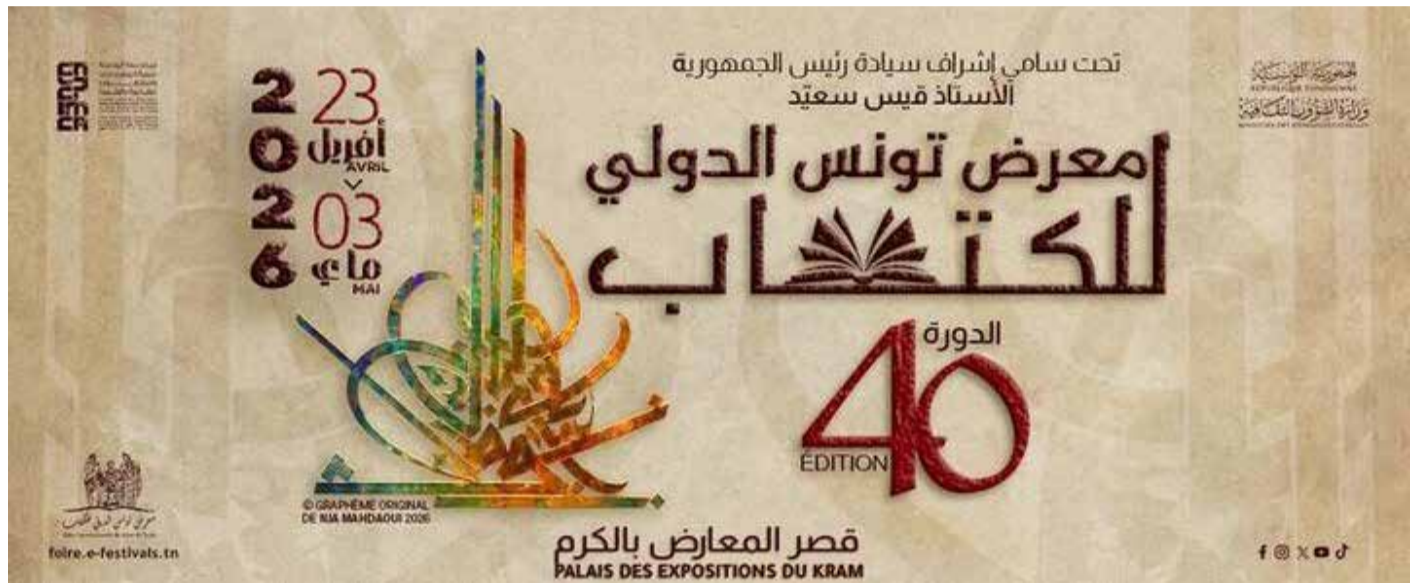


Cultural chords strike deep, rallying support for Iran's pavilion in Tunis

Arts & Culture Desk

Tunisia's President Kais Saied visited Iran's pavilion at the 2026 Tunis International Book Fair 2026 during the fair's opening at the Kram Exhibition Palace, where organizers reported notable public engagement and expressions of solidarity with the Iranian people. The 40th edition of the fair, running through May 3 under the theme "When the book becomes a homeland," has brought together 394 publishers, including 210 international participants and 184 Tunisian houses, showcasing more than 148,000 titles, according to Mehr News Agency. Opened to the public on April 23, the event features participation from 37 countries, with Indonesia as guest of honor, underscoring Tunisia's push to deepen cultural linkages with Asia. During his tour, Saied stopped at

several national pavilions, including those of Algeria, Palestine, Oman, Iran, and Russia, alongside institutional exhibitors such as ministries and academic centers. At the Iranian stand, Ambassador Mir Masoud Hosseinian presented the president with a finely printed Qur'an dating back to the first century of the Islamic calendar. Cultural Attaché Jafar Morvarid also attended. Iran's pavilion, organized by the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization, features cultural exhibits alongside visual tributes referencing recent military attacks and commemorating victims, including schoolchildren from Minab. A representative of Nakhle Sabz International Publications said visitor turnout at the Iranian stand has been "striking," with attendees voicing visible solidarity, even as the broader exhibition in-



frastructure falls short of leading Arab book fairs. The program includes high-level

seminars on translation challenges, the intersection of literature and cinema in Tunisia, digital

plagiarism, and intellectual property, as well as a special session marking the 900th anniversary

of Ibn Rushd. Eight awards will be conferred to spur literary and publishing innovation.

Iran ecolodges turn shelters amid staggering war losses

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's ecotourism sector has taken a \$38.5 million financial hit since February 28 as lodges shifted to free public sheltering during wartime Nowruz travel shutdowns, Yavar Abiri said. Abiri said the crisis, which coincided with the peak travel season, forced thousands of eco-lodges to forgo revenue and provide free or heavily discounted accommodation to displaced travelers, ILNA reported. Official data from the Ministry of Cultural Heritage showed occupancy rates held at around 60 percent, but roughly 40 percent of stays were provided free of charge, with another 20 percent offered at discounts of 30 to 50 percent, effectively eroding income streams. He described the sector as having assumed a de facto "passive defense" role, absorbing popu-



lation flows from urban centers into rural areas as insecurity and mobility constraints intensified. Villages and traditional homes opened their doors, turning ecotourism facilities into safe havens, a capacity Abiri said had not been fully anticipated by policymakers. Daily losses were estimated between \$0.51 million to \$0.64 million per day, driven by service provision without corresponding revenue. Over a 45-day period, cumulative damages approached \$38.5 billion, aligning broadly with official estimates of around \$32.1 billion. Iran currently hosts between

3,500 and 4,000 registered eco-lodges, employing about 30,000 people directly. Abiri warned that prolonged tourism stagnation, inflationary pressures, and declining household purchasing power have compounded the sector's vulnerability, raising the risk of business closures in the coming months. He said the downturn has already pushed some operators toward secondary jobs or potential exit from the market, as travel spending is increasingly deprioritized by households facing economic strain. Abiri also flagged uneven distribution of low-interest government loans, noting that a significant share of allocated funds was diverted toward handicrafts, leaving eco-lodges underfunded despite their role in sustaining rural employment and preserving local cultural heritage.

Malaysia launches campaign honoring Minab school victims



Arts & Culture Desk

Malaysia-based charitable groups, in coordination with Iran's diplomatic mission, on April formally launched the "Shajareh Tayebeh 168" campaign in Kuala Lumpur to commemorate 168 primary school students killed in a February 28 bombing in Minab and to mobilize humanitarian aid for Iran, according to Iran's cultural center in Malaysia. Initiated by Iran's Cultural

Consulate in Malaysia with the backing of the Iranian Embassy and Malaysian civil society organizations, the campaign frames remembrance through relief, pairing symbolic tribute with a structured aid pipeline. Malaysian NGO representatives were the first contributors, delivering donations at the Iranian Cultural Consulate in Kuala Lumpur. Ambassador Valiollah Mohammadi thanked Malaysians for their "enduring solidarity and generosity," saying public and official support "will remain etched in Iran's historical memory." Cultural Attaché Habib Reza Arzani said the campaign seeks to commemorate the 168 child victims of the Shajareh Tayebeh Primary School bombing in Minab and to scale up grassroots as-

stance. Under the plan, organizers aim to fund and dispatch 168 containers of public donations to Iran, each named after one of the victims. The initial contributions mark the first shipment tranche, with additional participation expected in the coming days. Malaysian NGOs also pledged funds equivalent to three containers of essential goods, dedicating them to the memory of three children, Zahra Ansarifard, Mohammad Raoufi-Nia, and Mohammad Shahdoostipour. Each container is budgeted at 40,000 Malaysian ringgit, or roughly \$10,000. Donors further presented 40.5 grams of gold bullion to the Iranian ambassador at the Kuala Lumpur consulate as part of the campaign's opening drive.

Epistemicide: Turkish scholars rap aggression on Iranian universities

Social Desk

A group of 239 prominent Turkish academics said in a joint statement reported Saturday by Iran's Student Affairs Organization that recent US and Israeli strikes on Iranian universities and research centers constitute "epistemicide," condemning the attacks as violations of international law and assaults on humanity's intellectual heritage. The signatories described universities as inviolable sanctuaries and said targeting educational infrastructure breaches conventions that protect civilian and scientific sites during conflict, ILNA reported. They warned that attacks on campuses and intimidation of Iranian scientists risk militarizing academia and eroding global scholarly security. The statement called on UNESCO and the United Nations to roll out an emergency protection mechanism for universi-



An Iranian flag is seen flying amidst the rubble and debris at Sharif University in Tehran following US-Israeli strikes on April 6, 2026. ● IRNA

ties in war zones, framing the issue as an urgent governance gap in international safeguards. It also criticized what it termed Western academia's silence, arguing that selective outrage over the destruction of scientific infrastructure undermines institutional credibility and public trust. In a sharp escalation of pressure, the academics urged suspending research ties with Israeli institutions linked to military technologies and advocated excluding pro-war entities from conferences hosted in Turkey. Closing with a show of solidarity, the group said Turkish universities stand ready to absorb displaced Iranian re-

searchers and students, proposing a network of "emergency academic bridges" to keep joint projects operational. The body said the initiative is notable for its breadth, with many signatories drawn from leading Turkish universities and identifying as liberal, non-political scholars. The statement further urged Ankara to elevate the immunity of scientific centers in wartime as a core agenda item at upcoming diplomatic forums, including the Antalya Diplomacy Forum. Since the war began on February 28, 2026, at least 30 Iranian universities and research facilities have been hit, according to reports cited in the statement.

Classic car rally in Tehran decries attacks on national heritage

Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian cultural organizers staged a rally tour and gathering of 70 classic vehicles on Friday at Niavaran Cultural-Historical Complex in Tehran to condemn what they described as US and Israeli military aggression against Iran's cultural and historical heritage, framing the event as a call to defend globally significant sites. Held under the slogan "Cultural heritage is the red line of history and human identity," the event drew a fleet of vintage and historic cars adorned with the Blue Shield emblem, alongside the



names of damaged landmarks and protest signage denouncing the wartime destruction, IRNA reported. Following the static exhibition, participants drove through major streets of Tehran in a coordinated rally, turning the capital's urban

arteries into a moving display of cultural advocacy. Organizers cast the rally as a symbolic assertion of Iran's commitment to safeguarding its civilizational identity, aiming to galvanize international awareness and heighten global sensitivity toward the preservation of heritage sites, many of which hold UNESCO-listed status and transcend national boundaries. They argued that protecting cultural patrimony constitutes a transnational obligation, warning that failure to act risks normalizing the erosion of irreplaceable historical assets.