

# Soleymaniyeh Garden where history and war damage coexist

## Iranica Desk

The Soleymaniyeh Garden, once situated east of the Doulab district in Tehran, was part of the estate belonging to Amir Mostafa Amir Soleymani, son of Aziz al-Molk. The property remained under the stewardship of the Soleymani family for years until 1926, when Mirza Hassan Khan Vossough al-Dowleh, a distinguished Qajar-era statesman and man of letters, acquired the estate along with additional portions of the Doulab area.

In the northern section of the grounds, he constructed a two-story mansion known as the Andaruni, which functioned as a reception space for courtiers and prominent figures of the Qajar court, according to IRNA. Today, ancient trees still stand within the garden — towering pines and red pomegranate trees that quietly testify to a once-glorious past. For generations, local residents have left fragments of memory beneath their shade. From the original expanse of the estate, however, only a portion remains, now re-

stored and repurposed as Sahand Park.

Yet the garden is more than soil and trees; it is inseparable from the life of a man who once stood at the center of Iranian politics. Mirza Hassan Khan, known as Vossough al-Dowleh, was born in 1875. From an early age, he developed an interest in science and literature, learned French, and soon entered the royal court. He received the title Vossough

al-Dowleh from Naser al-Din Shah in his youth and remained among the leading statesmen of his era. After years of political activity, he was removed from the premiership and spent a period in Europe. He later died in Tehran at the age of 80. Today, his surviving legacy is this mansion — a reminder of a time when art, nature, and political power coexisted within a single landscape.

During attacks by US and Israel in the Ramadan War, 149 cultural heritage sites across 20 provinces were damaged, including five world heritage sites, 54 museums, and seven historic urban fabrics. The Vossough al-Dowleh residence was among the affected historic structures, with part of it destroyed by blast waves.

According to international conventions, including the 1954 Hague Convention and the 1972 UNESCO World Heritage Convention, the destruction of cultural heritage during armed conflict is considered a crime against culture and humanity. The Vossough al-Dowleh Mansion still stands — wounded by history — yet every brick preserves a fragment of Tehran's historical identity. In the silence of its pomegranate branches, echoes of the past remain perceptible.

The head of the Non-governmental Committee for Protecting Historic Houses of Tehran stated that the garden and mansion — locally known as Bagh Anari, meaning Pome-

granate Garden due to its trees — has not only suffered war-time damage but has also been subjected to inappropriate restoration.

Sajjad Askari explained that the historic complex, once part of the Isfahanak village in the Doulab area, contains numerous untold narratives. The garden was initially named Ezzat al-Molk, later renamed Soleymaniyeh. It was subsequently purchased by Mirza Hassan Khan Vossough al-Dowleh, a prominent Qajar statesman and former prime minister, who built the current aristocratic mansion. Once adorned with stucco work, mirror decorations, and elaborate ornamentation, the residence reflected the grandeur of old Tehran and remained his home until his death.

He added that after the victory of the Islamic Revolution, the property was transferred to the Tehran Municipality in 2020 and was converted into Sahand Park. Restoration efforts began thereafter and have continued since, though they have faced significant challenges.

He further noted that blast waves caused damage to doors, windows, structural cracks, and other serious harm. However, he stressed that his primary concern is not only war-related damage but also the quality and methodology of restoration work.

According to Askari, insufficient oversight by cultural heritage authorities has led to unscientific restoration practices and a prolonged five-year delay in proper rehabilitation. He argued that much of the visible damage attributed to blast waves was exacerbated by flawed reconstruction, while the building's original authenticity largely remains intact.

He called for stronger supervision by heritage authorities to ensure that the Vossough al-Dowleh Mansion is restored in a manner that allows the "Pomegranate Garden" to once again reflect its historical identity and spirit — serving not as a modernized reconstruction, but as an authentic and carefully preserved cultural heritage site.



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## Historic revival plan unveiled for Kerman's old quarter

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Governor General of Kerman Province announced plans to establish a provincial historic district council aimed at removing investment barriers and accelerating the restoration of historic houses in the old quarter of the city of Kerman.

Speaking during a field visit to the city's historic fabric, Mohammad Ali Talebi said several sections of the district with strong investment potential had been reviewed and a number of restored houses are expected to begin operating soon as officially licensed accommodation centers, according to ISNA.

Highlighting the area's tourism and cultural potential, he noted that, in addition to the accommodation projects already underway, the district offers numerous opportunities for the expansion of tourism and cultural activities. Coordination meetings with relevant agencies will also be held to address regulatory and investment-related obstacles, he said. He stated that the newly planned historic district council would support the restoration of old houses, facilitate urban revitalization efforts, and improve coordination among executive bodies. According to Talebi, many of the historic homes in Kerman's old quarter could be repurposed as

eco-lodges, innovation hubs, and creative spaces, allowing the district to serve both residents and domestic and international tourists through sustainable and culturally appropriate uses.

He also announced provincial support measures for investors, including financial facilities for restoration, renovation, and equipping historic properties. Licensing procedures for eco-lodges and other community-oriented projects will also be expedited, he added. During the visit, cultural heritage and urban development experts outlined the historical and investment potential of the Atashkadeh area. Experts said one of the city's most significant historic blocks is

located there and has undergone minimal structural changes over the past century, preserving much of its original character.

The district covers approximately 12 hectares, with around six hectares designated as a target zone for revitalization and investment projects. The presence of historic homes, large land parcels, and adaptable spaces has created favorable conditions for tourism, cultural, and hospitality developments.

Experts also pointed to the district's narrow and dense alleyways, saying they could be transformed into pedestrian tourism routes and open-air museum corridors — a concept increasingly adopted in historic cities around the world.



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## Reading Room

### 'State terrorism; the evil of our times'

Reza Davari Ardakani, who for years was a colleague and friend of Ali Larjani — former head of Iran's Supreme National Security Council who was assassinated in March in a joint US-Israeli attack — reflects in his essay, published in the memorial volume marking the fortieth day after Larjani's martyrdom, on his scientific and political orientation. He describes Larjani as a moderate, non-partisan figure and a scholar of distinction who worked to prevent the dominance of extremes in political life.

#### Relationship between philosophy and politics

In his note, Davari Ardakani begins with a thought-provoking question that directs attention to deeper dimensions of the event: "The martyrdom of Larjani is significant and worthy of reflection from various

perspectives; was he targeted merely because he held the position of national security official?" From the author's perspective, understanding this event is impossible without considering its broader political and historical context. He also notes that politics had taken Larjani away from teaching and academic life, "When he was appointed to this position, I was not pleased, because it absorbed all his time and left him no opportunity even for two or three hours of teaching. I have no right to judge individuals' political choices or preferences, but I can agree or disagree with them."

He further emphasizes the relationship between philosophy and politics, arguing that in the present conditions, philosophy has limited capacity to directly influence politics,



Ali Larjani

"I do not believe that in a time when reason is weakening, philosophy can offer much assistance to politics. Philosophy is itself one of the ways of understanding the age; it is not an all-knowing, just judge strengthening the world. In a fragile order, nothing is stable, and wherever thought and knowledge exist and life is vibrant, there is order."

#### A philosopher in the realm of politics

Davari Ardakani underscores the Larjani's non-partisan stance, writing, "One point that is less often noticed is his lack of factional alignment. He was a man of moderation and, following efforts made by other moderate politicians, took steps of his own to prevent the complete dominance of ex-

trémism in political space."

Referring to Larjani's academic background — holding a degree in computer science from Sharif University of Technology and a Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of Tehran with a dissertation on Kant — he describes him as possessing "brilliant talent in science and philosophy."

He adds, "Academics who turn to politics are rarely able to preserve both roles equally, because practical politics is time-consuming. Apparently, Larjani was more inclined toward politics and entered its complex and difficult domain, where an individual's opinion and action can still have an impact. He did, in fact, exert influence."

Davari Ardakani stresses that Larjani never sought to practically merge philosophy and politics as some philosophers

have attempted; however, due to his dual engagement, his time was divided between the two, with a greater share devoted to politics.

#### Critique of state terrorism

Davari Ardakani explicitly refers to "state terrorism as one of the uglinesses of our time," linking the martyrdom of Ali Larjani to the emergence of this phenomenon in the contemporary world.

He notes that he wrote this essay in conditions of old age and illness to highlight two points: first, the emergence of state terrorism, and second, his personal sorrow over the loss of a valued colleague and friend. He further acknowledges that the weakness of age and the burden of illness currently prevent him from fully elaborating on the nature of these tragedies.