

Iran’s minister hails artists’ unity as ‘national asset’



● ILNA

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran’s Culture and Islamic Guidance Minister Abbas Salehi on Thursday praised what he called the “unexpected” national unity shown during the recent 12-day conflict with Israel, describing the public solidarity and artists’ response as a “national asset” that must be preserved. Speaking in Tehran during a meeting with members of the House of Cinema, Salehi said the war marked a rare moment in Iran’s modern history. “It was a completely unexpected national defense. Israel thought it could quickly bring Iran to its knees,” he told the gather-

ing, according to the ministry’s Public Relations Center, ILNA reported. “They forgot the Iranian people. Their perception was based on dissidents’ statements and flawed surveys,” he said, adding that such unity cannot be “fabricated overnight” in nations with short historical roots. Salehi commended artists for stepping in “without orders or directives,” arguing their engagement reflected Iran’s social strength. “Enemies might have counted on celebrities siding with them, but they became the people’s senior officers in this 12-day resistance,” he said. Addressing filmmakers direct-

ly, Salehi warned that without Iran’s own narrative, “executioner and martyr will switch places” in global perception. “The world of tomorrow is the world of images, and cinema creates that world. A two-minute clip can do the work of a two-hour speech,” he said, urging artists to produce works that portray the national experience accurately. He stressed that Israel spends vast sums to make its narrative dominant internationally, and called on Iranian cinema to counter such campaigns. “Even if you are upset with officials, don’t abandon Iran. This country is a millennia-old trust,” he said.

Iranian heritage groups urge UNESCO action after Israeli strikes

Arts & Culture Desk

More than 50 Iranian cultural heritage NGOs called on UNESCO on June 27 to take “binding measures” to prevent further damage to Iran’s historical sites after Israeli airstrikes hit areas near the Bisotun World Heritage Site earlier this month. In a letter sent to Audrey Azoulay, UNESCO’s director-general, the organizations condemned Israel’s attacks that began on June 13, warning they pose a “serious threat” to Iran’s cultural heritage, ILNA reported. The groups urged UNESCO to issue an official statement condemning the strikes and to consider referring the issue to the

UN Security Council if attacks continue. “Military actions that damage historical monuments and cultural sites are a clear violation of human rights,” they wrote, citing the 1954 Hague Convention and UN Security Council Resolution 2347 (2017) on protecting cultural heritage during armed conflict. The NGOs said drone and missile strikes landed as close as 3 km from Taq-e Bostan, an ancient Sassanid rock relief complex near Kermanshah in western Iran, according to a report by Iranian news agency ILNA. The organizations warned such attacks could trigger “cultural catastrophes” similar to those seen in other war-torn countries.

Iran hosts 27 UNESCO World Heritage Sites, including Persepolis and Bisotun, which contains inscriptions from Darius the Great dating back to the 5th century BCE. The groups said air raids near these sites raise “deep concerns” over irreversible damage. The letter asked UNESCO to deploy expert teams to Iran, form monitoring committees, and use its “executive and binding tools” to prevent future strikes on cultural sites. Signatories included the Iranian Association of Conservation Experts, the Pars Tourism House, the Tabriz Cultural Heritage Friends Society, and the Shush Ziggurat Cultural Tourism Association.



● UNESCO

Explore ancient wonders beneath surface of Hilehvar village

Iranica Desk

There are numerous villages in East Azarbaijan Province built with hand-crafted architecture nestled within cliffs. Among them, Hilehvar village stands out as a site that offers much more than just visual interest — it provides visitors with an untouched experience of history and natural beauty. Located in the north of Osku, roughly 44 kilometers from Tabriz and just two kilometers north of Kandovan, this historic village has a long and intriguing history. Although now abandoned, Hilehvar was registered on Iran’s National Heritage List in August 2005. At first glance, the village remains largely hidden and not immediately visible;

it is a place shrouded in mystery. As you travel from Osku to Kandovan, you’ll notice numerous cavities in the ground beside the road. These cavities are the buried houses of the ancient Hilehvar village — silent, abandoned structures brimming with solitude, once the homes of many. Local tradition suggests that its residents hid within these caves during enemy attacks on Kandovan village. The houses are so well concealed that even from close range, they are hardly visible, enhancing the village’s mysterious charm. The precise age of Hilehvar remains uncertain, but based on pottery fragments discovered at the site, it is likely that the village was inhabited from the

7th to the 12th centuries AH — spanning the Ilkhanid to Safavid periods. Additionally, the presence of an ancient cemetery nearby further affirms its historical importance. The inhabitants originally excavated their homes using volcanic sediments, forming cave-like structures deep within the earth. It is estimated that the village once boasted around 200 underground houses. Unfortunately, many — about 145 — have been buried under mud and debris over time, primarily due to the village’s location on the lower slopes of the mountain and its exposure to seasonal floods. This positioning causes water to infiltrate during rainy seasons, gradually filling the homes with mud.

Nevertheless, the East Azarbaijan Province’s Cultural Heritage Organization has unearthed 55 houses so far, preparing them for public visitation. This effort highlights Hilehvar’s enormous potential for future research across various fields, including architecture, sociology, ethnography, and archaeology. In upcoming years, it could become a vital site for in-depth studies, revealing hidden facets of this remarkable village. The architecture of Hilehvar village demonstrates extraordinary ingenuity in adapting to natural conditions. The design of the caves ensures that during winter, the interiors stay warm and cozy, while in summer, they block out the heat, providing a cool refuge from the scorching

sun. These features make underground living feasible and comfortable, with spaces such as rooms, kitchens, and storage areas integrated within the structures. Evidence indicates that the residents engaged in farming and animal husbandry. The presence of a manger or stable near the houses, constructed to shelter animals during cold seasons, supports this. Additionally, discoveries of ovens within some units suggest these spaces were used for cooking and heating. Traditional crafts like carpet and kilim weaving were common among the local people. East Azarbaijan Province boasts a mountainous, relatively pristine climate. Its higher-than-average rainfall compared to cen-

tral Iranian cities supports a diverse array of wild plants. The humidity remains fairly low, creating a balanced ecosystem. In spring, Hilehvar and its surroundings enjoy pleasant weather and stunning natural scenery. Summers can be hot, but temperatures rarely reach the extremes seen in central Iran or Tehran, remaining comfortably warm. When autumn arrives, the weather cools progressively. Winters are characterized by severe cold and heavy snowfall, covering the landscape in white and transforming the region into a winter paradise. These climatic and geographic features together offer visitors a truly unique and memorable experience.



● IRNA