

Minister: Iran bent on removing tourism barriers, boosting ties with Saudi Arabia

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, Reza Salehi Amiri, announced significant plans to enhance tourism connections with Saudi Arabia and other neighboring countries, including Bahrain and Kuwait. Speaking at a conference held in Tehran on December 29, Salehi Amiri emphasized the government's commitment to eliminating barriers for tourism operators and fostering international tourism. "The will of the government and the president, along with other state institutions such as the Parliament and the Judiciary, is to

remove obstacles facing tourism operators," he said. He stressed the need to move beyond the daily challenges in the tourism sector and to identify and eliminate the factors hindering growth. Salehi Amiri noted that flight services from Saudi Arabia to Mashhad have commenced, with Riyadh seeking to increase the number of flights. He also mentioned that preparations are underway to facilitate the entry of tourists from Bahrain and Kuwait in the future. In addressing the current state of tourism, he stated, "We must avoid despair and seriously focus on attracting tourists."

The minister outlined one of the government's key initiatives: To identify various sectors for attracting tourists from different countries, prioritizing those in the Nowruz cultural sphere initially, followed by assessing additional potential markets. Salehi Amiri also revealed that Iran has around 2,700 ongoing projects, including 550 hotel projects. "We plan to open 100 hotels annually and provide facilities to investors," he added. He emphasized that the tourism sector's recovery post-COVID-19 relies heavily on travel agencies and related entities, describing them as the "motor of Iran's tourism industry."

Additionally, Salehi Amiri pointed out Iran's rich cultural heritage, stating, "Iran holds a valuable place in cultural heritage and historical identity." He cited the historical region of Jiroft as an example of Iran's significant historical treasures. He urged for innovative means to present these values to the world and combat the phenomenon of Iranophobia. In conclusion, Amiri reaffirmed the importance of all sectors within the tourism industry, stating, "All parts of the tourism sector are significant to us, and we will support them. We believe that tourism agencies connect all elements of the industry".



Deputy minister: Handicrafts sector panacea for cultural, economic growth

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Iran's Deputy Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, Maryam Jalali, unveiled the National Handicrafts Development Document. During a ceremony held at the ministry's office, Jalali emphasized that the document epitomizes the dedication and commitment of all relevant officials and stakeholders, IRNA reported. "This national document was developed spontaneously over two years by artists, experts, and activists in the handicrafts sector," Jalali stated, highlighting the collaborative effort behind its creation. She noted, "We are all striving for the development and prosperity of handicrafts because we believe this sector is a key to our cultural and economic growth." The event saw the participation of various dignitaries, including the Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, and members of the Parliament's handicrafts commission, along with numerous government and private sector managers and seasoned artisans. Jalali reiterated that the goal is to make the document a "people-centered" initiative, aligning it with the objectives of the country's Seventh Development Plan. "We are witnessing a consensus in society, and the National Handicrafts Development Document aims to foster this unity,"



she added. Describing the document as a reflection of the values inherent in handicrafts, Jalali pointed out its significance as a vital tool for job creation and cultural transmission. "Handicrafts are family-oriented, with women being the primary producers in this field," she noted, underscoring the essential role of women in the handicraft industry. Furthermore, Jalali remarked that the formulation of the national document represents a collective effort, stating, "This is not just an event, but the fruit of collaboration among various organizations." She announced the establishment of four working groups to enhance the implementation of the document and achieve better outcomes. Jalali expressed optimism about the support from various sectors, including the government and parliament, declaring, "Handicrafts lead to dignified livelihoods, and we are fortunate to see considerable backing for this field."

Carter and Iran: Clash ...

The 39th president of the United States died on December 29, 2024, at the age of 100, on the anniversary of his trip to Iran. During his historic trip to Iran in late December 1977, which took place on New Year Eve, Carter introduced Iran as "an island of stability in one of the most troubled areas of the world." This visit became a symbol of the clash between global policies and the political and civil transformations occurring in Iran at the time, marking one of the turning points in the contemporary history of the country. In the early years following the fall of the Shah and the victory of the Islamic Revolution, many critics viewed Carter's failure to be re-elected as president of the United States as a result of his mishandling of the hostage crisis at the US Embassy in Tehran, which was seized by "the Muslim Student Followers of the Imam's Line." This is a narrative about Jimmy Carter's life after his presidency, written by an Iranian journalist: "Although Jimmy Carter lived for 44 years after the end of his presidency, he likely thought about those 444 days during all those years when his mind was occupied with how to secure the release of 52 American hostages in Iran. These hostages were held ... as a form of punishment for the US' 25 years of interference in Iranian affairs, and they were released under an agreement in Algeria; precisely when Ronald Reagan was taking the presidential oath." An interesting point to note is that Carter passed away on the anniversary of his trip to Iran. The then-President of the US arrived in Iran on December 31, 1977, along with his wife, Rosalynn Smith, and attended a banquet at Niavaran Palace. Carter's presence in Iran is a narrative of the clash between politics and fate, leaving an unforgettable image in the history of the country's contemporary foreign policy; an image that suggests even the "Island of Stability," from the perspective of the global hegemon's leader, can with-

in just one year become host to a revolution that would challenge this self-proclaimed hegemony in the heart of the Middle East for over four decades. **From birth to politics** Born on October 1, 1924, in Plains, Georgia, Carter became one of the most influential political figures of the 20th century. His father was a conservative and a segregationist, while his mother was a free-thinking woman who devoted a significant part of her life to caring for underprivileged families in Georgia. His political career began in 1962 when he won the Georgia state senate election. At that time, Carter was a supporter of "John F. Kennedy" and was known for his integrity and independent views, although politics did not always favor him. He lost in the Democratic primary for the governorship of Georgia in 1966, but this setback set the stage for his powerful comeback in 1970. Carter not only secured the Democratic nomination this time but also became the governor of Georgia by defeating his Republican opponent. He then focused on the 1976 presidential election. The political climate in the US at that time, especially following the Watergate scandal that led to Richard Nixon's resignation, presented a golden opportunity for him. By analyzing the Democrats' defeat in the 1972 election, Carter concluded that winning the 1976 election required a moderate candidate from outside the power circles in Washington—someone who could restore the public's trust. This strategy propelled him from state governor to president of the US. **Elections and victory of Democrats** Carter was one of the ten candidates in the Democratic Party's primaries for the presidential nomination in 1976. Though unknown to many voters, his firm positions on preventing waste of government resources, advocating for a balanced budget, and addressing the needs of the poor increased his popularity.

In the fall of 1976, his victory in the US presidential election had profound effects on the political landscape of Iran. Historical evidence shows that Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi was not pleased with Carter's victory over Republican candidate Gerald Ford in the US elections. The Shah, who had close ties with the Republicans, especially Richard Nixon, preferred US policies to be pursued under the management of this party. **Carter's policy and Pahlavi regime** Nixon, the Republican president, had adopted policies in support of the Pahlavi regime; extensive sales of military weapons were conducted, the role of regional gendarme was assigned to this regime, and the Pahlavi regime was considered the closest political-military ally of the US in the region. Although Carter's stances on "defending human rights" and "criticizing arms sales to dictatorial regimes" could have raised concerns for the Shah, after Carter entered the White House, he adopted a dual policy. On one hand, he emphasized human rights, political openness, and limiting arms sales, while on the other hand, he gradually leaned towards greater cooperation with the Shah's regime. The bilateral military relations underwent significant changes during the years 1976 to the fall of the regime under Carter's presidency. Initially, restrictions were imposed on the export of military equipment. These restrictions were later lifted, although many military contracts did not reach the implementation stage after the revolution due to specific US laws regarding the export of military equipment and the need for a lengthy process. During Carter's presidency, three main approaches towards third-world countries were observed: Pressuring authoritarian regimes to respect human rights and democracy, reducing military and intelligence presence, and striving for international peace. The Shah of Iran leveraged the support of his friends in the Carter admin-

istration and the US Congress to alleviate external pressures and successfully regained Washington's backing. The Pahlavi regime, influenced by political pressures from human rights organizations and in an effort to win Carter's favor, took measures to reduce these pressures; among them, the dismissal of "Amir Abbas Hoveyda," its prime minister who had held executive responsibilities in accordance with the Shah's wishes for nearly 13 years, followed by his arrest. Additionally, individuals involved in suppressing political groups and opposition parties were arrested and tried. After Hoveyda, "Jamshid Amouzegar" came to power. From then on, as the scope of crises expanded, prime ministers changed one after another because they lacked the capacity to overcome the crises, and cabinet changes did little to sustain the regime or resolve internal issues. In the year 1977, the Shah traveled to the US once, and Carter visited Iran again, when he introduced Iran as "an island of stability." These reciprocal visits and official meetings indicated political support for maintaining the status quo. Until the convening of the Guadeloupe Summit in January 1979, when the internal situation in Iran had reached a critical stage, the US still hoped for the Shah's survival and supported Bakhtiar's government and the establishment of the Regency Council to protect its interests after the Guadeloupe Summit. Therefore, it must be said that Carter retreated from his human rights rhetoric and, like his predecessors, continued to provide unconditional support for the Shah. Carter's historic visit to Iran and his laudatory remarks at the dinner at Niavaran Palace seemed to underscore this policy shift. He stated, "Our views on security issues are closer with no country than with Iran. I have no leader for whom I feel more gratitude and friendship than the Shah," but just a year after these remarks, the Shah fell, and the Islamic Revolution triumphed.