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Mosque cultural centers pioneers of reform, dynamism: Minister

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Abbas Salehi, hailed the country's mosque-based cultural and artistic centers as the "flag-bearers of development", stressing their pivotal role in fostering community engagement and artistic growth.

In a message marking the National Day of Mosque Cultural and Artistic Centers, Salehi pointed to the significance of the 28,000 centers operating across the country, describing them as a "precious asset" that bridges the past and the present, IRNA reported.

"The mosque has long stood as a beacon of guidance, a sanctuary where spirituality and society come together," Salehi said. "It is a place where the human soul, in its pursuit of truth, finds solace, and the light of wisdom is kindled in hearts."

He added that these cultural and artistic hubs have a crucial role to play in keeping the nation's religious and cultural heritage alive.

"If these institutions reach their full potential, they can serve as an inclusive and grassroots platform for public education and cultural development," he noted.

With social, cultural, and media shifts increasingly shaping the lifestyles and identities of young people, Salehi urged mosques to harness the unique potential of these centers to provide a "dynamic and inspiring space for intellectual growth, creativity, and artistic expression" – all within the framework of Islamic values.

He highlighted the centers' potential to act as a bridge between younger generations and their cultural roots, saying, "They can pave the way for rekindling young people's



connection with mosques, transforming these houses of worship into thriving hubs of cultural and artistic influence."

The minister also extended his congratulations to those involved in managing and promoting the centers, particularly as this year's anniversary coincides with Ramadan, the month of the Qur'an and prayer.

The National Day of Mosque Cultural and Artistic Centers, celebrated annually on March 8, serves as a reminder of the enduring role of mosques not only as places of worship but also as vibrant spaces for artistic and cultural enrichment.

32nd Int'l Holy Qur'an Exhibition's children's section inspires learning with interactive programs



Arts & Culture Desk

The 32nd edition of the International Holy Qur'an Exhibition has drawn widespread praise for its well-organized layout and engaging programs, particularly in the children and adolescent section, according to a senior cultural official.

Abdolhossein Khosropanah, secretary of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, toured the exhibition and expressed his appreciation for the thoughtful arrangement of the various sections, ISNA reported. "At first glance, it is evident that the exhibition is meticulously structured, and we are witnessing an overwhelming response from families and different segments of society," he told reporters on the side-

lines of the event.

On the exhibition's embrace of modern advancements, Khosropanah noted that this year's event has stepped up its use of cutting-edge technology, creative industries, and artificial intelligence to promote Qur'anic concepts.

"This is a commendable step forward," he said, acknowledging the efforts made to bring religious teachings closer to younger audiences in an engaging manner.

One of the standout features of this year's exhibition, he emphasized, is the dynamic and thriving presence of the children and adolescent section. "A variety of interactive workshops tailored for younger age groups have truly brought the exhibition to life," he said.

Khosropanah also pointed out that the inclusion of Qur'an-inspired artworks and handicrafts has struck a chord with visitors. "These artistic expressions have caught the eye of many attendees and serve as a testament to the deep-rooted connection between art and spirituality," he remarked.

Summing up his observations, the senior official underscored the exhibition's overall improvement in content and its strategic use of modern tools to spread Qur'anic culture. "This edition has taken a meaningful step toward reinforcing religious values in society," he concluded.

Gaza cease-fire deal ...

Meanwhile, other stakeholders are scrambling to find common ground to prevent the situation from spiraling out of control. Reports indicate that Egypt and Qatar are working on a compromise formula that would facilitate the release of part of the living captives. Their approach seeks to strike a balance between Hamas's demands and Israel's conditions so that neither side feels it has capitulated to the other. While Israel's stance on this proposal remains unclear, it seems Netanyahu is digging in his heels, unwilling to take any step that might be perceived as an admission that the war is over. His political survival depends on sustaining a war footing. Netanyahu's threat to resume the war if Hamas refuses to extend the first phase aligns with this strategy. With Trump offering Netanyahu unconditional backing, the Israeli leader may feel emboldened. However, reigniting full-scale war in Gaza is unlikely to yield decisive gains. At most, Israel might launch limited strikes or commit further atrocities to intimidate Hamas and pressure the resilient population of Gaza—but an all-out war on the scale seen before the cease-fire appears improbable. Hamas's strategy during the first phase has left no doubt: Israel has failed in its goal to eradicate Hamas. Despite the heavy toll of the war and a relentless propaganda offensive, Hamas has not only rebounded militarily but has also managed to expand its recruitment base while maintaining—and even strengthening—public support.

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On the other hand, Netanyahu finds himself in a tight political corner. Domestically, his ruling coalition is plagued by fierce internal disputes—particularly over the conscription of ultra-Orthodox Jews, an issue that has pushed his government to the brink of collapse. To navigate this crisis, he is weaponizing the ongoing war, using it as leverage to maintain balance between his ultra-nationalist allies, such as Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, who insist on conscription, and ultra-Orthodox factions that fiercely oppose it. However, he cannot be certain that resuming the war will lead to the liberation of the captives, just as he was unable to achieve this during the conflict and was forced to accept a cease-fire and negotiate an agreement with Hamas for an exchange. It is also possible that renewed fighting could result in the deaths of more captives and create new complications. At the same time, Netanyahu faces mounting hostility in the Knesset, where opposition parties have accused him of exploiting the war for personal gain. Heated confrontations have become the

norm in parliamentary sessions, with Netanyahu branding his opponents as traitors weakening Israel in wartime, while they, in turn, accuse him of clinging to power at the nation's expense. Public sentiment is also turning against him. According to Israel's Channel 12, a recent poll found that 60% of respondents believe that Netanyahu should step down. Against this backdrop, his threats to reignite the war appear more like a psychological warfare tactic—aimed at unnerving Hamas and breaking the spirit of Gaza's resilient population, who are already enduring unimaginable hardship.

Israeli media outlets have eagerly amplified this fear-mongering, with Channel 12 reporting that the military is preparing to resume hostilities within ten days—with the exact timing hinging on the appointment of Zamir as IDF chief of staff and the arrival of Trump's envoy in Israel. Zamir himself struck an aggressive tone at his inauguration ceremony, issuing direct threats of war against Hamas and Iran.

Trump, too, has thrown his weight behind Netanyahu. Even as his envoys negotiate with Hamas, he has taken to social media to demand the immediate release of all captives, dead or alive, warning that failure to comply will result in the destruction of both Hamas and Gaza's civilian population. This rhetoric of intimidation, aligned with Israel's threats, is clearly intended to create an atmosphere of terror and coercion. Despite all this, Netanyahu appears to have no viable path to securing the captives' release except through negotiation—whether by proceeding with the second phase of the cease-fire or by brokering an alternative deal. Hamas, for its part, will not bow to Israeli coercion and deception. What Tel Aviv failed to achieve through war and unspeakable atrocities, it cannot hope to obtain now through breaches of agreement and empty threats.

In this context, the direct US-Hamas contacts—offering Israeli-American captive releases in exchange for US pressure on Israel to move forward with second-phase talks—may be an attempt to break the deadlock Netanyahu has manufactured for personal gain and keep the door open for a diplomatic solution. The coming days will likely see an escalation in psychological warfare, with heightened threats of renewed conflict and possibly some limited military operations. However, Hamas and the Palestinian resistance are unlikely to cave in to such tactics. Gaza's fate will not be dictated by intimidation and inhumane pressure—captive negotiations will proceed only through dialogue and a mutually agreed framework.

'They' to compete at US WILDsound film festival

Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian filmmaker Morteza Sabzeqaba's short film 'They' will compete at the 8th WILDsound International Film Festival in the United States.

The festival, which runs from March 10 to 20 in Los Angeles, aims to promote storytelling through cinema, showcasing top short films and documentaries worldwide, ILNA reported.

'They,' written and directed by Sabezqaba, has previously won the Best Film Award at Taiwan's 'Three Acts of Goodness' International Film Festival and the Special Prize in the Mediterranean section of Italy's 'Tracce Cinematografiche' Film Festival.

This marks the film's 21st festival appearance. The 15-minute short, produced by Khuzestan's Art Bureau and



filmed in Dezful, features a team including cinematographer Amir Alivaisi, editor and sound designer Farid Daghighaleh, production designer Hamid Nourabadi, and a cast led by Alireza Khodadad, Azim Sabzeqaba, Mehdi Sharifi, and Fatemeh Sayah-Tarfi.

The WILDsound festival will screen its competition films online.

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P%	0.05	Max
S%	1	Max
SiO2%	3.0	Max
Al2O3%	0.7	Max
CaO%	0.9	Max
MgO%	2.50	Max
Moisture%	7.00	Max
Size ave	80%<0.15 mm	

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