



Anzali Free Zone to become Iran's handicraft export hub to Caspian Sea nations

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Ministry of Cultural Heritage is set to transform Anzali Free Zone into a major export hub for handicrafts to Caspian Sea littoral states, the deputy minister for handicrafts announced at the seventh Iran Expo 2025. Maryam Jalali, during a meeting with Mostafa Taati-Moghaddam, CEO of Anzali Free Zone Organization, emphasized the strategic role of the northern free zone as a "launching pad" for Iranian handicrafts to reach markets around the Caspian Sea, IRNA reported. "Anzali has the potential to become a miniature Iran, a space where foreign tourists and traders can familiarize themselves with Iran's cultural diversity whilst benefitting from the free zone infrastructure for handicraft trade," Jalali pointed out. The deputy minister stressed the need to bolster export infra-

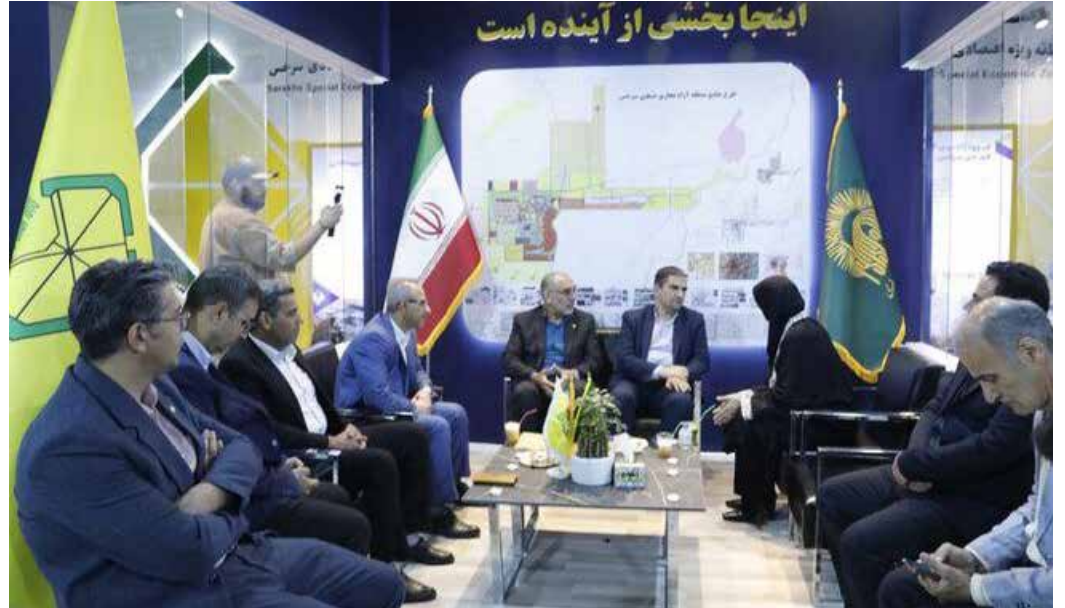
structure, noting that "establishing a specialized customs office for handicrafts, standardizing products, and enhancing artisans' commercial knowledge are our top priorities in this region." Taati-Moghaddam revealed plans for the country's largest handicraft complex in Anzali, centered around wickerwork produced in the national wickerwork village of Fashtake. "This complex, involving more than 1,800 artisans, will be operational by the end of the current year, serving as a platform for training, production, exhibition and export of handicrafts," he stated. He also announced the launch of Antonov-26 cargo flights between Rasht and a Russian province, with a capacity of six tons, scheduled bi-weekly specifically for transporting handicrafts to target markets around the Caspian Sea. The deputy minister highlighted the establishment of a public joint-stock handicraft export



Iran's Deputy for Handicrafts and Traditional Arts Maryam Jalali (3rd R) meets with Mostafa Taati-Moghaddam (6th L), CEO of Anzali Free Zone Organization on the sidelines of the Iran Expo 2025 on May 1, 2025.

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development company that will enter the capital market. "This company can play a key role in attracting investors and transform Anzali into one of the country's main gateways for handicraft exports," she explained. Iran's handicraft exports have reached \$224 million in the current Persian calendar year, with an equal amount estimated to have been exported through suitcase trade. The government is actively working to remove barriers to handicraft exports, with the resolution of foreign exchange commitments in collaboration with the Central Bank being a major step forward.



Jalali emphasized that free zones, particularly Anzali, offer unparalleled capacity for implementing economic diplomacy based on culture due to their

proximity to important markets like Russia. "Iranian handicrafts are not just commodities but living narratives of the country's history, art,

and ecosystem, which have eager audiences in today's world," she remarked, describing handicrafts as a vital link between economy and tourism.

Legacy of Allama Muhammad Iqbal

Iran pays tribute to 'poet of the East'

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran held a commemorative conference celebrating the literary and philosophical legacy of Allama Muhammad Iqbal at Tehran's Art Bureau on Friday, bringing together scholars and poets from Iran and Pakistan to explore the influential thinker's multifaceted contributions. Organized by ECO Cultural Institute and Art Bureau, the program featured speeches by distinguished Iranian scholars Mohammad Baqaei, Mohammad Reza Sangari, and Zahid Munir,

who holds the Urdu language chair at University of Tehran, on various aspects of Iqbal's thought and literary works. The event also featured poetry recitations by Iranian and Pakistani poets dedicated to Iqbal, IRIB news Agency reported. "Iqbal Lahori is like the Rumi of our time," said Sangari during the conference. "He thoroughly understood Iranian philosophy and was influenced by great figures such as Sohrevardi, Avicenna, and Mulla Sadra". Mohammad Baqaei, a prominent Iqbal scholar, expressed disappointment

over the lack of involvement from the Pakistani Embassy in recent commemorative events. He emphasized Iqbal's complex personality, describing him as "the most Iranian non-Iranian" who played a role for Persian language and culture in the subcontinent similar to what Ferdowsi did for Iran. "Iqbal was a religious intellectual who accepted modern rational values while updating religious thought for contemporary times," Baqaei noted, adding that many themes found in modern Persian poetry can be traced back to Iqbal's work.

Saeed Lashgari, Deputy for Provincial Affairs at Art Bureau, highlighted Iqbal's role as a cultural bridge between Iran and Pakistan. "Iqbal's personality serves as a cultural bridge between Iran and Pakistan. He played a prominent role in expanding cultural and literary interactions between the two countries". The event also featured a small exhibition displaying 60 book titles on Iqbal published by the ECO Cultural Institute. This conference follows a tradition of Iqbal commemorations in Iran, including previous events held at Tehran Uni-



versity and other academic institutions. Allama Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938), known as the "Poet of the East," is revered for his philosophical and poetic works that helped reshape Muslim thought in the early 20th century. His message of Islamic unity and revival continues to resonate across the Muslim world.

Printing industry drives five centuries of change: Iran's culture minister



Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Abbas Salehi on Friday called the printing industry the "driving force" behind every major revolution of the past five centuries, crediting print with shaping the modern world. Speaking at a ceremony marking International Workers' Day at Bank Melli Iran's Printing and Publishing Company, Salehi paid tribute to workers lost in the Shahid Rajaei Port incident, IRNA reported.

Salehi described print workers as "artists" and said humanity has seen two major turning points: First, the discovery of fire, and second, the invention of printing. He said the latter allowed people to "discover and express their infinite human dimensions." "Printing has been the engine behind all modern revolutions," Salehi said, naming the Renaissance, the 17th-century scientific revolution, political upheavals in France, Russia and China, as well as the telecommunications, electronic, digital



Iran's Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Abbas Salehi (6th L) pose for a group photo at a ceremony held at Bank Melli Iran's Printing and Publishing Company in Tehran on May 1, 2025.

● IRNA

and artificial intelligence revolutions. In each case, print played a "pivotal and driving" role, he said. Salehi called print "not just an episode in life, but the dawn of humanity's continuous movement" over the past 500 years. He praised the industry as "art and even beyond art," noting that the "fabric of many great arts is tied to printing." He also called it "culture and beyond culture," saying print is woven into books, media and advertising, and "industry and beyond industry," as many sectors depend on it. Workers in printing, Salehi said, "hold a lofty position" and "help humanity along many paths of progress." Printing, invented in the mid-15th century, is widely recognized for fueling the spread of knowledge and sparking the modern era.

Iranian play to be staged at Tajikistan's int'l theater festival



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An acclaimed Iranian play is set to take the stage at Tajikistan's International Festival of Professional Theaters this week, according to Iran's Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance. The play, 'Fox Hunting Manners,' written by Ebrahim Adelnia and directed by Mohammad Shakeri, will represent Iran at the festival in Dushanbe from May 1 to May 7, IRNA reported. Nadereh Rezai, Iran's Deputy Minister

for Artistic Affairs, arrived in Tajikistan's capital on Friday to attend the festival and hold talks with senior Tajik officials in the fields of culture and the arts. Upon her arrival, she was welcomed by Deputy Minister of Culture of the Republic of Tajikistan Manuchehr Sharifzoda, and Iranian embassy representatives. 'Fox Hunting Manners' drew "widespread acclaim" at Iran's 43rd Fajr International Theater Festival earlier this year, where it was hailed by critics and audiences alike for its powerful storytelling and direction. The Dushanbe festival, now in its third edition, brings together theater troupes from across the region and beyond, aiming to "strengthen cultural ties" and promote artistic innovation. The Iranian delegation's participation underscores ongoing efforts to boost bilateral cooperation in the arts, with both countries emphasizing the "significance" of such exchanges for their cultural sectors. The Iranian Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance said the festival "offers a unique opportunity" for Iranian artists to reach new audiences and engage with their international peers.