

Significance of Masuleh’s Alam Bandi ritual as a religious heritage

Iranica Desk

The lunar month of Muharram is one of the most sacred and revered periods in the Islamic calendar. It serves as a time for reflection, remembrance, and deep reverence for Imam Hussein (PBUH) and his companions’ martyrdom at Karbala. Ashura, the tenth day of Muharram, holds immense significance as it commemorates the day when Imam Hussein (PBUH) and his followers sacrificed their lives fighting against tyranny, injustice, and oppression. This day stands not only as a symbol of sacrifice and martyrdom but also as a powerful reminder of resistance, steadfastness, and the ongoing struggle for justice. Throughout this sacred month, mourning rituals and ceremonies are performed across the Muslim world, expressing love and devotion to Ahl al-Bayt (PBUH), the family of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and highlighting the importance of upholding Islamic values, standing against oppression, and promoting moral integrity. These observances serve to keep alive the legacy of Imam Hussein (PBUH) and the spirit of Ashura, inspiring generations anew, chn.ir wrote.

One unique tradition associated with Muharram, particularly in Masuleh, Gilan Province, is the Alam Bandi Ritual — literally meaning “flag rising.” This ritual has garnered international recognition and attracts a large number of religious pilgrims from across Iran and around the world every year. The event, which is of-



ficially registered on Iran’s National Heritage List, takes place annually at sunset on the sixth day of Muharram. During this ceremony, residents of this historic city, many of whom reside in other parts of Iran and even abroad, return to their ancestral hometowns specifically to participate in this revered ritual, honoring the

customs of their ancestors. The ceremony begins with mourners, adhering to an old custom, rubbing cymbals against each other atop rooftops and courtyards of neighborhood mosques while blowing traditional trumpets. This melodious sound echoes throughout the streets of Masuleh, drawing the residents and

mourners from all four neighborhoods of the city toward the mosques. The melody’s resonance awakens a collective consciousness of the event’s start, prompting communities to gather at their respective neighborhood mosques. This religious ceremony is centered at the shrine of Imamzadeh Aun ibn Ali

(PBUH). Initially, residents from the four neighborhoods transfer their Alams — draped in green cloth and decorated with symbolic motifs related to Ashura — to the shrine. These Alam are then blessed and prepared by trustees representing each district. Following this, the mourning groups participate in the

rites, receiving their Alams before returning to their neighborhoods to continue the mourning process. A distinctive feature of this ritual is the Alam used during the ceremony. Unlike typical Alams, this one is uniquely shaped vertically. It is believed that, owing to the distinctive architecture and tiered rooftops of

Masuleh’s houses, the Alam was intentionally designed in this form, reflecting the village’s characteristic style and cultural heritage.

It is noteworthy that most houses in Masuleh open their doors to offer donations during these days. The local inhabitants serve traditional refreshments such as cinnamon tea, hot milk, and sweets cherished in the region. Additionally, sheep are sacrificed as offerings for mourners, in accordance with traditional customs. One of the remarkable aspects of this ceremony is its purity from superstitions; it continues to be held annually with deep respect and devotion, preserving its original traditions and significance.

Imamzadeh Aun ibn Ali (PBUH) rose after the uprising of Mukhtar to seek revenge for Imam Hussein’s (PBUH) martyrdom at Ashura.

The Alams and banners used in the ceremonies remain in the mosques of the four neighborhoods until the end of the month of Safar. Until the day of Tasu’a, the banners are dressed in green, symbolizing ongoing mourning and hope. On Ashura, however, these green garments are removed, and the Alams are dressed in black, signifying mourning and grief.

Most Muharram rituals in Gilan Province attract large crowds of visitors from all over Iran and around the world. These events stand among the most revered and colorful expressions of Islamic mourning, deeply enriching the cultural and spiritual fabric of the region.

IRNA

Improving infrastructure in Kalat to boost tourism

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Kalat is considered one of Iran’s border cities, situated in the northeastern part of Khorasan Razavi Province. The name Kalat translates to fortress, rampart, or citadel. Its historical significance dates back to the Afsharid era and the reign of Nader Shah, which is why it is also renowned as Kalat Naderi. In history, Kalat was known as a storage place for valuable jewels and spoils. Notably, the city was attacked 14 times by Timur Lang, yet he was never able to conquer it. Nestled among the heights of the Hezar Masjid Mountains, Kalat is famed as the land of impenetrable fortresses,

with the rugged mountains serving as a natural barrier that provides formidable protection. The terrain results in a cold climate, and visitors can enjoy fresh, pollution-free air during their trips. Winters here tend to be quite cold. Kalat continues to hold its strategic importance and rich historical significance. Its unique landscape and depth of history make it a compelling destination for travelers interested in natural beauty and cultural heritage. Recently, the governor of Kalat, in an interview with ISNA, described the city as the “jewel of eastern Iran’s natural history” and emphasized that Kalat is now

poised for a significant leap forward in the tourism sector. Abulfath Lashgari highlighted that this region has long been celebrated as one of the most beautiful spots of Khorasan Razavi Province, attracting enthusiasts of nature and history alike, according to ISNA. He noted that millions of visitors come annually to explore attractions such as the Khorshid Mansion and other historical sites. Currently, there are around 150 ecolodges operating within the county, serving tourists and visitors. While accommodation options have improved compared to the past, the governor acknowledged that, given the large

influx of tourists, there is still room for further development. Lashgari stressed the urgent need to develop tourism infrastructure and facilities. He emphasized the importance of investment in the hospitality sector and noted that recent meetings with over 30 investors aim to facilitate this progress. Significant steps have already been taken, including initiatives to improve tourism infrastructure, enhance drinking water supplies, and install stairs in the Qarasu neighborhood — all aimed at increasing tourist satisfaction. He also discussed efforts to regulate unofficial lodging establishments, stating that

all such places must obtain the necessary permits. Issuing permits in Kalat is not an obstacle, and the priority remains on enhancing tourism services and facilities. Lashgari encouraged young villagers and female household heads interested in ecotourism activities to benefit from accessible facilities, as this can create employment opportunities and increase income in rural areas. Referring to the region’s many natural and historical attractions, Lashgari highlighted five perennial rivers, three large springs, several historical sites, and three major dams, which draw many tourists throughout the year.

He pointed out that the city’s roads, currently in suboptimal condition, need upgrading. Thanks to efforts by the city’s representative in Parliament, construction has begun to upgrade the Mashhad-Kalat highway, which will include additional lanes. This project is expected to take seven years and aims to facilitate tourist travel while reducing traffic accidents. He further noted that Kalat’s unique historical and natural features have turned it into a popular destination for travelers. The villages, with their rich culture, warm hospitality, and pristine landscapes, can offer visitors unforgettable experiences. These attributes will help position

Kalat as a preferred destination for both domestic and international tourists. Emphasizing that developing tourism will benefit the local economy and aid in the preservation of cultural traditions, Lashgari said that with active community participation and the creation of new employment opportunities, sustainable development and conservation of natural and cultural resources are achievable. He finalized by stating that with its vast potentials, Kalat could soon rank among Iran’s leading tourist destinations, contributing significantly to the region’s economic and cultural prosperity.

