

Restoration of Jalal Al-e Ahmad's paternal house has begun:

# A new cultural center for Tehran on the horizon



## Social Desk

The house in which Jalal Al-e Ahmad (1923-1969), famous Iranian novelist, short story writer, and translator, grew up, located in the historic Sangelaj neighborhood of Tehran, is one of the houses registered on the Iran National Heritage List. The house is owned by the national fund for the restoration and utilization of historical and cultural monuments.

In 2020, the house was put up for auction with the aim of restoring it and transforming it into a center for cultural events, Mehr news agency reported.

Mahboubeh Kazemi Doulabi, a cultural developer, took on the responsibility of restoring and utilizing the property. However, upon receiving the house, she discovered that it lacked basic amenities such as water, electricity, and gas. Moreover, it was filled with garbage and, on top of that, around 15 drug addicts, led by

a certain 'Amir Chelcheleh', had turned the historic house into a place for drug exchange.

On May 18, 2021, the house was entrusted under unsuitable conditions. Additionally, it lacked installed water and electricity meters for an entire year thereafter. All this was in spite of the fact that Doulabi was supposed to bring the house to a state in which cultural events could take place.

However, due to infrastructural inadequacies, delays from restoration funds, and addicts residing in the premises, the process has been prolonged. It wasn't until January, 2023, when Doulabi received official confirmation that she could begin restoration work. Her efforts finally began on March 9, 2023 and are still ongoing.

The restoration process is being carried out meticulously and diligently. Over time, the house has undergone many alterations – from experiencing flooding

reported by neighbors, to a persistent humidity problem threatening its structural integrity. The house has also attracted diverse crowds ranging from celebrities to drug addicts who considered it their home.

At different time periods throughout its history, the house has witnessed cement or plaster applied over its walls. However, the current restoration team is painstakingly removing these additional layers to get to the original bricks beneath. They are also sanding and cleaning them. Some original bricks have been replaced, while others have been rearranged to preserve the house's authentic appearance.

The team of restorers and designers has made good use of photographs, manuscripts, letters, and storybooks among other resources to recreate the atmosphere of Jalal Al-e Ahmad's presence at this residence.

"Jalal's family has been very helpful. They inform us about loose

parts of the house or covered pipes. We will have more pictures soon," Doulabi says.

She adds, "If there has been a delay in restoring this house, it is because we have been waiting for approvals right from the start. They did not inform us that there was no electricity or water here." The water department, according to her, insisted on providing an ownership document to install a meter, while the ownership of the house lies with the Ministry of Cultural Heritage.

She also points out that removing the addicts from the premises took time.

"Plus, we prioritize quality over speed when it comes to restoration work. While plastering could have saved us time, we didn't want to rush through the project."

After a tour of the different parts of the house, Doulabi mentions, "When Master Jazayeri restored the doors of the house we got to their original greenish turquoise



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color, and they will be painted this very same color."

With approval from experts at the restoration fund, the restoration team demolished an additional room built on top of a porch due to its collapsed roof and lack of any historic value.

"In return, we restored an existing balcony from 1931. Several wells in the house were also restored, while the one that had collapsed was closed off and a new one was dug," Doulabi says. She continues, "I saw this house back in 2017, but a suitable use for it was not defined then. But now, with its reception purposes in mind, parts of the yard under Jalal's room and balcony could be turned into a café, and the house's 27 spaces could be utilized for cultural activities."

She suggests that Jalal's room could serve as accommodation for artists or writers who wish to engage in creative pursuits such as writing books or screenplays "from morning till night."

Other sections can be designated as meeting halls or used for book launches, cultural and educational workshops, etc.

"This house is one of those rare houses that have a wind catcher, so we plan to restore that as well," she says.

The cultural developer adds, "We have also discussed with vendors in the neighborhood that the shutters of their shops should be painted by a team of artists in order to transform this alley into a street gallery. These painted shutters could even be illuminated. We pitched the idea to the municipality and they all agreed." Doulabi believes that those who invest their resources in historical houses should not be labeled as mere investors because, from an economic and investment standpoint, restoring these houses may not always yield returns.

These individuals are cultural developers, who allocate more than estimated costs towards preserving such buildings.

## Iran spends hundreds of millions of dollars on foreign students

### Social Desk

The head of international affairs and foreign schools at Iran's Ministry of Education has revealed that \$335 million are spent annually on foreign students, with an average expenditure of \$527 per student. Mehdi Fayyazi also discussed the education system's strategy for foreign nationals in Iran, which prioritizes honoring them and identifying talented students, according to IRNA.

Currently, five percent of the country's education resources and 22,000 classrooms are dedicated to serving foreign students.

Fayyazi highlighted a concerning contrast between funding received by Iran compared to other countries. He explained that while Iran receives around 17 million euros from international institutions for foreign students (which is relative-

ly low), Turkey has demanded annual payments from Europe with the threat of opening its borders to allow these individuals into Europe. However, he reassured that there is no discrimination between Iranian students and foreign students in Iran.

Furthermore, Fayyazi mentioned that international organizations have constructed a total of 88 schools within the country, with an additional 23 schools currently under construction.

Regarding Iranian schools abroad, he noted that there are currently 11 international schools operating in Iran (mostly non-governmental) and 75 governmental/non-governmental/remote schools present in various countries worldwide. In recent years, there has been a decrease in both the number and population of these schools by 49 percent, resulting

in the closure of 33 institutions. However, last year witnessed a positive trend as student enrollment increased by 15 percent. Students attending these overseas schools primarily consist of children of Iranians living abroad as part of the global network community along with Iranian businessmen.

Fayyazi stressed two key demands made by overseas students: firstly, enhancing Islamic and Iranian identity within these educational institutions; secondly, the need for bilingualism through adopting an international curriculum alongside proficiency in another language – an aspect neglected previously since many such schools were monolingual. However, in line with government priorities, the bilingualization process was given prominence during the current administration.

Fayyazi also acknowledged the demands of teachers working abroad, which have been accumulating. However, due to the substantial amount involved, it has become challenging to address their payment issues.

In conclusion, Fayyazi emphasized that Iranian schools operating abroad play a crucial role in strengthening the global network of Iranians. Schools must obtain a license from the Ministry of Education for proper administration; otherwise, they risk closure and their educational credentials will not be recognized or approved.

## British nurse guilty of murdering seven babies

A neonatal nurse has been found guilty of murdering seven babies and attempting to kill six more, making her the worst child serial killer in modern British history and raising urgent questions over whether her crimes could have been stopped.

Lucy Letby, 33, was convicted of the "persistent, calculated and cold-blooded" murder of five premature boys and two newborn girls on the unit where she worked at the Countess of Chester hospital in north-west England, The Guardian reported.

As ministers ordered an independent inquiry into how Letby was able to carry out her horrifying campaign, a whistleblower told the Guardian that he believed babies would have been saved if hospital executives had acted sooner on concerns about the nurse.

Stephen Brearey, who was the first to alert executives to Letby's connection to unusual deaths and collapses, said he felt bosses had been "neglectful" by failing to contact the police earlier.

Letby was in her mid-20s when she preyed on highly vulnerable babies between June 2015 and June 2016, often attacking them just moments after their parents or nurses had left their side. Police were finally contacted in 2017 and she was arrested

in 2018. Her victims included two identical triplet brothers, killed within 24 hours of each other, a newborn weighing less than 1kg who was fatally injected with air, and a girl born 10 weeks premature who was murdered on the fourth attempt.

Bereaved parents gasped and wept in the public gallery as the verdicts were delivered over several dramatic days at Manchester crown court, after one of the longest-running murder trials in recent times.

Outside court, parents of the victims said justice had been served but that no conviction would "take away from the extreme hurt, anger and distress that we have all had to experience."

Letby is expected to become only the third woman alive in

the UK to be handed a whole-life term – meaning she will never be released from prison – when she is sentenced on Monday.

Police believe Letby may have harmed more babies during her six-year career as a children's nurse and have launched a helpline for parents to call to report concerns.

Detectives have asked specialists to examine the records of more than 4,000 infants born at Liverpool Women's hospital and the Countess of Chester, the two hospitals where Letby worked between 2010 and 2016.

One mother said on Friday night that she believed Letby attacked her newborn son a day after she made a complaint about an "inappropriate" comment by the nurse.



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