

Minister: National treasures ‘fully protected’ during Israeli strikes on Iran

Social Desk

Iran’s cultural treasures emerged intact from the recent 12-day war between Israel and Iran, Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Reza Salehi Amiri said on Sunday, crediting swift and round-the-clock efforts to protect key museum assets.

Speaking at a meeting of hoteliers and tourism officials in Tehran’s Babataher Hotel, Salehi Amiri said that despite the intensity of the attacks, “not a single piece from the national treasure sustained damage.”

According to the minister, valuable artifacts were transferred to secure storage facilities shortly after the hostilities broke out on June 13, ISNA reported.

“The moment the first signs of escalation appeared,” he said, “our teams were mobilized without pause.”

He announced that a dedicated task force has now been formed to gather field data and assess war-related challenges across Iran’s tourism sector. Its report will soon be submitted directly to President Masoud Pezeshkian.

Salehi Amiri urged the press to reflect what he called the “unshakable dignity” of the Iranian public during the war, saying the nation had portrayed “a

lasting image of Iranian honor.” He called on media outlets to take on the “responsible task” of amplifying that message on the global stage.

The minister described the early morning of June 13—the day Israel launched its first strikes—as “the explosion point of a long-term project” that had been in the making for years. He pointed to past assassinations of nuclear scientists as part of a broader, drawn-out plan. “They believed Iran was too worn down—internally and externally—to withstand another blow. That was their strategic miscalculation,” he said.

According to Salehi Amiri, the war underscored two strategic fronts where Iran must now operate simultaneously: Diplomacy and resistance. He cited President Pezeshkian’s push to deepen regional and international ties, including “productive talks” with Egypt in recent weeks.

While acknowledging the strain on Iran’s tourism infrastructure, he praised hotels and guesthouses for their response. Many, he said, “opened their doors for free” to displaced families, showing “compassion, ethics, and a deep sense of national duty.”

The minister promised that hoteliers’ war-related grievances—raised during



the Tehran meeting—would be pursued “as rightful and lawful demands.” He said the government was drafting support packages aimed at easing the burden, including in banking, insurance, and tax relief. “Tourism is not just a business,” he said, “it’s a pillar of our na-

tional economy and cultural identity.” Salehi Amiri also told attendees that the cabinet had been briefed with a comprehensive report on the protection of cultural heritage during the conflict. “With vigilance and coordination, we kept our heritage safe,” he said.

He concluded by underscoring that the government remains “in debt to the people,” noting that powers had been delegated to ministries and provincial governors to ensure faster delivery of essential goods and public services. “We see ourselves only as servants of this nation,” he said.

Over 230,000 Afghans left Iran in June ahead of return deadline: IOM



More than 230,000 Afghans left Iran in June, most of them deported, as returns surge ahead of a deadline set by Tehran, the United Nations migration agency

said on Monday. The number of returns from Iran rose dramatically in recent weeks. Afghans have reported increased deportations ahead of

the July 6 deadline announced by Iran for undocumented Afghans to leave the country. From June 1-28, 233,941 people returned from Iran to Afghanistan, International Organization for Migration (IOM) spokesman Avand Azeez Agha told AFP, with 131,912 returns recorded in the week of June 21-28 alone. Since January, “691,049 people have returned, 70 percent of whom were forcibly sent back”, he added. For several days last week, the number reached 30,000 per day, the IOM said, with numbers expected to increase ahead of the deadline. Afghans spilled into an IOM-run reception center out of buses ar-

iving back-to-back at the Islam Qala border point in western Afghanistan’s Herat province on Saturday. The recent returns have been marked by a sharp increase in the number of families instead of individuals, the UN said, with men, women and children lugging suitcases carrying all their belongings. Many have few assets and few prospects for work, with Afghanistan facing entrenched poverty and steep unemployment. The country is four years into a fragile recovery from decades of war under Taliban authorities, who have called for a “dignified” return of migrants and refugees from neighboring countries.

Kabul’s Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi raised the Taliban government’s concerns in a meeting with Iran’s ambassador, according to a statement, saying: “A coordinated mechanism should be put in place for the gradual return of migrants.” The cash-strapped government faces challenges in integrating the influx of returnees, which has piled on to hundreds of thousands also forced out in recent years from Pakistan – another traditional host of Afghans fleeing conflict and humanitarian crises. Severe international aid cuts have also hamstrung UN and NGO responses, with the IOM saying it was “only able to assist a fraction of those in need”.

“On some high-volume days, such as recently at Islam Qala, assistance reached as few as three percent of undocumented returnees,” it said in a recent statement. Returnees AFP spoke to in recent days at the border cited mounting pressure by Iranian authorities and increased deportations, with none pointing to the recent Iran-Israel war as a spur to leave the country. However, “regional instability – particularly the fallout from the Israel-Iran conflict – and shifting host country policies have accelerated returns, overwhelming Afghanistan’s already fragile humanitarian and development systems”, the UN mission in Afghanistan, UNAMA, said in a statement.

Tehran officials revive push for mandatory shelters after Israel-Iran strike

Social Desk

Iranian authorities are renewing calls for mandatory safe rooms and shelters in residential buildings, after a 12-day war with Israel exposed the lack of secure civilian infrastructure in the face of airstrikes.

The conflict, which erupted on June 13 after an Israeli strike killed senior Iranian military and scientific figures, underscored the need for better public shelter systems. US forces joined the offensive days later, targeting Iran’s nuclear sites in Natanz, Fordow, and Isfahan. Iran responded with “crushing” missile strikes before a ceasefire was reached on June 24, IRNA reported.

But as the dust settles, the war has reignited a long-dormant debate. “This was a wake-up call,” said Ali Beitollahi, senior researcher at the Road, Housing and Urban Development Re-

search Center. “We’ve seen again what happens when planning stops at talk.” For decades, Iranian officials have floated plans to build reinforced shelters or safe rooms in homes to guard against both war and natural disasters like earthquakes. But none of the proposals ever got off the ground. After the 2003 Bam earthquake, public interest surged briefly, then faded.

Tehran City Council Chairman Mehdi Chamran said last week a new motion will be tabled requiring buildings with more than 50 residential units to include shelters equipped with basic facilities. Multi-level parking garages may also be repurposed as emergency shelters, he said. Experts say Iran’s seismic vulnerability adds urgency to the issue. “Iran sits on multiple fault lines,” Beitollahi noted. “We cannot afford to forget the lessons of war and disaster every time the emotions cool.”

While several agencies—from the Ministry of Interior to the National Disaster Management Organization—could take charge, Beitollahi stressed the absence of clear legal obligations has left responsibility adrift. “No law, no follow-through,” he said. “Even a cabinet directive would do the job, if enforced.”

He argued that multipurpose underground spaces, including metro stations built with dual-use in mind, offer practical and economic solutions. “These aren’t just war bunkers,” he added. “They’re about saving lives, when the shaking starts or the sirens go off.”

The proposal also calls for a nationwide rollout of safe rooms built with reinforced walls and no debris risk. Beitollahi believes such spaces must become mandatory, not optional. “When seconds count, you need somewhere to run,” he said. “This can’t be left to chance.”

