

Late president's literary initiatives

PERSPECTIVE The deceased Iranian president Ebrahim Raisi was always trying to improve the conditions of the literary figures in the country and would turn up at ceremonies related to literature. One of the characteristics of the president was his attention to cultural events and the issues and troubles of authors, poets, and others who make a living from writing in all its forms. In the three years he held the presidency, he

turned up at the Book of the Year Award ceremony each year. In early March 2022, when health guidelines linked to the COVID-19 epidemic were still being strictly followed across the country, the closing ceremony of the 39th edition of the Book of the Year Award and the 29th Iran's Book of the Year Award was held simultaneously with the presence of president Raisi, Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Mohammad-Mehdi Esmaeili, and other cultural

caretakers of the country. At the ceremony, the president pointed out that books play a very key role in political and economic analyses and said: "For this reason, paying attention to books and reading books is of great importance in the Islamic Republic." He went on to add that books and book reading are of huge significance in Iran. Thanks to such an approach, we're seeing more and more growth and success from educated Iranians in society and academic circles.

Best tool for understanding characters

Referring to the role of the book as a bridge between civilizations, president Raisi maintained in that ceremony: "The book is the best tool for understanding characters. If it were not for the works of Saadi, Hafez, and Avicenna, it would be very hard and even impossible to pin them down. Getting to know a culture and civilization goes hand in hand with getting to know the books, and through books and cultural works, we can share our culture with other countries."

On that day, the president also paid attention to the hardships of the livelihood of Iranian literary figures. "These days, many people who write well are living in difficult conditions. They should be supported."

Duty of protecting culture

The following year, at the 40th Book of the Year Award ceremony, the president touched on the protection of culture as the duty of intellectuals and stressed: "Books can keep a culture safe. It's up to intellectuals to safeguard this function and tradition. Books are the works that can protect a society's culture. You should always keep an eye on books. They're the best way to preserve the history, culture, and knowledge of the nation. Books give us a platform to pass on thoughts and science."

Pointing out the actions of his government in this regard, he explained: "One of the serious plans of this government is to focus on cultural issues. Dealing with economic and livelihood matters shouldn't take our eye off the ball when it comes to books and culture. That includes honoring authors and writers who were active in the book world. We should always double down on these efforts. Books are our way to know the great. The government should pave the way for the emergence of better writers in the book publishing field."



During an unannounced visit to the Tehran International Book Fair, the late Iranian president Ebrahim Raisi (C) talks with a publisher of the Holy Qur'an on May 21, 2022. president.ir

Elites of society

Two years later, president Raisi took part in the 41st edition of the Book of the Year Award ceremony on March 8, 2024, as well. The late president stated there that the perfect human being was the noble prophet of Islam, adding that through books and by looking at the life of the perfect human being and his precious parents, "we can see a role model to build our life upon". Emphasizing that responsible writing should be promoted, he noted: "We shouldn't cash in on books, writing, and the transmission of knowledge. Of course, everyone has bills to pay, but books and the sharing of science, knowledge, and culture should be put on a pedestal." The late president stated that some jobs in society always rely

on the treasury or handouts and that the life of someone struggling in this regard should be provided for somehow. "But we shouldn't bring the book down to the level of a money-making medium," he said. "There might be some extra income involved, but that's not the point. Writing is one of those jobs that, although it's considered work, shouldn't be about making money." Addressing the writers present at the meeting, he highlighted: "You are the elites of society and have your own responsibilities. We expect elites to safeguard society from cultural invasion and protect it against deviations. An intellectual isn't someone who leads people towards Western or Eastern thoughts."

Expansion of public libraries

His attention to cultural issues wasn't just a one-time thing at the Book of the Year Award. On November 15, 2022, president Raisi flagged the problem of books and book reading as one of the key indicators of every society's culture. He asked the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance to make expanding public libraries and easy access to books a priority. Following the late president's attendance at a ceremony for commemorating the National Day of Books, Reading, and Librarians in November 2022, the Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance penned a letter to the president, suggesting ways to make books more accessible and tackle the livelihood challenges faced by

librarians with the help of the country's institution for public libraries. Per the president's order on November 28, 2023, relevant institutions, including Iran's Planning and Budget Organization, were tapped to cooperate in solving librarians' problems and making books more accessible. The organization was also tasked with allocating the necessary credit budget to temporarily ease librarians' livelihood challenges within the rules. Another part of the order focused on central libraries in the provinces; the Planning and Budget Organization was to allocate the required credits to complete the construction of these central libraries.

Communicating via Book fair

During different periods, both when he was serving as the head of the judiciary and later as president, he attended the Tehran International Book Fair. He recently spoke about the importance of holding the Tehran International Book Fair and advancing cultural justice. During his multi-hour visit to the book fair, he chatted with publishers and publishing managers about issues and challenges in the publishing industry and the book market. According to him, the book fair is more than just a cultural event. It's a platform for establishing meaningful and effective commu-

nication between authors, publishers, and book readers, and a place where ideas are exchanged. He attributed the thriving book publishing and distribution sector to the blessings of Iran's Islamic Revolution. Before the Revolution, the Tehran Book Fair was limited to a couple of tents pitched next to the University of Tehran. Now, with the backing and encouragement of the leader, an exhibition of this magnitude and quality is held for books, fueling everyone's enthusiasm and interest in reading.

Self-sufficiency in paper production

Another key point in the president's was the attention he paid to self-sufficiency in paper production. Right from the start of the previous government's term, Raisi pushed for self-sufficiency in paper production by rallying various forces and holding regular meetings with paper producers. He also tasked his first deputy with following up on this matter. With Raisi at the helm of the government, the Ministry of Education was tasked with using domestic production for textbook papers. This move kept \$50 million of foreign currency within the country. As a result, about 1,241 people found employment in Mazandaran's wood and paper industry factory.

Raisi's gov't celebrates cultural renaissance

Record-breaking achievements in performing arts, music

PERSPECTIVE The previous government wrapped up with the untimely, tragic death of president Ebrahim Raisi, but over his three-year tenure, a noticeable growth kicked off in the fields of art and cultural activities.

Three years ago, there were 580 movie theaters up and running in the country. Raisi's government turned things around by adding another 300 cinemas to the mix. By the end of the Iranian calendar year 1402 (ended March 19, 2024), the number of movie theaters in the country had ramped up to 846. Besides showing a growth rate of over 48% for constructing theatres compared to the previous government, this figure means that the per capita cinema for Iranians has improved to one theater per 104,000 people. When president Raisi took the wheel, the latter figure stood at one theater per 580,000 people.

Breaking box office records

In the first year of Raisi's government (ended August 3, 2022), film sales racked up a whopping 415 billion Tomans (nearly \$9 million) with an audience of 13 million people tuning in. The following year, cinema sales skyrocketed to over 1,240 billion Tomans (over \$20.7 million). Keeping up the momentum, Iranian cinema sales clocked in at over 146 billion Tomans (over \$2.29 million) in the first month of the Iranian calendar year 1403 (ended April 19, 2024).

Cinematic productions

Under President Raisi's government, over 180 movie scripts have been greenlit for production. These films showcase a diverse range of genres and talents, with both renowned veterans and up-and-coming filmmakers behind the camera.

Concerts held

Over the last three years, a grand total of 7,000 music concerts have been played in venues in the capital and various cities across the country. The number of concerts in 1401 (ended March 20, 2023) hit 3,913, and the following year, the tally cranked up to 4,970.

Theatrical productions

By July 2022 last year, the count of theatrical productions neared 8,000, and this number ramped up in the months to March that marked the end of the calendar year. Compared to the year before, drama production and performances have shot up by over 30%.



The late Iranian president Ebrahim Raisi (C) is interviewed while touring Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) facilities for filming TV programs. IRNA