central Asia, Russia, and Europe, which is becoming increasingly popular due to its economic and geopolitical benefits.

ISPA: Steel industry fetches over \$5.3b as exports surge

Economy Desk

The Iranian Steel Producers Association (ISPA) reported on Tuesday that the value of exports for products in the country’s iron and steel chain surpassed \$5.3 billion in the first eight months of the current Iranian calendar year (started March 21, 2025), and registered a 27-percent growth. According to the association, more than \$5.3 billion worth of iron and steel products was exported from the country between March 21 and November 22, 2025. The report said the total export volume of the entire steel chain increased by

41 percent and the total volume of export of iron ore concentrate indicated a 77 percent rise in the same period. The value of exports of all types of steel sheets almost tripled, reaching approximately \$500 million. Iran possesses abundant raw materials, ranking among the world’s top 10 for both iron ore reserves and steel production capacity. Iran dominates West Asian steel output at 61.1% of the region’s 5.4 million tons in October 2025, fueled by direct reduced iron-electric arc furnace processes that comprise 90% of capacity. First-half 2025 (Iranian year) hit nearly 15 million tons, up

3.2%, despite energy challenges like power cuts, with rebar and iron ore concentrate showing strong growth. Annual output exceeded 30 million tons in 2024, targeting 55 million by 2030 via efficient tech. In 2025’s World Steel in Figures, Iran placed 10th with 31.4 million tons projected, reflecting resilience under sanctions through export focus and regional primacy. Projections estimate 3.6 million tons monthly by 2026, solidifying Iran’s Middle East leadership, with finished products, including slabs, hot-rolled coils, and rebars, being major exports to markets in the West Asia, Asia, and Africa.



Iranian wagons authorized to operate in three Central Asian countries: Official

Economy Desk

Director General for International Affairs at the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development Amin Taraffo emphasized on Tuesday the country’s efforts to maintain its pivotal role in regional transit, announcing the complete lifting of restrictions on the movement of Iranian wagons in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. “Permission was obtained for Iranian wagons to operate in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan,” he said, whereas before, Iranian wagons were not allowed to travel in Com-

monwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries. Pointing to the challenges and restrictive conditions inside and outside the country that put transit through Iran under pressure, Taraffo described the ministry’s strategy as “mobility” with the aim of providing cheap, smooth, and high-speed access to transportation. The official added that infrastructure development, despite limited resources, has been prioritized, especially key projects that ensure Iran’s rail connection to its neighbors and trans-regional markets. Taraffo underlined that the

restriction removal was achieved under the “anti-isolationist policies” of the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development, which aims to maintain the global transportation chain’s reliance on Iran’s route. Highlighting Iran’s role as one of the safest and most economical transit routes in the region, Taraffo said, “Even if alternative routes are created in the region, including connecting Azerbaijan to Nakhchivan via other paths, Iran’s route will still remain the best option due to its economic, security, and infrastructural advantages.”

Zimbabwe calls for strategic economic partnership with Iran

Economy Desk

Bright Kupemba, the Zimbabwean ambassador to Iran, underscored on Tuesday the long-standing and robust relations between the two countries, calling for the expansion of bilateral ties into a sustainable and strategic economic partnership. “The relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Zimbabwe have deep historical roots that date back to Zimbabwe’s independence era. These relations have always been stable and built on mutual trust,” Kupemba said in a meeting with business people in the northwestern Iranian city of Zanzan. Stressing that the connection between the two countries should extend beyond economic interactions, the Zimbabwean ambassador said, “There is a strong and strategic political bond between the leaders of Iran and Zimbabwe. Both countries believe that these political relations should effectively transform into extensive and robust economic ties.” Pointing to formal cooperation mechanisms between Harare and Tehran, Kupemba said, “The Joint Commission for Co-



operation between Iran and Zimbabwe is one of the most important platforms for developing bilateral relations.” Referring to the sanctions imposed on both countries, he said, “A large part of the trade between Iran and Zimbabwe is conducted through third countries. The import of tobacco, gold, and precious stones from Zimbabwe to Iran, and the export of bitumen, tractors, machinery, industrial fuels, plastics, carpets, and agricultural products from Iran to Zimbabwe are among the main axes of trade between the two coun-

Bright Kupemba (C), the Zimbabwean ambassador to Iran, addresses a meeting with business people in the northwestern city of Zanzan on December 16, 2025. ● IRNA

tries.” The ambassador described Iran’s pharmaceutical industry as one of the key areas of co-operation, adding, “Zimbabwe warmly welcomes investment from Iranian companies in the fields of drug production, medical equipment, and technology transfer.”

International Human Rights Day Symposium at University of Tehran

Redrawing Iran's relationship with int'l organizations on human rights



THE GUARDIAN

By Rasoul Safarahang and Amir Mollaee Mozaffari
Researchers in political affairs

SYMPOSIUM EXCLUSIVE

On the threshold of the 77th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a scholarly symposium was convened at the University of Tehran through the efforts of the Center for Graduate International Studies of the University of Tehran and the Mahdad Legal Group. The event, which had been intended merely as a formal commemorative occasion, turned into the arena of a serious and rarefied intellectual debate; a forum in which Iranian jurists, diplomats, and academics, in an unprecedented manner, subjected two fronts to simultaneous critique: domestic governing mechanisms and ostensibly universal international structures. What distinguished this gathering from analogous prior instances was the frankness of expression in articulating fissures, the presentation of analyses devoid of naïve optimism, and the endeavor to delineate solutions that emerged not from a posture of negation, but from within the legal framework and with an intention of reform.



Mohammad Hassan Ziaei-Far (L), secretary general of the Islamic Human Rights Commission, addresses the audience at the International Human Rights Day Symposium at University of Tehran on December 10, 2025, as other esteemed panelists listen.

IRAN DAILY

A warning concerning 'state crime'



Abbas Shiri

The inauguration of the symposium, with an address by Dr. Abbas Shiri, dean of the Faculty of Law and Political Sciences of the University of Tehran, was so audacious and unvarnished that it perturbed the atmosphere of the hall from the very outset. He, by bypassing clichéd preliminaries, addressed directly

one of the most sensitive nodes of tension in Iran's human rights discourse: the potential contradiction between the progressive principles of the country's Constitution and restrictive executive practices. Shiri, with academic yet clear words, spoke of a phenomenon that he calls "state crime". This weighty designation refers to a condition in which the state or governmental organizations, not through explicit violation of law, but through the conduit of "expansive and indetermi-

nate interpretations" of existing statutes, infringe upon the fundamental rights of citizens. The concrete exemplar upon which he concentrated was the process of determining the qualification of electoral candidates. He cautioned that if the criteria for approval of qualifications, which under the Constitution are entrusted to organizations such as the Guardian Council, are implemented in a "broad, indeterminate, and non-transparent" manner, they can, in practice, "preclude

the participation of significant segments of citizens in the cycle of political power". In other words, a right that is explicitly emphasized in Chapter Three of the Constitution can, at the stage of implementation and interpretation, be neutralized and rendered inefficacious. Shiri characterized this condition as a violation of the "universal right of participation" and as an issue connected to the "independence, territorial integrity, and fundamental freedoms of the nation."

Proposing a pragmatic solution



Hossein Mehrpour

In the continuation of the trajectory of intra-structural critique, Dr. Hossein Mehrpour, head of the Supervisory Board for the Implementation of Iran's Constitution, endeavored, instead of merely accentuating the problem, to present a concrete, dialogue-based solution. He, through historical

excavation, returned to the early days following Iran's Islamic Revolution, when the question of the relationship between the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" and "Islamic teachings" was central. Mehrpour recounted a dialogue with Professor Antonio Cassese, the eminent international jurist, which could constitute the key to his proposed approach. Cassese had suggested to him that, instead of a generalized confrontation with the human rights discourse, joint sessions should be convened with Islamic and

legal experts, and a precise, "article-by-article" examination of Iran's international commitments, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, should be undertaken. The objective of this examination would be the transparent and limited identification of cases of definitive incompatibility with Islamic standards or Iran's Constitution. Subsequently, the country could, in a specific and transparent manner, announce to the global community that, in these "particular cases," due to conflict, it is un-

able to implement that article unconditionally and may enter a "reservation". However, in other instances where no incompatibility exists, it would commit to full implementation. In Mehrpour's view, these concepts are "profoundly consonant with our religious and ethical teachings as well." His proposal was, in essence, an invitation to move from a defensive-ideological strategy toward a strategy of "critical yet rule-governed engagement" that emphasizes legal transparency and precision.

Bitter outlook of a complex dossier

If Shiri and Mehrpour concentrated predominantly upon the domestic sphere and legal solutions, Dr. Mohammad Hassan Ziaei-Far, secretary general of the Islamic Human Rights Commission, with a realistic gaze derived from years of practical experience in the international arena, delineated a gray portrait of Iran's position devoid of romanticism. His analysis commenced with a remembrance of the victims of human rights violations in Gaza, Yemen, Sudan, Ukraine, and even "within our own country," and emphasized the principle that every day must be Human Rights Day. He assessed Iran's interaction with the international human rights system, which is composed of diverse norms and mechanisms, as not particularly sat-

isfactory. Ziaei-Far referred to Iran's complex dossier, which, since the inception of the Islamic Revolution, has been accompanied by special rapporteurs, resolutions, and supervisory mechanisms. Nevertheless, he stressed that the country's official current, in contrast to domestic headline currents, maintains a "serious and expanding" engagement with this system, manifested in responding to reports, participation in standard-setting processes, and activism on issues such as Palestinian rights. Yet his final summation was bitter: "Our situation at the global level is not particularly desirable, and we have not succeeded in defining an appropriate position for ourselves within this system." The outlook ahead, from Ziaei-Far's perspective, will

continue along the same trajectory so long as one of the following four key variables does not undergo fundamental change:

- 1. Domestic politics and the quality of governance:** a change here will directly and immediately be reflected in the country's international image. Improvement in effective domestic governance is the most efficacious means for altering the external narrative.
- 2. The mode of relations with influential states within the power-centered international structure:** this variable is connected to macro-diplomacy and relations with great powers.
- 3. Intelligent acts within multilateral mechanisms:** the manner of engagement and utilization of opportunities in organizations such



Mohammad Hassan Ziaei-Far

as the Human Rights Council belong to this category.

- 4. The general international environment:** the world, under current conditions and due to various events, such as the wars in Ukraine and Gaza, focuses less on Iran's dossier. This four-dimensional analysis did not attribute the crisis solely to external ill intent or diplomatic weakness but perceived it as the consequence of the entanglement of internal and external factors, and deemed improvement contingent upon simultaneous transformation in these domains.

Three rights victims must attain

Dr. Mohammad-Hadi Zakerhossein, assistant professor of Criminal Law at the Faculty of Law and Political Sciences of the University of Tehran, with awareness of temporal constraints at the symposium, directed the discussion to the operational core of human rights: the realm of criminal justice. He emphasized that human rights do not acquire meaning solely in docu-

ments and resolutions, but are realized in courts, in investigative processes, and in the reparation of victims. From his perspective, states possess three levels of obligation: the obligation to respect (or, abstention from violation); the obligation to protect (or, prevention of violation by others); and the obligation to implement (or, affirmative measures). Criminal justice is the key instrument for effectuating the obliga-

tion to "protect". Zakerhossein also cautioned that criminal justice itself must not be transformed into an instrument for violating human rights. A law enacted in the name of combating crime is legitimate only when it is compatible with human rights standards. His remarks clearly demonstrated that defending human rights in the international arena, without the establish-



Mohammad-Hadi Zakerhossein

ment of a transparent, accountable, and equitable judicial system domestically, lacks the requisite moral and practical credibility.

Diagnosing a pandemic malady



Nasrin Mosaffa

Many speakers, independent of domestic critiques, adopted a critical gaze toward the structures and performance of the international human rights system. Dr. Nasrin Mosaffa, professor of International Relations at the Faculty of Law and

Political Science of the University of Tehran, with a tone imbued with sorrow and concern, declared that the global human rights movement, despite its undeniable achievements in norm articulation and institution creation, "is not in a salutary condition". From her viewpoint, initial optimism regarding human rights compliance has diminished, restrictions have become accepted more and more, and trust in international supervisory organizations is declining.

Mosaffa regarded recent catastrophes, especially the Gaza tragedy, as exemplars of "manifest assault upon human dignity at the collective level," which pose fundamental questions concerning the efficacy of international organizations. She warned that human rights are in danger of becoming a "metaphor for expressing dissatisfaction" with an unjust order and an instrument for "selective political legitimization". In other words, when human rights are ap-

propriated by powers, they become not the language of justice, but the language of power. Mosaffa's proposed solution was not the drafting of new charters, but the "internalization of human rights values" at individual, social, and governmental levels. She believed that no resolution or report, in and of itself, is capable of realizing human rights, and that only through internalization of these values can the path toward rebuilding trust in these standards be smoothed.

UPR between ideal of universality, reality of ‘reciprocal fault-finding’



Hossein Sharifi Tarazkouhi

Among various international mechanisms, Dr. Hossein Sharifi

Tarazkouhi, university professor and human rights researcher, selected the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) mechanism of the Human Rights Council as a case study for examining existing tensions. He first emphasized the unparalleled authority of the Universal Declaration of Human

Rights, even for states that have not acceded to the principal covenants, and demonstrated how its principles function as a stable framework underlying the development of more specific rules, such as regulations concerning artificial intelligence. He then analyzed the

UPR and enumerated its strengths and weaknesses. The principal strength of the UPR, from his perspective, is the “relative reduction of political selectivity” and the inclusion of all 193 United Nations member states. This procedure, in theory, could prevent the monopolization of criti-

cism against particular countries. However, Tarazkouhi, with realism, warned that this arena is not entirely devoid of political games. The UPR can be transformed into a stage for “diplomatic action and reaction” and even “reciprocal fault-finding” among states. He cited Iran’s Ministry of For-

eign Affairs report on human rights violations in the United States as an example of such action within the UPR framework. This analysis demonstrated that even when an international mechanism enjoys a relatively more equitable design, its implementation, within the context of inter-state power relations, can divert it from its original objectives.

Power and human rights

A persistent tension in int’l system



By Roxana Niknami
Assistant professor of regional studies at UT

OPINION
EXCLUSIVE

The relationship between power and human rights in the international system is the story of a tension that has persisted from the very inception of the global order (dating back to World War II) to the present. In 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was drafted with an elevated ideal: the creation of an order in which the inherent dignity of the human being would be respected beyond borders and political powers. Yet reality has demonstrated that human rights have always been shaped and implemented in the shadow of power.

At the structural level, the international system is founded upon the principle of state sovereignty. This principle, itself a product of the Peace of Westphalia, grants states exclusive authority over their territories and populations. This is precisely the point at which tension begins: how can the human rights of a country’s citizens be defended when the very state that is obligated to protect those rights is itself their violator?

In practice, power affects human rights in three forms. First, hard military and economic power, which determines which human rights violations elicit an international response and which are ignored. The genocides in Rwanda and Bosnia, when comparing the differing reactions of the international community to other genocides, constitute salient examples of this selectivity. Second, soft cultural power, which shapes the universal definition of human rights. The debate between universalism and cultural relativism is, in reality, a debate about who possesses the power to define these rights. Third, institutional power, which is embodied in the structure of the United Nations Security Council and the veto right of the five great powers. Nevertheless, this narrative constitutes only half of reality. Human rights are themselves a form of power; normative power that can alter state behavior, mobilize social movements, and define political legitimacy. The growth of international courts, supervisory mechanisms, and the activities of non-governmental organizations all indicate the institutionalization of this normative power.

The principal challenge of today’s international system is the creation of equilibrium between these two types of power. On the one hand, political power realities cannot be ignored; on the other hand, human rights must not be permitted to become merely an instrument in the hands of great powers for advancing their own interests. The solution lies in strengthening multilateral organizations, increasing the participation of global civil society, and most importantly, creating genuine state commitment to the universal principles of human rights. Ultimately, the relationship between power and human rights is not a binary, zero-sum relationship, but a dynamic dialectic that shapes the future of the international system.

Paradigmatic crisis, future challenges

If the first part of the University of Tehran symposium was oriented toward critiquing the status quo and presenting corrective solutions within the system, the second part entered a broader, future-oriented, and at times radical domain. In this section, the current crisis was interpreted not as a temporary disruption, but as an indication of a perilous paradigm shift in the logic governing international relations. Simultaneously, the greatest future challenge, artificial intelligence, occupied the focal point of attention, and ultimately, through a multidimensional and transdisciplinary gaze, the possibility of rethinking the conceptual foundations of the human rights system was explored.



Roxana Niknami (R), assistant professor of regional studies and the panel moderator, addresses the audience at the International Human Rights Day Symposium at University of Tehran on December 10, 2025, as esteemed panelists listen.
● IRAN DAILY

Descent from ‘law-centered’ ideal to ‘power-centered’ reality



Saeed Khatibzadeh

The address by Dr. Saeed Khatibzadeh, deputy minister for Research at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and president of

the Institute for Political and International Studies of the Ministry, constituted one of the most pivotal macro-analyses presented at this symposium. He commenced his remarks with a striking sentence: “We are living history.” In his belief, we are witnessing fundamental and rapid transformations in the international arena that previously were encountered only in history

books: shifts in the geography of power, centers of knowledge, and definitions of power. The core of Khatibzadeh’s analysis, however, was the delineation of a regressive trajectory for the international order. He summarized this trajectory in three stages: 1. **Law-based Order:** this elevated ideal emerged after two world wars and was embodied

in the United Nations Charter. In this order, war was the exception and peace the rule, and law constituted the framework constraining power. 2. **Rule-based Order Defined by Powers:** after the collapse of the strategic rival, the Soviet Union, the hegemonic power gradually distanced itself from the discourse of “law” and moved toward “rules” that it defined

and imposed. These rules were not necessarily identical with universal international law. 3. **Peace through Force:** the current condition in which even those fabricated rules are abandoned. The concrete manifestation of this condition, from Khatibzadeh’s perspective, is the “systematic, naked, and brazen violation of international law.” To substantiate this claim, he referred to the following instances: the massacre of tens of thou-

sands of civilians in Gaza without a deterrent international response (absolute impunity); the symbolic shredding of the United Nations Charter in the General Assembly by an Israeli diplomat; attacks on safeguarded nuclear facilities; and the assassination of commanders outside the battlefield. The alarming point, in his view, was that in the past, violators attempted to justify their actions, whereas today even this “shame and fear” has dissipated.

Twelve windows for comprehending a living system

In contrast to Khatibzadeh’s historical-political analysis, Dr. Mohammad Reza Ziaei Bigdeli, retired professor of International Law at Shahid Beheshti University, with a holistic, philosophical, and transdisciplinary gaze, sought to examine the “international human rights system” itself as a complex phenomenon. He emphasized that for comprehending this system, the mere study of legal

rules is insufficient, and that it must be viewed from multiple perspectives: history, philosophy (with emphasis on humanism), culture, religion, sociology, politics, diplomacy, and economics. He then presented his analytical framework in the form of 12 questions or axes that, like 12 windows, illuminated various dimensions of this system: 1. Philosophical foundations and the influ-

ence of humanist philosophers. 2. Elevated values embodied therein, such as justice, inherent dignity, and peace. 3. The hierarchy of rights (or, the distinction of non-derogable fundamental rights, such as the right to life). 4. Positive rights versus negative rights, such as the right to life versus the prohibition of torture. 5. Generations of human rights, from the recognized first and

second generations to the fourth generation (technology-related rights) and the fifth generation (intergenerational rights). 6. The interconnectedness of rights and their relationship with international humanitarian and criminal law. 7. Novel instances, such as the right to truth, the right to be forgotten, and the right to digital privacy. 8. The distinction between “human rights” (right-centered) and “inter-

national human rights law” (rule-centered). 9. The nature of obligations (peremptory, universal, customary) and the phenomenon of “normative inflation”. 10. The enjoyment of human rights by legal persons (transnational corporations and NGOs). 11. The manifestation of human rights in all branches of international law (or, the humanization of the discipline). 12. Future challenges, from politicization and weak enforcement to the neglect of non-Western traditions.



Mohammad Reza Ziaei Bigdeli

This multidimensional perspective would transform human rights from a rigid collection of regulations into a living, dynamic phenomenon rooted in human lived experience, continuously evolving and confronting new challenges.

Double-edged blade of AI



Ghasem Zamani

Dr. Ghasem Zamani, professor of International Law at the Faculty of Law and Political Science of Allameh Tabataba’i University, devoted his address to one of the greatest challenges confronting human rights in the 21st century: artificial intelligence (AI). He un-

equivocally described this phenomenon as a “double-edged blade” and elaborated upon both of its facets. 1. **The opportunity-generating facet:** enhancement of work capacity and global communications, empowerment of marginalized individuals and groups, increased effectiveness and reduced cost of public services (education and health), and the realization of “intelligent justice” through the reduction of bureaucratic processes. 2. **The threat-generating facet:** this portion of Zamani’s remarks

was more admonitory: • **Unprecedented violation of privacy:** the collection and processing of personal data on a scale previously impossible. • **Reinforcement and institutionalization of discrimination:** unconscious, or conscious, algorithms can reproduce and intensify existing biases. • **Destruction of employment and intensification of inequality:** automatization of occupations on a massive scale. • **Threats to cybersecurity and democracy:** through deepfake

technologies that can compromise the authenticity of information and electoral processes. • **A profound digital divide:** Zamani emphasized, with statistics, that 80% of investment in artificial intelligence is monopolized by three countries, the United States, China, and the United Kingdom, while approximately one-third of the world’s population lacks access to the internet. This inequality transforms artificial intelligence into an instrument for intensifying the North-South divide.

Containing normative inflation, returning to a single minimal treaty

The most audacious and radical proposal for exiting the structural human rights crisis was presented by Dr. Amir Saed Vakil, assistant professor of International Law at the Faculty of Law and Political Science of the University of Tehran. His analysis commenced with an explicit warning: “What you are about to hear may be unsettling for some unconditional devotees of the prevailing human rights discourse.” He described the crisis in terms of “two

parallel worlds”: • **The digital world:** an arena with compounded threats to privacy, individual autonomy, and security. • **The real world:** in which human rights have become a “globalizing project,” yet in practice, we witness increasing catastrophes. The transitional period from a unipolar to a multipolar order is also accompanied by instability. The principal causes of inefficacy, from Vakil’s perspective, were two phenomena: • Normative infla-

tion, or the accumulation of hundreds of documents, treaties, resolutions, and new rights, sometimes designed for states with strong organizations. • The deep chasm between “law in the books” and “law in action”. Under such conditions, many active yet low-impact supervisory organizations are likened to “zombies” that function ostensibly but exert minimal real influence. Vakil’s radical solution was this: cessation of recognizing endless new rights



Amir Saed Vakil

and movement toward “a single international treaty”. This treaty must be coherent, codified, binding, and simultaneously limited to the “essential and fundamental obligations enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.”

Yazdani, Azarpira rivalry set to heat up Iran's Wrestling Worlds trials

Sports Desk

Iranian wrestling fans may well be treated to a compelling domestic rivalry featuring Hassan Yazdani and Amirali Azarpira once the selection process for next year's World Championships gets underway in the coming months.

Freestyle sensation Yazdani – a winner of a national-record 10 world and Olympic medals – made a statement return to action during the final day of the Iranian Wrestling Premier League on Friday, having been sidelined for 489 days after undergoing surgery on his injured shoulder, which cost him the 86kg final at last year's Paris Olympics.

Moving up to the 97kg class in a bid to win an elusive second Olympic gold at Los Angeles 2028, Yazdani began the day with a superiority win (10-0) over former U20 world champion Abolfazl Babloo during his team's 7-3 semifinal victory over Khaybar in the morning session. Yazdani then defeated 2021 world bronze medalist Mojtaba Goleij 4-0 in the penultimate bout of the final, though his Esteghlal Juybar team ultimately fell short against Bank Shahr.

"Yazdani delivered a new version of himself," former Olympic bronze medalist Morad Mohammadi said of his compatriot, adding: "He has been an exception in Iranian wrestling and is



Freestyle wrestler Hassan Yazdani is pictured ahead of his victory over Abolfazl Babloo in the Iranian Premier League semifinal in Tehran, Iran, on December 12, 2025.

● IAWFIR

capable of adapting to different circumstances.

"His performance truly surprised all wrestling experts. Honestly speaking, I thought he would struggle in a new weight class after being out of action for such a long time, but he proved to be the same old Hassan Yazdani we all knew."

At 30, Yazdani appeared to be back to his familiar ruthless form, but before thinking of chasing his fourth world title in a star-studded 97kg event – likely to feature Russian great Abdulrashid Sadulaev, reigning American world champion Kyle Snyder, and Olympic gold medalist Akhmed Tazhudinov – in



Iran's Amirali Azarpira is seen during his silver-winning campaign at the Wrestling World Championships in Zagreb, Croatia, on September 15, 2025.

● IAWFIR

Manama next October, the Iranian will have to see off a domestic threat posed by 23-year-old Azarpira.

It has been less than two years since the young Iranian made his senior international breakthrough at the 2024 Ranking Series event in Zagreb, where he defeated Snyder in the final. The two-time U23 world cham-

pion marked his Olympic debut with a precious bronze medal in Paris, thanks to another victory over Snyder in the third-place bout, and then built on that success by winning a silver medal at September's World Championships in Zagreb.

The pinnacle of Azarpira's campaign in the Croatian capital came in the semifinals, where he

defeated Tazhudinov 5-2, making up for his first-round setback against the Bahraini wrestler in Paris.

Azarpira was unlucky to miss out on the top podium after suffering a 4-2 defeat to Snyder, but captured his maiden senior gold in Riyadh a month later, defeating Kazakhstan's Rizabek Aitmukhan – a world champion at 92kg in 2023 – 5-0 in the final at the Islamic Solidarity Games. With both Yazdani and Azarpira fancying their chances of winning the ultimate prize in Manama, a thrilling rivalry appears to be on the cards between the two top-tier wrestlers.

"Azarpira has shown excellent progress in recent years, winning world and Olympic medals. A potential matchup between Yazdani and Azarpira would definitely be a thrilling one. I believe the winner of that battle would be the top contender for gold at the World Championships," said Mohammadi, who tipped Yazdani to build on "his vast experience" to prevail over his younger compatriot.

The two have been exempted from participating in next week's National Championships – which will serve as the opening phase of Iran's World Championships trials – meaning fans will have to wait until the start of the international season to see the two world-class wrestlers go head-to-head.

Persian Gulf Pro League: Sepahan extends winning streak to go top

Sports Desk

Sepahan claimed a massive 1-0 away victory over Foolad Khuzestan in Ahvaz on Monday to move back to the top of the Persian Gulf Pro League table.

In-form striker Mohammad Asgari gave Sepahan an early lead at the Foolad Arena, tapping home center-back Ali Nemati's misjudged headed clearance into the bottom corner nine minutes into the game. The visitors had a glorious chance to double their lead from the penalty spot on the half-hour mark, only to see veteran skipper Ehsan Hajsafi send his effort well over the crossbar.

Asgari's strike nevertheless proved enough for Sepahan to extend its winning streak in the Iranian top flight to seven games. The result helped Moharram Navidkia's side – having managed just one victory in their first six matches of the campaign – move atop of the table with 27 points, two clear of Persepolis, which has played a game more and defeated Iraco 1-0 at home on Saturday. A fifth defeat in 14 matches left Foolad languishing in 13th place with 13 points, just two above the relegation zone, compounding the pressure on under-fire head coach Yahya Golmohammadi, who saw sections of the home crowd chant against him after the final whistle.

Elsewhere, Esteghlal missed the opportunity to move into third place after being held to a 1-1 draw by Khaybar in Khorramabad.



Sepahan players celebrate their winner in the 1-0 victory over Foolad Khuzestan in the Persian Gulf Pro League in Ahvaz, Iran, on December 15, 2025.

● SEPAHAN SC

Albanian winger Jasir Asani gave the visiting Blues a flying start, scoring his sixth goal of the campaign from the penalty spot in the eighth minute, before Mehrdad Qanbari sent Spanish goalkeeper Antonio Adán the wrong way from the spot to level the scores in the 27th minute.

Khaybar thought it had found a second goal in first-half stoppage time, but it was ruled out by VAR, which deemed Aref Qezel to have fouled an Esteghlal defender before heading home from close range.

Esteghlal sits fourth in the table with 22 points, trailing third-placed Chadormalu by two points with a game in hand. Chadormalu, the surprise package of the season, continued its impressive run with a 3-1 home

victory over struggling Esteghlal Khuzestan.

Ecuadorian summer signing Cristian Martinez was on target twice to give the host a two-goal lead by the 27th minute. Hamid Bouhamdan gave the Southern Blues a late lifeline by converting a penalty in the 83rd minute, but Chadormalu restored its two-goal cushion two minutes later when Reza Mahmoudabadi's deflected effort from the edge of the box found the back of the net.

Esteghlal Khuzestan remained third from bottom in the table, level on points with city rival Foolad.

The biggest upset of the day came at Sirous Qayeqran Stadium in Bandar Anzali, where Maziar Zare's Malavan suffered a 4-0 home defeat against new-

ly promoted Fajr Sepasi.

Sasan Jafarikia, Yadegar Rostami (penalty), and Farshid Esmaeili scored within a 14-minute spell to give Pirouz Qorbani's Fajr a shock three-goal lead by halftime, before Meisam Moradi capped a well-worked counter-attack in the 68th minute to put the result beyond doubt. The victory lifted Fajr to eighth place with 18 points, leapfrogging Malavan on goal difference, although Zare's side has a game in hand.

In Sirjan, Siavash Yazdani and Aliasghar Ashouri scored two late first-half goals as Golgozar secured a 2-0 home win over Mes Rafsanjan.

Golgozar sits seventh with 20 points, while Mes remained bottom of the table with eight points.

Iran Women set to take part in friendly futsal tourney in Brazil

Sports Desk

Iran's women's national futsal team has been invited to take part in a four-team tournament in Brazil next April, also featuring the host, Morocco, and Canada, announced Elmira Saminipour, the team director.

The exact schedule and fixtures for the event are yet to be confirmed by the host country, Saminipour added.

All four teams competed in the recently concluded Futsal Women's World Cup in the Philippines. The two-time Asian champion Iran suffered defeats against Brazil (4-1) and Italy (3-1) either side of a 6-2 victory over Panama, finishing third in Group D in November and missing out on a quarterfinal place.

Brazil went on to lift the trophy at the inaugural event, beating Portugal 3-0 in the final.

Morocco, which won the Africa Cup of Nations title on home soil last April, finished runner-up to Argentina in Group A with six

points before suffering a 6-1 defeat against Spain in the quarterfinals. Canada, meanwhile, finished bottom of Group B after losses to Colombia (2-0), Thailand (6-3), and Spain (7-0).

"Lavoisier Freire, the director of Brazil's national futsal teams, was impressed by Iran's style of play, the players' determination, and the team's management on such a big stage when the two sides met at the World Cup," Saminipour said. "That convinced him to extend a direct invitation to the Iranian women's team right after the match."

She added: "Participation in this tournament could play a significant role in the future plans of our national team. Our goal is not merely to compete, but to use every international opportunity for growth, gaining experience, and better preparing the squad. We hope that through proper planning, we can make an effective impact in these competitions and once again serve as worthy representatives of Iranian futsal."



● FFIRI

Walk through history, nature in Maryan village of Gilan Province



● [kojaro.com](#)

Iranica Desk

Humans have always sought natural areas with clean air and freedom from noise to find rest, especially given the pressures of living in crowded and polluted urban environments. They long for traditional spaces that divert the mind from concrete and towering buildings, instead presenting forests and meadows that captivate every visitor's sight. Finding such places with these qualities in Iran is far from an impossible dream. This vast country, boasting a four-season natural climate, simply requires a bit of determination to fulfill your desire for tranquility. Among these destinations, which many city dwellers yearn for, is Maryan village, IRNA wrote. The name Maryan literally means a place built beside the road. This village is located near Talesh and lies approximately 143 ki-

lometers from Rasht, the provincial capital of Gilan Province. Situated at an elevation of 1,080 meters above sea level, Maryan is embraced by picturesque landscapes of pastures, forests, and mountains. Within this dreamlike village, the harmonious blend of quince, apple, and pear trees combined with the soothing melodies of the shepherd's reed flute and the gentle ringing of sheep's bells briefly transports visitors to a land of dreams, reminiscent of scenes seen only in films. Maryan village is considered one of the attractive tourist spots, featuring a mild climate in summer and cold weather in winter. The local economy primarily revolves around gardening, farming, handicrafts, and animal husbandry. Key agricultural products from this area include wheat, potatoes, alfalfa, beans, tobacco, apricots, apples, quinces, and pears.



● [kojaro.com](#)

The villagers traditionally wear Taleshi attire and communicate using the Taleshi and Azari languages. The local cuisine offers a variety of traditional dishes, such as stews like Shorba and Qormeh, as well as diverse soups including sour Ash and Ash Reshteh. Beyond its mountainous heights, enchanting

forests, and the flowing Gorgan Rud river, Maryan village also boasts ancient historical sites. One of these is Maryan Cemetery, whose existence attests to the area's long-standing history and the presence of various Taleshi ethnic communities spanning centuries. Research indicates that this cemetery is among

the largest prehistoric burial grounds in Iran. Constructed in the style of pre-Islamic ancestors, excavations here have uncovered bodies accompanied by essential burial items. Maryan Bathhouse stands as another significant attraction. Registered as one of Iran's national monuments, it dates back to the

Qajar era. Designed by a German architect under the command of Sardar Amjad, the bathhouse was constructed using materials such as bricks, plaster, and stone. Additionally, the Sardar Amjad Palace offers historical insight. This summer palace comprises two separate buildings; while one structure has deteriorated over time, the other has been carefully restored and renovated. Once regarded as a center of power, the palace was commissioned as the summer residence of Sardar Amjad during the reign of Naser al-Din Shah Qajar. For travelers aiming to extend their visit, exploring the natural sites surrounding Maryan village is highly recommended. Highlights include: **Seragah Lake:** This idyllic lake reflects the beauty of the surrounding trees on its surface. It is encircled by numerous orchards bearing delicious fruits alongside extensive rice

fields. The tranquil silence of the lake, coupled with its soothing ambiance, offers visitors a profound sense of mental and emotional relaxation. **Talesh Sled:** Those seeking an exhilarating experience can enjoy sled riding through the Siyahdaran forests, adding excitement to their journey. **Gisum Forest:** Located 10 kilometers along the road from Talesh to Rasht, Gisum Forest spans 80 hectares and is home to more than 75 species of plants and various animals. This biodiversity makes it one of the most captivating tourist destinations in Gilan. **Salsal Castle:** A relic from the Seljuk era, this castle is situated in Lisar village, 20 kilometers from the main road connecting Talesh and Astara. Registered on Iran's National Heritage List in 2003, Salsal Castle is celebrated as one of the finest locations for photography enthusiasts.

Adas Polo reflects tradition, nutritional wisdom

Iranica Desk

Adas Polo is one of the most beloved dishes in Iranian cuisine. This aromatic rice dish combines the earthy flavor of lentils with a variety of complementary ingredients, creating a delightful experience for the palate. It is traditionally prepared in two main styles — simple and chamber (layered) — and is commonly served as a votive meal during religious ceremonies. As a staple of Iranian culinary heritage, Adas Polo holds a special place on many tables. The preparation is straightforward and efficient, requiring less than 30 minutes to prepare the ingredients and approximately 30 to 60 minutes to cook. The core ingredients include rice and lentils, often enhanced with meat, raisins, caramelized onions, barberries, and walnuts. For added variation, it is frequently served with sugar or dates, offering a sweet contrast to the savory elements. The distinctive aroma, flavor, and golden color of Adas Polo primarily come from

butter, cinnamon, and saffron — signature spices that elevate this dish. To garnish, Iranian cooks may decorate the dish with dates, pistachio slices, and slivered almonds. In ceremonial settings, Tahdig — the crispy rice, bread, potatoes, or lettuce cooked at the bottom of the pot — is also an essential accompaniment that adds texture and richness. Lentils, the key ingredient in Adas Polo, are celebrated for their exceptional nutritional profile. They are rich in plant-based protein, dietary fiber, iron, and essential minerals such as folate and magnesium, making them an excellent choice for supporting heart health, digestion, and sustained energy levels. Lentils are also low in fat and calories, which contributes to a balanced diet. Their complex carbohydrates help maintain steady blood sugar levels, benefiting overall metabolic health. Iranian polo dishes, including Adas Polo, offer more than just delightful flavors; they reflect a tradition of wholesome, balanced meals. Polo (rice dishes) is often

prepared with a blend of nutritious ingredients such as nuts, dried fruits, and aromatic spices, which enhance both taste and health benefits. The combination of rice with lentils or other legumes in these dishes provides a complete amino acid profile, important for muscle repair and growth, especially in plant-based diets. Moreover, the use of herbs and spices like saffron and cinnamon not only enriches flavor but also provides antioxidant and anti-inflammatory benefits. Together, these elements make Iranian polo dishes not only a culinary pleasure but also a nourishing and healthful choice that supports well-being.



● [alamto.com](#)

Iran’s Nazeri, Tajik Kholov debut collaborative music album in Konya

Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian maestro Shahram Nazeri and the late Tajik singer Davlatmand Kholov unveiled their collaborative album ‘O, Love! Come’ on Tuesday, coinciding with the 752nd anniversary of the death of Persian poet and mystic Rumi, according to the Selçuk University Mevlana Research Institute. The album, directed and produced by Shahab Nikman, represents Kholov’s final recorded work and the first time Nazeri has premiered an album in Turkey, ISNA reported. Years earlier, Nazeri’s album ‘Avaz-e Asatir’ (Mythical Chants) had been released in Paris.

It was showcased at the institute with support from the International Mevlana Foundation and the Mana Naqsh Heritage Institute for Culture and Art. “This is the first and only joint effort between Nazeri and a non-Iranian singer,” the organizers noted. Featuring seven vocal tracks and a music video, ‘O, Love! Come’ blends Persian and Tajik dialects, highlighting the rich interplay between the two linguistic traditions. Signature pieces include reinterpretations of Nazeri’s ‘Mastaneh Sho’ (Be Intoxicated) and Kholov’s ‘Sheyda Shodam’ (I Became Enraptured), retitled ‘Heyran Bia’ (Come, Bewildered), performed jointly by the two luminaries of Eastern

classical music. The album was created under the auspices of the Mana Naqsh Heritage Institute for Culture and Art, a UNESCO advisory body, to promote Rumi’s philosophy and Persianate intangible cultural heritage shared across Iran, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Turkey, and Uzbekistan. Musicians from at least four countries contributed, including instrumentalists from Iran, Tajikistan, and Afghanistan, while whirling dervishes featured in the music video hailed from Konya. The video draws inspiration from Rumi’s spiritual journey from Khorasan’s Ghiasieh School of Khargerd to Konya, symbolizing the path from Sharia (religious law) to Tariqa (spiritual path), as

conceptualized in Attar’s ‘Seven Cities of Love.’ Its imagery foregrounds Persian mystical thought and the global recognition of Mevlevi Sema as an intangible cultural heritage. Instrumentation emphasizes traditional Persian and Eastern instruments, particularly the rabab (a traditional, short-necked string instrument), historically associated with Rumi. Five rabab performers contribute, each representing distinct regional styles: An Isfahani musician, two Baloch Iranians, one Tajik, and one Afghan. ‘O, Love! Come’ forms part of the international ‘The Language of Love’ project, launched in 2019 in London with live performances by Nazeri and Kholov at



the Barbican Centre. The initiative celebrates the legacy of 30 first-millennium Persian poets and now highlights Rumi’s enduring influence on music, philosophy, and intercultural dialogue.

Golestan Province poised for tourism surge



Iran’s Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Reza Salehi-Amiri (front R) visits the Gorgan Photography Museum in Golestan Province, Iran, December 16, 2025. ● IRNA

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran’s northern Golestan Province is on the cusp of a major tourism and sustainable development boom, Iranian Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, Reza Salehi-Amiri, said during a provincial visit on Tuesday. Speaking at the newly developed Gorgan Rural Heritage Museum and the 650-hectare Qoroq Forest Park, Salehi-Amiri highlighted the region’s unique natural and cultural assets, ISNA reported. “Golestan is like a sun shining across Iran, both illuminating and warming,” he told reporters, noting that provincial authorities, local representatives, and ethnic communities have aligned on a strategic vision prioritizing development over local disputes. The minister described Qoroq Forest Park, set within the globally recognized Hyrcanian forests, as a model of environmentally conscious expansion. “This park will be one of the largest and most beautiful forest parks in Iran,” he said. Within its 50 hectares, a cultural village is emerging, restoring six historic rural structures so far, with the first phase scheduled to

open by the Persian New Year or, at the latest, next spring. Salehi-Amiri confirmed that full project completion is expected in the first half of 2026. During the visit, Salehi-Amiri also toured the Gorgan Photography Museum, the first specialized photography museum in northern Iran. Housing over 2,500 cameras and audiovisual devices, the museum aims to become a national hub for photographic heritage. Future expansions include a 30-seat VIP cinema and dedicated educational programs. Other initiatives include the Ashuradeh sustainable tourism project, undertaken in line with environmental safeguards, and the restoration of the historic Gorgan Wall, targeted for UNESCO recognition. Salehi-Amiri emphasized on-the-ground engagement by senior officials as a cornerstone of the ministry’s strategy to align planning with local realities. He also urged the national media to amplify Golestan’s cultural and natural attractions to domestic and international audiences, highlighting Qoroq Forest Park as a key focal point in Iran’s broader tourism promotion campaigns.

Species-specific sounds spark surprising animal responses

Scientific, behavioral, and cognitive views

By Alireza Sepahvand
Journalist

OPINION EXCLUSIVE

Music has been an inseparable part of human experience for centuries, serving as a powerful tool for expressing emotions, facilitating communication, and even providing therapeutic benefits. Yet an intriguing question continues to captivate researchers: Do animals perceive and respond to music as humans do? If they do, what types of music are meaningful to them, and how do their reactions differ from those of humans? Over the past decades, scientific studies have sought to answer these questions, yielding valuable insights into auditory perception, emotional responses, and animal behavior. The following explores animals’ reactions to music through behavioral, cognitive, and biological lenses, drawing on examples from carefully conducted scientific experiments.

Biological foundations of sound processing in animals

To understand animals’ reactions to music, one must first consider the structural differences between the human auditory system and that of other creatures. Every species has its own hearing range, different sensitivities to frequencies and rhythms, and unique cognitive capacities that determine how it receives and analyzes sound. For example, dogs hear much higher frequencies than humans, so human-centered music is not always pleasant or understandable for them. Marine mammals like whales and dolphins have different auditory structures, and much of their communication is based on ultrasound. Songbirds possess a brain structure closer to that of humans, comparable to the human music-processing area.

These biological differences lead to highly diverse reactions to music among species, and a piece of music that is calming or joyful for humans may be annoying or meaningless to another animal.

Music shapes animal mood

Behavioral studies show that animals display reactions to familiar sound patterns. However, their reaction to music greatly depends on the species and the type of music. Research shows that dogs react more calmly to classical music. In some experiments, reduced barking, lowered bodily tension, and increased resting time were observed while dogs listened to classical music. In contrast, rock or metal music can trigger nervous behavior and restless movements. Cats respond less to human-centered music than dogs do. But studies on “cat-specific music”, pieces composed based on the frequencies and rhythms similar to natural cat sounds, show that they react more positively to such music. This aligns with the theory that animals respond to sounds that fall within the natural range of their communication. In agricultural settings, music is sometimes used to improve livestock welfare. Studies show that cows, after a period of listening to calm music, show increased milk production. Pigs react more calmly to gentle music. Chickens also become calmer and less stressed in some conditions when exposed to music. However, these effects are not always constant and may depend on the environment, sound volume, and the animals’ habits. Some birds, such as finches and budgerigars, have complex vocal abilities, and their songs have structures similar to music. Research shows that the brains of songbirds contain regions that process sound similarly to the human auditory cortex. They can im-

itate and retain complex rhythmic and melodic patterns. Some species can detect whether a vocal sequence has been altered, something similar to detecting a “wrong note.” However, it is still unclear whether birds experience music “emotionally” or if their reactions are merely related to learning and imitation patterns. Chimpanzees, gorillas, and monkeys are genetically close to humans, but their behavior toward music shows that the concept of music may not exist in them as it does in humans. In some studies, they did not show specific reactions to classical, pop, or rock music. Music that resembles their heartbeat or body-movement rhythms attracts more attention. Sometimes regular rhythms can reduce stress, but this effect has not been confirmed in all studies. These findings suggest that human-like music perception may be a species-specific trait of our kind. Horses are sensitive to sound, and calm music can reduce their stress. Trainers sometimes use music to create relaxation during grooming or training. Although the auditory structure of fish is very different from that of mammals, they respond to sound vibrations. Music with a steady beat can change the group movement of some fish. Elephants have the ability to perceive very low frequencies. Documented cases exist in which elephants reacted to sounds from instruments like the piano and even exhibited rhythmic movements. However, it is not definitively known whether these reactions are emotional or merely motor curiosity. In recent years, music has gained attention as a therapeutic tool for pets and even zoo animals. Its known applications include reducing separation anxiety in dogs, reducing stress during livestock transport or treatment, calming animals in shelters, and improving sleep and reducing aggressive be-

havior. Many of these results are linked to specific musical features such as gentle rhythm, simple harmony, and frequencies close to the species’ natural hearing range.

Do animals experience music?

One of the most important questions is whether animals’ reactions represent some kind of emotional experience, or if they are simply responses to auditory stimuli. Opinions on this matter vary. Some scientists believe that aesthetic sense in music is likely unique to humans. Others have found evidence suggesting that animals may experience a kind of emotional state related to music. For example, the heart rate of dogs or cows decreases when listening to calm music, which may indicate emotional changes; but it still cannot be said with certainty that this state is the same as the “musical pleasure” humans experience. In conclusion, animals’ reactions to music are complex and multifaceted, because the most important means of human communication is expression and language, and obtaining and interpreting mental reactions from animal species is very difficult. Nevertheless, studies show that animals are sensitive to sound, and music can affect their behavior and physiology. However, many animals, especially primates, do not experience human music the way we do. Reactions are usually related to biological features of the species, including hearing range, type of vocal communication, and natural behavioral patterns. Still, music can be an effective tool for reducing stress and improving animal welfare. Research in this field is ongoing, and as our knowledge of animal brains and cognition grows, we will better understand how and to what extent music can affect their world.