

Iran touts national unity in crisis as cultural sector gains government backing

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, Reza Salehi Amiri, highlighted national unity during recent crises and outlined efforts to strengthen the country's cultural sectors at a high-level policy meeting on Sunday in Tehran.

Salehi Amiri said the nation passed a critical test during the recent 12-day war, crediting "the people's dignity" and "national unity" for repelling external pressures, IRNA reported.

He stressed that the government, alongside the armed forces and citizens, secured essential supplies like food, fuel, and healthcare during this period. The minister also noted his ministry's focus on maintaining organizational stability and pursuing reforms through "calm, logical, and strategic analysis" rather than rushed changes.

The meeting brought together four senior ministers—from communications, interior, labor and social welfare—and a top cultural adviser to the First Vice President, showing a rare alignment of government bodies supporting Iran's cultural heritage, tourism, and handicrafts sectors. Officials described this collaboration as strengthening the "civilizational triangle" critical to Iran's cul-

tural governance and soft power amid mounting external challenges.

Communications Minister Sattar Hashemi underscored the role of technology in expanding Iran's cultural and religious tourism outreach.

He referred to recent preparations for the Arbaeen pilgrimage, stating, "Technology must be our bridge to the world." The ministry coordinated with Iraqi telecom providers to enhance connectivity for millions of pilgrims, part of a wider plan to grow religious tourism using digital infrastructure.

Interior Minister Eskandar Momeni outlined Iran's ambitious targets under the Seventh Development Plan to attract at least 15 million foreign tourists annually. "This is just the starting point," he said, framing the ministry's cultural mission as "historic," not merely administrative. He pointed to the increase in UNESCO World Heritage sites from three at the 1979 revolution to 29 today as proof of Iran's long-term strategy to promote its cultural treasures globally.

Zia Hashemi, cultural deputy to the First Vice President, highlighted the symbolic role of war martyrs in Iran's cultural heritage. Calling heritage workers "anonymous soldiers of Iran's cultural front," he shared how visiting



the Soltaniyeh Dome profoundly affected him: "You don't leave the same person after seeing it." Officials described the meeting as a

sign of "institutional maturity" in cultural governance. By aligning ministries and resources, the government aims to bolster cultural diplomacy, elevate

artisans' status, and protect identity-shaping assets amid what they called "narrative warfare" and global "Iranophobia."

Iran honors martyred artist Mansoureh Alikhani with Sarajevo exhibit



Arts & Culture Desk

Iran opened an art exhibition in Sarajevo on Sunday showcasing the works of Mansoureh Alikhani, a painter martyred in an Israeli strike on Tehran in June, the Iranian cultural office in Bosnia and Herzegovina said.

The exhibition, organized by Iran's Islamic Culture and Relations Organization, features 20 paintings

by Alikhani along with her biography in Bosnian and English. The works, sent to Sarajevo as part of a broader cultural diplomacy initiative, aim to spotlight the "crimes" of Israel during its military operations against Iran, ILNA reported.

Born in 1967 in the northern city of Noshahr, Alikhani earned her undergraduate and graduate degrees in painting from Alzahra Uni-

versity and Soore University in Tehran. She later taught at Kashan University of Art, Soore Art School, and several private institutions. Her professional record includes solo and group exhibitions, book illustrations, festival jury service, and awards from national art competitions.

Alikhani was killed on June 15 during Israeli missile strikes on residential areas of Tehran, which Iran described as part of "an unprovoked act of aggression." The attack drew international condemnation and fueled tensions between the two countries.

Iran had previously mounted a similar exhibit in Sarajevo, displaying images of children killed during a 12-day war. Cultural envoys say such efforts are meant to "bear witness through art" to the human toll of military escalation.

Iran seeks UNESCO status for ancient Sassanian city of Darabgerd

Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian authorities have begun the process of nominating the ancient city of Darabgerd — considered the world's first circular city — for inscription on UNESCO's World Heritage List, a provincial heritage official said on Sunday.

Sadegh Zare', acting deputy for cultural heritage at the Fars provincial tourism department, told IRNA that Darabgerd dates back to the Sassanian Empire and holds "undeniable historical value."

Built in the third century AD, the city is located in southeastern Fars province, near the border with Hormozgan, about 225 kilometers from Shiraz. Its circular layout and triple concentric walls inspired later Sassanian urban designs, including Firuzabad and Bishapur.

Zare' said Darabgerd was meant to be inscribed on the UNESCO list alongside other Sassanian landscapes like Firuzabad, Bishapur and Sarvestan, but the lack of archaeological research delayed its candidacy.

He added that registration requires a "complete dossier," including archaeological studies, protective measures and a long-term management plan. Funding has now been secured to kick-start the application. "Around 30 billion rials (\$50,000) from the Oil Ministry's social responsibility funds have been earmarked," Zare' said, though he cautioned that the funds are shared with other infrastructure needs, making short-term full allocation unlikely.

He stressed the need to "secure further support"



to advance the file over the next year.

The final submission to UNESCO depends on Iran's national quota and annual priorities set by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, Zare' said.

He proposed that Darabgerd could be added to the existing "Sassanid Archaeological Landscape of Fars Region" listing.

Darabgerd was both a military and administrative stronghold. Archaeological evidence shows the site once featured a vast moat and three circular defense walls — a model later echoed across the empire. Today, it remains the best-preserved circular Sassanian city and offers a rare window into the empire's urban planning evolution.

The city is also referenced in Ferdowsi's 'Shahnameh' which recounts, "When he raised the city's wall... they named it Darabgerd."

Darab County sits in the southeast corner of Fars Province, neighboring Hormozgan.

Rational, flexible diplomacy ...

Should snapback be triggered, conditions will tighten: all UN sanctions would be reinstated, the issue would be referred to the UN Security Council, and Iran might fall under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. At the same time, Iran must display initiative in its talks with various parties, in order to pull the nuclear file and sanctions relief out of the current compressive state.

Western media report that Europe has

offered a six-month pause on snapback activation—this could open a window for diplomacy, provided Iran moves away from top-down diplomacy at the negotiation table. If these six months are treated as a genuine opportunity, Iran must take fresh and different steps. A new political structure is needed to ease off tensions with the West and resolve outstanding issues.

In fact, Iran faces a technical dispute with Europe and a security anxiety with

the United States. Both remain unresolved. Europeans are generally more flexible than the Americans, but US policy is heavily influenced by pro-Israeli lobbying. Behind the scenes, the US and Israel are covertly pressuring Europe to provoke snapback of sanctions. Many American senators are pressuring Europe to do so. In such a climate, Iran continues to deal with marginal domestic and foreign policy issues—but it must accept that policy is time- and

context-dependent. Today, Iran needs to lean on more rational and flexible diplomacy.

A major critique of current foreign policy is the lack of initiative and diversified scenarios. The best initiative now would be to reduce the current tensions surrounding IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi. Neither he is coming to Iran, nor is Iran prepared, given certain stances, to host him. However, his deputy and a proposed expert team are

scheduled to visit Iran. Hopefully Iran will agree so they can see first-hand the state of its nuclear facilities following Israeli and US military strikes. Iran could allow inspectors to return within a reasonable timeframe—under appropriate security and safety protocols—so they can prepare an acceptable report. Such a report could reduce tension between Iran, Europe, and the United States, opening new avenues for fresh negotiations.