



Tehran handicrafts fair becomes turning point in Iran's cultural event history

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's 37th National Handicrafts Exhibition, hailed as a watershed moment in the country's art and cultural scene, generated nearly \$18.8 million in direct sales and led to a \$50 million international agreement, according to the Ministry of Cultural Heritage. The fair was held in Tehran from November 13 to 16, 2024, drawing tens of thousands of visitors and over a thousand participants from across the country. In a policy meeting held Tuesday to plan the upcoming edition, Deputy Minister of Handicrafts Maryam Jalali described last year's event as a "structural and content transformation." The session, attended by Cultural Heritage Minister Reza Salehi Amiri and senior officials, was held at the ministry's Nowruz Hall. Jalali said the 2024 fair had become more than a venue for craft sales, it served as a national stage to project Iran's "cultural power" and engage in global dialogue.

The ministry reported that 1,038 artists and organizers participated in the event, which brought in an estimated 80,000 visitors. Through prior negotiations, officials secured a 50% discount on booth rental fees and provided free accommodation for 259 artisans from economically disadvantaged regions. In addition to the 1 trillion rials (\$18.8 million) in declared artist sales, the event also resulted in 1.5 trillion rials (\$28.3 million) in domestic contracts signed with public institutions. The most notable outcome was a \$50 million memorandum of understanding with a visiting commercial delegation from the region — a deal officials say highlights the potential of Iran's crafts sector in economic diplomacy. "We saw a real shift," Jalali said. "This was not just an exhibition, it was a platform to grow our creative economy and raise the global profile of Iranian craftsmanship." She added that the 38th edition would aim to build on last year's success through national brand development and stronger cultural exports.



● IRNA

Official calls Khorramabad world heritage status a triumph of cultural identity



● MEHR

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Iran's Deputy Tourism Minister Ali Darabi said that the UNESCO World Heritage inscription of Khorramabad's prehistoric valleys and sites "was a cultural will amid a security storm." He added the recognition, achieved during a period of conflict, "goes beyond an administrative achievement, reflecting the deep identity conviction and strong bond Iranians have with their historical heritage."

Darabi made these remarks at a ceremony honoring those involved in securing the World Heritage listing, highlighting the achievement as a powerful symbol of national unity and dedication to preserving Iran's rich Iranian-Islamic cultural legacy. The ceremony also marked the announcement of a major national festival planned for August 26 in Khorramabad. Atta Hassanpour, Director General of Lorestan's Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Department, described the event as "a message of national resolve" to showcase the province's historical significance and enhance social spirit. Iran's Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts has accelerated its efforts to promote heritage protection. Currently, Iran holds 29 World Heritage dossiers covering 114 sites and elements, a testament

to the country's vast civilizational richness. Darabi emphasized that the registration process has transformed from a specialist endeavor into a widespread public demand and a national priority. "Heritage now penetrates the cultural conscience of society," he said. In related developments, military forces will withdraw gradually from the historic Falak-ol-Aflak Castle in the coming months, opening the door for restoration and tourism development, Hassanpour announced. Former Deputy Minister Mohammad Hassan Talebian described the World Heritage listings as strategic tools for institutional cohesion and cultural diplomacy. Heritage expert Rasoul Vatandoust added that such recognitions provide "an unparalleled opportunity to redefine Iran's image internationally—as a rooted, civilization-building culture."

Zagros forests gain UN protection following Iran's proposal

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The United Nations' Asia-Pacific disaster management arm (APDIM) formally adopted forest fire prevention in Iran's Zagros range as a regional priority, following a proposal by Iran, according to documents released at the 81st annual session of ES-CAP in Bangkok on July 26. The move marks a "significant step" in safeguarding one of the Middle East's largest and most vulnerable forest ecosystems, long threatened by intensifying wildfires, IRNA reported. The Plan and Budget Organization of Iran, the national focal point for APDIM, played a central role in getting the initiative off the ground and is now pushing forward with bilateral cooperation projects, in coordination with Iran's Forests, Range and Watershed Management Organization. The adopted programs aim to boost regional preparedness and capacity to tackle large-scale forest blazes, APDIM officials said. The Iranian proposal also urges an expansion of APDIM's scope to address pest outbreaks and forest diseases—issues Tehran wants brought to the table at the center's upcoming Governing Council meeting. Iran's delegation emphasized that "trans-boundary environmental challenges require collective action," adding that broader APDIM engagement could lead to more effective international responses to forest degradation. The project builds on Tehran's earlier collaboration with APDIM on combating cross-border dust storms. Iranian officials expressed hope that deeper ties with the UN body and related institutions will lead to more "tangible improvements" in disaster management across the region.



Uzbek archaeologists push to re-date Samarkand's origins to 3,000 years

Lawmakers in Samarkand region submitted new archaeological findings to national authorities that could officially push the city's age back to 3,000 years, according to a statement published by state news agency UzA on Tuesday. The regional kengash (council) of people's deputies took up the matter at its July 23 session, following fresh excavations and expert assessments. The findings stem from a multi-year archaeological effort to revisit the city's origins using modern tools and interdisciplinary methods. Samarkand's officially recognized age has shifted over time—from 1,500 to 2,000, then to 2,500 years, and most recently to 2,750 in the

early 2000s. Now, scientists argue that the city's roots may stretch back even further, citing evidence uncovered at nearby Kuktepa and Afrasiab. "This hypothesis rests on robust data," said Muminhon Saidov, director of the Samarkand Archaeological Institute. He noted that Kuktepa, a site located about 25 kilometers from present-day Samarkand, may have hosted a large urban center in the early first millennium BC. Archaeologists, including M. Iso-middinov, Claude Rapin and M. Khasanov, point to a ruler's residence and a temple complex unearthed there—features they say match descriptions in the ancient Zoroastrian text, the Avesta. They

believe the urban nucleus later shifted to Afrasiab by the 7th or 6th century BC. Excavations carried out earlier this year uncovered a 22-meter section of a defensive wall near the former Amir Timur Ark in Kuksaray Square. Made of sun-dried bricks and built directly on a natural loess base, the wall dates from the 7th to 6th century BC and helps piece together the city's fortification layout. Dig sites within the Afrasiab citadel revealed layers of habitation stretching from the 7th-6th centuries BC to the 12th century. Lower strata produced pottery shards, animal remains and organic samples—some buried more than seven meters deep—belonging to

what is believed to be a complex defensive system. Botanical and zoological materials from the digs were dispatched to laboratories in France, Germany and Japan. Final analyses are still underway. However, preliminary reviews submitted to Uzbekistan's Academy of Sciences and the Agency for Cultural Heritage's Scientific Council have drawn positive responses. The research has been guided by a public council on history and archaeology formed this year at the governor's initiative. The group includes historians, scientists and cultural figures working under the region's administration. If validated by national authorities, the proposed re-dating would mark



a turning point in understanding Samarkand's place in Central Asian history—pushing its story further back into antiquity.