



My cultural activities are tribute to Iran's culture: *South Korean ambassador*

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INTERVIEW

South Korean Ambassador to Iran Kim Junpyo has a particular interest in using culture to bring the two Eastern nations closer together.

Since taking up his post in January 2024, he has twice delighted Iranians by performing well-known Iranian songs.

In November 2024, he performed the old Iranian song 'Porsoun Porsoun', meaning asking around in Persian, with the Iranian Istgah Orchestra to mark the 62nd anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two countries, and a video of the performance was released. A year later, on the anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties, he performed the much-loved song 'Jaan-e Maryam' (Dear Maryam) with the same private orchestra, using the language of music to convey a message of peace and friendship to the Iranian people.

In an interview with Iran Daily, the Korean ambassador said the aim of his cultural activities had been to "pay tribute to Iranian culture."

He believes cultural diplomacy can pave the way for economic and political diplomacy.

The following is the interview with the envoy, conducted through an interpreter.

IRAN DAILY: Mr. Ambassador, in recent years you have performed two popular Iranian songs, Porsoun Porsoun and Jaan-e Maryam. What motivated you to undertake these cultural activities?

KIM: Performing Iranian songs was quite difficult for me. I put a lot of effort into getting the pronunciation of the Persian words and sounds right. The main rea-



South Korean Ambassador to Iran Kim Junpyo performs Iranian song 'Jaan-e Maryam' in November 2025.

son I did it was that I had a great deal of respect for Iranian culture, and I wanted to find a way to express and convey that respect.

Iran and Korea have many similarities in common, and I find those similarities very interesting. There are many cultural similarities between the two countries, and I really wanted to recognize their value and somehow convey that feeling.

The two songs I performed, Porsoun Porsoun and Jaan-e Maryam, seem to connect with the human heart. That is what music does, in a way. It can become a means of linking people, and I really wanted to show that connection through music.

Tell us about your interest in Iran's great poets. Apparently, you have also performed some of Hafez's poetry. How familiar are you with Hafez and Persian poetry?

Before I came to Iran, I knew absolutely nothing about Iranian or Persian poetry. After I came here, I tried to connect with this poetry by reading the works of Hafez and Saadi and, in that way, become familiar with them. All of this happened after I came



to Iran. Before that, I had no background in Iranian or Persian poetry.

In South Korea, especially in the past — although perhaps a little less so now — it was quite common for people to quote a passage from a poem in their speeches and use it in that way.

When I came here, I noticed exactly the same thing. I thought, well, if I give a speech here, I can also quote a passage from a poem. And I found another similarity between Iranian and Korean culture in that respect.

It was exactly the same practice I had seen in Korea. People would use poetry in their speeches. I discovered that same cultural similarity here in Iran.

Korean television series

have a large following in Iran, as does K-pop. Were you aware of this popularity before you came to Iran to serve as ambassador? To what extent can this popularity help bring the two countries closer culturally?

I knew, even before coming to Iran, that some Korean television series, such as Jumong and Jewel in the Palace, were popular here. But after arriving in Iran as South Korea's ambassador, I became much more aware of this. Since I already knew how important culture is to relations between two countries, and how it can bring people from both sides closer together and connect them — music is a good example — I decided to focus heavily on cultural activities.

Since I arrived, I have tried to promote cultural exchange. But I wanted this exchange to be more than just Korea introducing its culture to Iran. I did not want it to be one-sided. I made a great deal of effort to create the conditions for a genuine, two-way and mutually beneficial cultural relationship.

Do you think Iranian music and films have the potential to attract Korean audiences

and become popular there?

Yes, definitely. The Busan International Film Festival, which is held in South Korea every year, has Iranian filmmakers among its participants, and a large number of Iranian films are screened there. They demonstrate many different aspects of Iran, and this can certainly continue and have an impact. And it is not limited to cinema. A few years ago, well-known Iranian musician and composer Kayhan Kalhor traveled to South Korea and performed there. Many of the young people who attended were deeply impressed by the music he played on the kamancheh and liked it very much. So cultural influence can certainly work in both directions, from Iran to Korea as well, and we have seen that happening over the years.

It seems that, unlike political and economic diplomacy, cultural diplomacy has to some extent been overlooked in relations between the two countries. How effective can cultural diplomacy be in bringing Iran and South Korea closer together, and how important is it?

I think it is very important. As I mentioned earlier, culture creates bonds between people. The better we understand another country's culture, the better we understand its people, and that mutual understanding can influence our relations in the future.

In other words, culture can provide a foundation and open the way for other forms of diplomacy, whether economic or political. Cultural diplomacy can pave the way for these efforts and can be very influential. That is why I personally place so much emphasis on culture.



Iraj chose to be singer of all people

By Alireza Sepahvand
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OPINION EXCLUSIVE

Famous Iranian singer Hossein Khajeh-Amiri, known as Iraj, passed away on Wednesday but when it comes to certain voices, one cannot speak of an "end." Some voices become part of the memory of a nation, and as long as someone in this land listens to music, song, and their collective memories, they remain alive. Iraj was one of those voices, a voice that was present in the sphere of Iranian music for more than seven decades and finally joined eternity, entrusting his immortality to the very thing to which he devoted his life: singing.

Iraj was not just a renowned singer. He was a vocal phenomenon. Iranian master singer Mohammad-Reza Shajarian said about him at an honoring ceremony for Iraj in 2013: "Iraj's voice is a yardstick and standard in the history of our singing," and emphasized that whenever one wanted to give an example of the highest level of vocal ability, one would give a voice like Iraj's as an example. This view, expressed by one of the greatest singers in the history of Iranian music, may perhaps be the most precise description of Iraj's position; a singer who became known as the "Pahlavan (hero) of Singing," and this title, more than being a promotional nickname, was a description of the dimensions of his ability and character. In terms of the type, color, quality, texture, and power of his vocal ornamentation, Iraj was unparalleled. In Iranian singing, the voice is not simply "loudness" or "range." Vocal color, the quality of resonance, the ability to control, clarity of expression, the power to maneuver through different vocal registers, and above all, the relationship between technique and music, together form what makes a singer a great singer. Iraj possessed qualities in all these components for which it is difficult to find an equal example.

With the emergence of Iraj in the realm of singing, a dimension of the power of Iranian vocal art was displayed that had never been seen on this scale and with this quality. The importance of this event becomes clearer when we know that he emerged at a time when Iranian singing itself was full of great peaks; Taj Esfahani was singing at the height of his authority, Banan was at the peak of delicacy, refinement, and musical understanding, and names such as Adib Khansari, Taherzadeh, and Zelli each represented a part of the glorious history of Iranian singing. In such a constellation, simply singing well was no longer enough. For a singer to be able to rise among these giants of singing, he had to possess something beyond ordinary talent.

That "something" in Iraj was an exceptional vocal instrument a voice that combined power with ease.

One of the wonders of Iraj's singing was that his vocal ornamentations in the high registers sounded so smooth, effortless, and natural that the listener imagined performing them was easy. But it was enough for a professional singer to try to perform even a much weaker imitation of the same phrase to realize what kind of power Iraj possessed. This is precisely where the distance between a "good singer" and the possessor of a historic voice becomes apparent. What sounded natural and effortless for Iraj represented, for many other singers, the limits of their vocal abilities.

Akbar Golpayegani, too, had emphasized the clarity of Iraj's voice and his unique vocal ornamentations, describing him as a singer with rare abilities. These testimonies from his contemporaries and the great figures of singing carry particular importance, because the true value of a singer is sometimes understood better by those who themselves have stood in the same field than by any critic.

But Iraj was not just the possessor of a powerful voice. An important part of his artistic personality must be sought in a choice that, at first glance, may have raised questions for many in the world of music: why a singer with such technical and vocal capacity devoted a significant part of his artistic life to singing in cinema, popular works, and songs that perhaps did not correspond to the image expected of a classical and sophisticated singer.

New military lineup ...

Preparing for multiple war scenarios

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The need to neutralize US conventional and asymmetric war scenarios in the air, on land, at sea and in people-centered domestic security has become unavoidable, and the current lineup of appointments precisely reflects this necessity. The lineup makes clear Tehran's readiness and firm resolve for a prolonged war of attrition, or at the very least to maintain an offensive posture in future negotiations and conflicts. The appointment of figures such as Ahmad Vahidi, with a background in commanding the Quds Force (IRGC's overseas arm); Hossein Taeb, with extensive experience in intelligence and security; Ali Ozmaei, with a significant record of

accompanying and commanding the navy under wartime conditions; Ali Abdollahi of the Khatam al-Anbiya Central Headquarters; and Mohsen Rezaei, the former IRGC commander during the Iran-Iraq War (1980-88), all attest to this doctrinal shift. The integration of the Armed Forces General Staff with the Khatam al-Anbiya Central Headquarters also underscores the need for unified command, allowing a faster and more coordinated response to combined military, cognitive and economic threats. The appointment of Hossein Taeb as head of the Basij Organization is likewise aimed at strengthening the grassroots intelligence network, making use of new technologies and organizing at the neighborhood level. This further reinforces the link

between military power and society because, under a deterrence doctrine based on punishment, the adversary must know that even in the event of domestic pressure or infiltration, the cost of popular and intelligence resistance will also be extremely high.

Domestic consolidation, international deterrence

Domestically, the appointments will, in the short term, help consolidate the command structure and reduce public confusion, while strengthening the Basij will put at hand tools for social control and countering enemy provocations stemming from the economic pressure of the war. On the international stage, the message of these changes has been clearly understood by the United States and

Israel. Tehran has demonstrated its readiness to respond in kind, step up the activities of the foreign allied forces known as the Axis of Resistance and carry out hard-hitting offensive operations, meaning any calculations by the adversary to launch an attack or apply greater pressure will inevitably have to factor in the cost of severe retaliation. From the standpoint of negotiations, this configuration also prepares Iran to bargain from a position of strength. Ultimately, the Iranian leader's recent appointments should be seen as a turning point in redefining the Islamic Republic of Iran's security and military doctrine in line with the ongoing transition in the international order; a shift that will formalize Iran's new regional and global role.