

# 'Shahnameh' manuscript unveiled in Mashhad as Iran honors Ferdowsi's legacy

## Arts & Culture Desk

A rare 350-year-old manuscript of Ferdowsi's 'Shahnameh' (Book of Kings) was unveiled Tuesday at the Central Library of Astan Quds Razavi in Iran in Mashhad, as Iranian cultural institutions launched a series of events marking Ferdowsi National Day (May 15) and celebrating the Persian epic's enduring international stature. The handwritten volume, preserved at the Astan Quds Razavi manuscript center, was presented during the shrine complex's 289th weekly cultural and academic gathering, according to IRNA. Scholars said the lavishly produced manuscript was likely copied in Mu-

ghal India in the late 17th or early 18th century before being endowed to the Razavi shrine in 1753. "This edition was clearly prepared for a prominent figure in India," manuscript expert Amir Mansouri said, citing its six-column format, fine Nasta'liq calligraphy and large folio dimensions. The 325-page manuscript, cataloged under No. 4127, is now accessible to researchers and literary scholars. Mansouri said the library currently houses 34 handwritten volumes centered on the Shahnameh, many of them produced in India, reflecting centuries of cultural and literary ties between Iran and the Indian subcontinent as well as Indian patrons'

devotion to Persian heritage. The unveiling coincides with nationwide tributes ahead of May 15, officially observed in Iran as Ferdowsi National Day. The Iranian National Works and Cultural Figures Association is set to host a virtual ceremony titled 'Shahnameh, the Epic of Iran's Resilience,' bringing together leading Persian literature scholars and cultural figures. Widely regarded as one of the world's greatest epic poets, Ferdowsi safeguarded the Persian language through the 'Shahnameh,' a monumental work chronicling Iran's ancient history, mythology and civilizational memory across generations.



## Iran eyes regional tourism rebound after conflict

### Arts & Culture Desk

Iran is moving to revive its tourism industry through regional outreach, rural travel initiatives and international cultural events after the sector sustained losses estimated at 28.5 quadrillion rials (\$15.6 billion) during the recent Ramadan war, Deputy Tourism Minister Anoushirvan Mohseni-Bandpey said on Tuesday. The losses, excluding airlines, hit hotels and accommodation providers hardest, accounting for 20 quadrillion rials (\$10.9 billion), while travel agencies lost 5.5 quadrillion rials (\$3 billion), tour guides one quadrillion rials (\$546 million) and other tourism-related activities two quadrillion rials (\$1.09 billion), Mohseni-Bandpey told reporters at a press briefing, IRNA reported. Despite the conflict coinciding with Iran's peak spring travel season and the 12-day hostilities disrupting operations across the sector, the official said more than 29 million domestic trips were recorded during the Nowruz holidays, showing what he described as the resilience of the country's travel market. Seeking to rebuild international confidence, Iran has secured the hosting



rights for Economic Cooperation Organization tourism events and plans to stage additional regional gatherings aimed at restoring inbound travel flows and rebranding the country's tourism profile. The ministry is also banking on a surge in religious and medical travel. More than 140,000 pilgrimage and health travelers entered Iran in March 2026, with arrivals rising to over 178,000 in April despite wartime conditions, Mohseni-Bandpey said. Authorities are preparing a support package for tourism businesses that includes six-month tax and insurance deferrals as well as delayed loan repayments. Separately, 14 quadrillion rials (\$7.6 billion) in low-interest financing has been earmarked for eco-lodges and handicraft operators, with loans carrying a 4% rate. The tourism official said rural tourism had emerged as a new growth driver after three Iranian villages

Iran's Deputy Tourism Minister Anoushirvan Mohseni-Bandpey (C) attends a press briefing with journalists in Tehran, Iran, May 12, 2026. ● CHTN

were added to a global tourism list in 2025, while eight more villages are competing for international recognition in 2026. Under a long-term "stable peace" scenario outlined by the ministry, Iran aims to increase inbound arrivals by 50%, expand electronic visas to 33 countries and attract foreign investment into health tourism and ecotourism projects. The deputy minister also announced the imminent launch of a national tourism card for Iranian travelers and said eco-lodge operators had been exempted from paying insurance contributions as part of broader efforts to shield small operators from mounting financial pressure.

## Cinematic palette widens in bid to lure audiences back to theaters

### Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's cinema industry has broadened its production slate across social dramas, children's features and youth-oriented works, the head of the Cinema Organization of Iran said, as authorities seek to reinvigorate theaters, nurture emerging filmmakers and strengthen the country's cultural appeal for international audiences and artists. Raed Faridzadeh, speaking to IRNA in Tehran, said the diversification of film production had widened options for domestic screenings and boosted momentum across the industry at a time of economic strain.

"The country's cinematic slate has become increasingly diverse," he said, pointing to the growing range of genres moving into both production and theatrical release. Faridzadeh said the organization had worked over the past year to ensure that "all genres" could secure space in both production pipelines and cinema schedules, amid efforts to revive audience engagement and expand cultural activity nationwide. He also stressed that Iran remained open to filmmakers and actors living abroad, describing the country's embrace of cinema professionals as broad and inclusive. "There is no restriction or obstacle for

cinematic activists returning to the country," he said, adding that filmmakers from "different perspectives" had stood alongside the public in recent years. The cinema chief called on directors and producers to help capture contemporary social realities on screen and contribute to public morale through cultural production. Faridzadeh also highlighted the emergence of a "gifted and skilled" younger generation showcased at the Fajr Film Festival, saying cultural institutions were moving to create more opportunities for new filmmakers to present their work and sustain the industry's creative renewal.

## Tehran, Kabul expand cross-border healthcare cooperation

### Social Desk

Iran and Afghanistan are advancing plans to expand cross-border healthcare services and establish a joint border marketplace, Iranian officials said Tuesday at a bilateral meeting with authorities from Afghanistan's Farah Province, as Tehran moves to strengthen regional cooperation and improve services for border communities. Speaking at the second joint session on economic and border cooperation, Iran's Consul General in Herat, Alireza Marhamati, said officials from both sides were pursuing coordinated measures to ease border issues, broaden cooperation and improve public services along the frontier, IRNA reported.



He described the initiative as a potential "model" for collaboration across other shared borders. A central focus of the talks was healthcare access for Afghan citizens. Marhamati said Tehran and Kabul were drafting a joint framework to streamline medical treatment and visa procedures for Afghan patients traveling to Iran.

Iran's policy in this field, he said, is aimed primarily at helping Afghan patients receive treatment rather than generating revenue. The discussions also highlighted growing cooperation in agriculture and livestock. Marhamati said several Iranian delegations had traveled to Afghanistan to explore investment opportunities, including

cotton cultivation projects. He added that two slaughterhouses in Herat built according to Iranian standards had received approval from Iranian representatives and were expected to begin operations soon. Officials also reviewed plans for a joint border marketplace designed to facilitate easier exchanges for residents living on both sides of the frontier and support economic activity in border regions. Alireza Khomehzar, head of the Birjand Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture, said smoother customs procedures, stronger private-sector coordination and improved transport infrastructure could further deepen cooperation between the neighboring countries.

## Lake Urmia hits six-year high after favorable precipitation

### Social Desk

Lake Urmia's water level has climbed to its highest point since 2020, Iranian officials said during a field inspection of the northwestern salt lake on Tuesday, as authorities stepped up efforts to stabilize one of the Middle East's most fragile ecosystems. Reza Rahmani, governor of West Azarbaijan Province and secretary of the national task force for Lake Urmia restoration, said the lake's water level had reached 1,271.03

meters after months of increased inflows averaging roughly 30 million cubic meters per day. The improvement has triggered the revival of Artemia, the lake's native brine shrimp, and the return of migratory birds to the internationally known wetland, IRNA reported. Rahmani attributed the recovery to heavier rainfall, river dredging, controlled water releases and the refilling of surrounding wetlands, but warned that "summer evaporation cycles" could reverse the gains if current

conditions fail to hold through 2027. He said authorities had launched a broad campaign to cut agricultural water consumption by 50% across the basin through crop-pattern reforms and modern irrigation systems, while also calling on universities in Urmia and Tabriz to help develop long-term stabilization plans. The revival of Artemia has also drawn attention to the lake's economic potential. Nasser Agh, head of the Artemia Research Institute at Urmia University, said expanded Artemia

cultivation and exports could help finance restoration projects while supporting Iran's aquaculture sector. A pilot artificial-lake project near Rahmanlu Port in East Azarbaijan Province is expected to produce up to 50 tons of Artemia annually, alongside five tons of Artemia cysts used in fish and shrimp farming. It is said that public participation and tighter controls on illegal water extraction remain essential to preventing renewed drought conditions in the basin.

