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Vol. 7792 ● Wednesday, March 12, 2025 ● 100,000 rials ● 8 pages

# Iran's science, tourism ministries ink cooperation agreement

## Minister: Universities central to national identity, civilizational development

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts and the Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology have signed a memorandum of understanding to enhance collaboration between cultural and academic institutions. During the ceremony, Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, Reza Salehi Amiri, emphasized the vital role of universities in fostering civilization and national identity, IRNA reported. He called for stronger collaboration between the two sectors, stressing that this partnership is essential for achieving shared goals. The agreement aims to harness

scientific, educational, and research capacities to elevate cultural heritage, tourism, and handicrafts while transforming their preservation. It establishes a framework to integrate scientific, technological, and cultural efforts to safeguard national heritage and promote creative industries. The memorandum outlines efforts to engage students and academic elites in protecting cultural, historical, and spiritual heritage, apply scientific methods and innovative technologies in preservation, and support research and theses on Iran's history, culture, and civilization. It also highlights the role of scientific associations and cultural student organizations in national and international programs,

fostering creative industries, and strengthening entrepreneurial ecosystems within the sector. Both ministries will collaborate on scientific, cultural, and entrepreneurial events to promote sustainable tourism, organize technological businesses, and utilize new technologies for heritage preservation. They also pledged to host events honoring national traditions like Nowruz. Salehi Amiri reiterated that universities are central to strengthening national identity and emphasized the importance of joint festivals and conferences as tools to achieve this goal. He highlighted the potential of the Cultural Heritage and Tourism Research Institute and universities working together to ad-



Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, Reza Salehi Amiri (R), and Minister of Science, Research, and Technology, Hossein Simaei Sarraf, hold the agreement signed on March 10, 2025, aimed at strengthening collaboration between cultural and academic institutions. ● YJC

vance research. Minister of Science, Research, and Technology, Hossein Simaei Sarraf, stressed the significance of universities in promoting national identity and called for increased collaboration. He noted that under the Seventh Development Plan, vocational training is set to increase by 40%, with the Ministry of Cultural Heritage as a key partner. Sarraf described strengthening a sense of national belonging



and understanding Iran's heritage as a fundamental necessity. Starting April 4, 2024, scientific and cultural trips will be launched nationwide to deepen students' appreciation of their

identity. He also announced free access to historical sites and museums for students and faculty, initiated by Salehi Amiri, as a model for future university-heritage collaborations.

## Minister calls for urgent library expansion to revitalize reading culture in Iran

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Abbas Salehi, underscored the vital importance of expanding libraries during the 21st anniversary of the establishment of the country's public library system. Speaking at the closing ceremony of the 13th Razavi Reading Festival, Salehi said, "If we want reading to not become a thing of the past, we must take library development more seri-

ously with the support of both public and private resources." Salehi added, "Reading in our country does not reflect the culture and civilization of Iranians, and positive changes must occur in this area," IRNA reported. The minister stressed the need for better access to books, pointing out that the economic conditions have led to a decline in cultural consumption within households. "The cultural consumption basket of families

has decreased in recent years," he said, adding that the share of books in household consumption dropped from 0.18% in 2017 to 0.10% in 2023. Salehi elaborated on the repercussions of this trend, saying, "If this gap in access to books is not addressed, reading will face serious challenges." He emphasized that libraries serve as a crucial second source of access to books, particularly as families are increasingly constrained by their budgets.

Salehi revealed that there are only 49 million books in Iran's public libraries, describing this figure as inadequate. He advocated for a serious commitment to enhancing library resources, adding, "If we want to cultivate a nation of readers, we must focus more on securing library resources." Comparing Iran's library infrastructure to other countries, Salehi noted that there are approximately four libraries for every 100,000 people in Iran, while countries like Russia have

61, Italy 21, and India 11. "To prevent reading from becoming a relic of the past, we must take library development more seriously with the help of public and private resources," he emphasized. The minister called for making libraries more appealing, indicating that over 50% of those who enjoy reading do not visit libraries. "Improving libraries involves various strategies, and we must eliminate obstacles," he added.

## Picasso's message of peace ...

"Museums don't operate in a vacuum; they respond to the times. Selecting Picasso for this exhibition was a deliberate decision—a form of 'museum diplomacy' aimed at fostering cultural exchange. By exhibiting Picasso's works, TMOCA extends an invitation to the world, signaling that art remains a universal language for peace and understanding." He emphasized that many of Picasso's works, such as 'Guernica,' 'Weeping Woman,' and 'Dove of Peace,' were deeply influenced by war, conflict, and human suffering. "These pieces remind us of the hardship and turmoil that past generations endured. Unfortunately, similar tensions persist today, as world leaders and political forces continue to stir up instability. Through this exhibition, we are sending a subtle but firm reminder of the value of peace. This isn't just about showcasing artwork—it's about reigniting an essential humanitarian message."

### Excitement of a full Picasso collection

One of the standout aspects of this exhibition is its comprehensive approach to Picasso's work. "Although some of his pieces have been displayed individual-

ly over the years, never before has such a vast collection of his works been exhibited together in Iran," Dabirinejad noted. After careful consideration, curators decided to bring out a diverse range of Picasso's works, including sculptures, oil paintings, artist books, and an extensive selection of prints. "Picasso was a master of utilizing every available medium—at a time when artists lacked today's digital tools, he turned to printmaking, handcrafted editions, and multiple reproductions to ensure his work reached a wider audience," he explained. This strategy has allowed museums across the world, including TMOCA, to house and share his art with the public. One of the most remarkable inclusions in this exhibition is a set of four artist books, three of which are being unveiled for the first time. Among them is 'La Tauromaquia,' featuring 26 intricately designed images, a reflection of Picasso's Spanish heritage and the country's deep-rooted bullfighting culture. Dabirinejad believes this exhibition offers a broader perspective on Picasso's career. "Most people immediately associate Picasso with Cubism, but this showcase

demonstrates the incredible breadth of his artistic experiments over different periods. It offers visitors a chance to see him in a new light—as an artist who never stopped pushing boundaries."

### Layered narrative experience

This exhibition serves as a golden opportunity for visitors, particularly art students, to gain deeper insight into Picasso's work. As Dabirinejad put it, "Seeing Picasso's artworks sheds light on the social backdrop and the artistic evolution he lived through." The curators have aimed to craft a narrative-driven showcase—not only chronicling the artist's life and societal influences but also unraveling the unique story behind each piece. Every artwork carries its own weight in meaning, shaped by the circumstances under which it was created. This layered, contextual storytelling goes beyond mere technique; it enriches the audience's grasp of the cultural and social dimensions behind the artist's work. One key aspect of museum pieces—especially contemporary art—is that we have a wealth of surrounding information that

helps us frame their significance. That's why this exhibition has taken a twofold approach: Showcasing both the intrinsic narrative of the artworks and their broader historical and artistic context. From a research standpoint, the exhibition team pulled out all the stops to ensure scholarly rigor. As Dabirinejad explained, "With the help of scientific advisors, we aimed to bolster the exhibition's research dimension." Every museum exhibition goes through a meticulous process: First, identifying the artworks, then conducting extensive research and documentation. Throughout this preparatory phase, experts undertook a series of scientific and technical preservation measures to ensure the pieces were displayed in their best possible condition. Criticism often arises when artworks appear in exhibitions with visible damage, dust, or creases—raising concerns about poor conservation. However, it's a given that delicate artworks naturally undergo changes over time due to exposure to humidity, temperature fluctuations, and other environmental factors. To counteract this, museum professionals constantly work behind



TMOCA

the scenes to preserve and restore these pieces, ensuring they remain in optimal shape for both display and long-term conservation.

### Crown jewel: Picasso's masterpiece

When it comes to housing an exhibition of Picasso's works, preservation is paramount. Dabirinejad emphasized, "The moment an exhibition featuring collection pieces kicks off, safeguarding them becomes our top priority." With only a few exceptions that couldn't be displayed in Iran, the museum made a concerted effort to bring out every Picasso work

in its collection. This extensive showcase includes 66 pieces, with one of the standout attractions being The Painter and His Model, a signature Picasso masterpiece making its debut in this exhibition. Running until May 21, the exhibition is expected to draw in waves of visitors, especially during the Nowruz holiday. "We believe that with the enthusiasm of artists, critics, and the media, this exhibition will be a gateway to showcasing Iran's rich cultural and artistic heritage on a global scale. Judging by the buzz already surrounding it, a tremendous response is on the horizon."