

Iran plans 1,000 heritage sites, markets for expanded Nowruz festivities

Persian New Year to rebuild social morale, widen public participation: Minister

Arts & Culture Desk

Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Reza Salehi-Amiri said on Saturday that the upcoming Nowruz, which begins on March 20, 2026, will serve as a platform to rebuild social morale and widen public participation, outlining a nationwide program of cultural events and expanded heritage access at a meeting of senior cultural officials in Tehran. Speaking at the Ministry's Cultural Council session held at the Fajr Hall of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, the minister cast the Persian New Year as a "national and civic project" designed to strengthen social capital through coordinated public celebrations, artistic programming and community-led initiatives, IRNA reported. The ministry will activate 1,000 designated Nowruz sites across the country, alongside 1,000

handicrafts markets, in what officials described as the largest organized seasonal rollout of its kind. Ceremonies marking the exact turn of the year will be staged at selected heritage venues, each operating under capped visitor quotas to manage crowd flow and protect historic fabric.

A summit of tourism ministers from Nowruz-celebrating countries is scheduled to convene in Tehran during the holiday period, adding an international dimension to the domestic program. National-level performances will include concerts by the Iranian National Orchestra and a dedicated Nowruz symphony, while provincial theater troupes and street carnivals are set to animate urban centers and regional capitals.

Programs are also planned at Tehran's landmark palace complexes, including Niavaran Palace Complex and Golestan Palace, where curated exhibitions



Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Reza Salehi-Amiri (c) speaks during a Cultural Council session in Tehran, Iran on February 21, 2026.

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and formal ceremonies will accompany public celebrations. Deputy minister Ali Darabi said governors would oversee implementation at provincial level, with the central government acting as coordinator. Municipal authorities have been tasked with preparing public squares, parks and pedestrian zones for high visitor volumes, while national travel service headquarters will operate throughout the holiday to streamline logistics and safety arrangements.

Officials said the overlap of Nowruz with the holy month of Ramadan in 2026 would be addressed through tailored cultural programming intended to accommodate both observanc-



es without disrupting travel and public events.

Nowruz, inscribed by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity and observed

across parts of West, Central and South Asia, remains Iran's busiest travel season. Authorities expect millions to take to the roads and visit histori-

cal sites during the two-week break, making crowd management and heritage protection central to this year's operational blueprint.

Minister urges Iran to seize gaming potential amid global boom

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Iran's Culture and Islamic Guidance Minister Abbas Salehi warned that failure to mount coordinated support for the domestic video games sector would amount to "burning" a national advantage, as he addressed the closing ceremony of the 11th Iran Video Games Festival at Tehran's Vahdat Hall. Salehi said video games, with 3.4 billion players worldwide and \$183 billion in revenue in 2023, have become one of the most powerful media industries globally. Iran, he added, remains competitive in human capital despite losing part of its early lead. More than 29 million people in Iran are active gamers, according to the National Foundation for Computer Games, with the average player age rising to 29

from 16 in 2010. In the United States the average stands at 35, underscoring the medium's shift into a multi-generational market, ISNA reported. He described gaming as an integrated cultural ecosystem spanning animation, narrative design and advanced technologies including virtual reality, arguing that piecemeal policies would not suffice. A comprehensive support package, aligning public and private investment from production to market access, is needed to prevent further erosion of capacity. Festival secretary Reza Ahmadi said 164 titles were submitted this year despite internet disruptions and logistical constraints. Of those, 130 qualified for review and 75 reached the main competition stage. He called the event a pro-

fessional platform rather than a mere contest. Veteran developer Mohammad-Mehdi Behfarad, chief executive of Medrick Game Studio, said Iran entered game development roughly in step with the global wave nearly two decades ago but failed to sustain momentum. Neighboring countries with shorter track records now target annual sales of around \$750 million, he said, attributing Iran's lag to late-stage policy recognition and limited structural backing. He said total annual support from all public funds combined does not match the price of a luxury car in Tehran, arguing that without meaningful capital injection and media visibility, studios cannot scale or compete internationally.

Vienna forum brings Iranian, European scholars together to revisit shared civilizational heritage

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Iranian and European Iranologists gathered in the Austrian capital for a two-day international conference on Iranian-Islamic civilization, held in person and online, as scholars from both sides set out to reassess its historical foundations, intellectual architecture and cultural reach, organizers said.

The conference, titled 'Iranian-Islamic Civilization: Identity, Components and Historical Glory', brought together academics in history, philosophy, literature and cultural studies to examine the formation and evolution of a civilizational model shaped by the encounter between Islam and Iran's pre-Islamic heritage, IRNA reported.

The opening session also marked the launch of the first Iranology Book Prize, named after the late Austrian Iranologist Bert Fragner. The award was presented to Sibylle Wentker of the Austrian Academy of Sciences for her translation and critical edition of five volumes of 'Tarikh-e Vassaf,' a key chronicle of Iran during the late

thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries under Mongol Ilkhanid rule. The work is regarded as a principal source for the political and social history of that period. In her remarks, Wentker described the prize as a professional honor and outlined the historiographical value of 'Tarikh-e Vassaf,' written by Vassaf al-Hazra of Shiraz, noting its detailed account of events spanning the late 1200s and early 1300s and its synthesis of political narrative with social observation.

Another highlight was the formal unveiling in Vienna of the German-language volume Austrian Iranologists, published by Unidialog Verlag with contributions from Iranian cultural institutions based in the city. The book documents the role of Austrian scholars in advancing Iranian studies and traces a century of academic engagement between the two countries.

Speakers addressed a broad spectrum of themes, from the philosophical and administrative legacies of pre-Islamic Iran to the development of Persian literature and mysticism across a cultur-



al zone stretching from Anatolia to the Indian subcontinent. One panel examined the portrayal of women in the 'Shahnameh,' (Book of Kings) classifying female figures from political actors to warrior heroines and arguing that Ferdowsi's moral framework rests on human merit rather than gender. The second day, held online, featured 15 papers across two panels dedicated to intellectual history, economic structures and the transmission of scientific knowledge. Presentations revisited the Academy of Gondishapur's role in transferring medical learning into the early Islamic era and analyzed Iran's fiscal institutions from the pre-modern period to the twentieth century.

A president of contradictions ...

Influenced by Israel's hawkish Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Trump has laid down maximalist demands, including curbs on Iran's missile range, conditions that Tehran argues would compromise its security and defense. Even if Trump were pursuing regime change, he would be contradicting his own promises on the campaign trail. In a November 2024 interview, he said, "We can't get totally involved in

all that. We can't run ourselves, let's face it." Since returning to the White House in January 2025, Trump has ordered several military strikes, though limited ones, against countries such as Yemen, Nigeria and Venezuela, moves that run counter to his promise to wind down US military engagements. Now, with such a massive deployment to the Middle East, he has put the entire region and, by extension, the glob-

al economy at risk. Iran's Leader has warned that any attack would trigger a regional war. Ali-reza Tangsiri, commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps' Navy, has said his forces stand ready to close the Strait of Hormuz - a waterway through which some 20% of the world's oil passes - on orders from higher authorities. It is striking that a president who casts himself as a messenger of peace and

covets the Nobel Peace Prize would at the same time contemplate a war against Iran, the fallout of which is impossible to predict. The notion of "peace through strength" appears to really hit the spot for the paradox-filled president but he totally misses that it is basically a synonym for bloodshed and violence or at best, it is just a euphemism for war. If the flames of such a conflict spill over beyond Iran and engulf the wid-

er Middle East, particularly if energy flows are disrupted, experts warn oil prices could skyrocket above \$150 a barrel. That seems to be the last thing Trump would want. With US midterm congressional elections looming in November and the prospect of impeachment if Republicans lose ground, Trump would do well to think twice about striking Iran and several times over about his pledge to end endless wars.