

## On Ferdowsi commemoration day

# Leader hails Persian as 'greatest capacity' for promoting Iran's civilization

### Arts & Culture Desk

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Mojtaba Khamenei on Friday described the Persian language as one of the "greatest capacities" for promoting Iran's rich Islamic civilization worldwide, urging writers and artists to preserve the nation's cultural identity through literature and art as Iran marked the national day honoring epic poet Abolqasem Ferdowsi. In a message issued for the National Persian Language Preservation Day and commemorating the Persian poet Ferdowsi (May 15), the Leader said Persian was more than a means of communication and served as "the framework of cognition" and a defining thread of Iranian identity.

"Persian language and literature represent one of the greatest capacities for promoting the rich culture and civilization of Islamic Iran across the global arena," he said, while calling on cultural figures to "rise like Ferdowsi" and immortalize the nation's contemporary ep-

ics through artistic expression. Referring to what he described as Iran's "third sacred defense," the Leader said the Iranian nation had once again demonstrated the heroic spirit embodied in Ferdowsi's 'Shahnameh,' the millennium-old Persian epic widely regarded as a cornerstone of Iranian literature and identity. He said the concepts of courage, justice and resistance embedded in the 'Shahnameh' continued to unite Iranians across ethnic and social backgrounds in safeguarding the country's independence and cultural authenticity. President Masoud Pezeshkian also paid tribute to Ferdowsi in a separate message, describing the 'Shahnameh' as the "historical and cultural identity card" of the Iranian nation and portraying the poet of Tus as a guardian of both Persian language and Iranian civilization.

### Heroism rooted in justice, wisdom

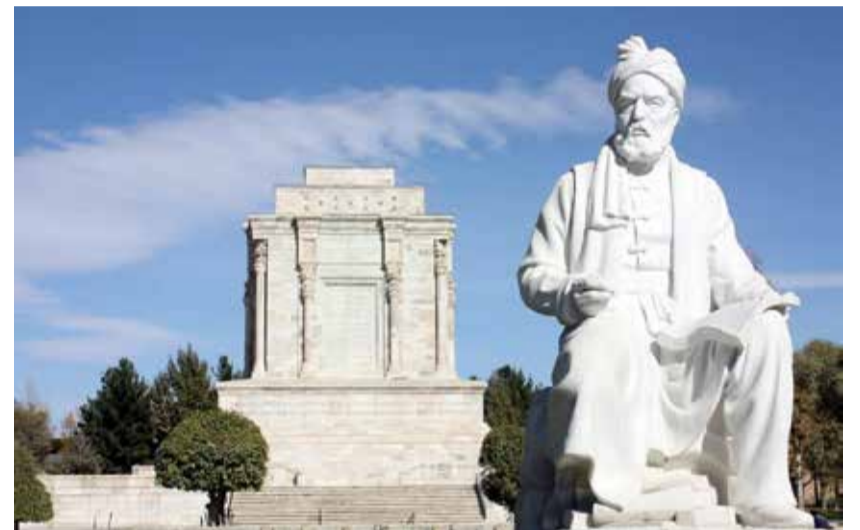
Pezeshkian said Ferdowsi's heroes were

not merely warriors but symbols of wisdom, loyalty and moral virtue, adding that the poet forged a lasting connection between Iran's national epics and Islamic values.

"In Iranian and Shia culture, heroism finds meaning through justice, loyalty and defense of truth," the president said. He added that contemporary Iran was still home to "humble heroes" who protected the nation's dignity and security through sacrifice and wisdom, drawing parallels between modern-day defenders of the country and the legendary champions celebrated in the 'Shahnameh'.

At a ceremony hosted online by the Society for the Appreciation of Cultural Works and Dignitaries on May 12, prominent literary scholars described the 'Shahnameh' as a "fortress of words" that preserved Iranian identity through centuries of upheaval.

Renowned Persian literature scholar Mir Jaleddin Kazzazi said Ferdowsi had defended Iran "with an army of words,"



while other speakers highlighted the epic's universal themes of wisdom, justice and human dignity.

Academics at the gathering said the 'Shahnameh' remained one of the

world's most influential epic works and continued to resonate with Persian-speaking communities and international audiences alike through its enduring moral and cultural themes.

## Harmony rises from war-scarred Tehran synagogue

### Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's cultural authorities pledged to restore a Tehran synagogue damaged during last year's Israeli and US airstrikes on the capital, as officials, Jewish community figures and peace researchers convened at the site on Thursday for the cultural event 'Harmony at Tehran's Wounded Synagogue.' Held at the Rafi-Nia Synagogue in central Tehran, the gathering brought together Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Minister Reza Salehi-Amiri, Iranian Peace Studies Association head Nematollah Fazeli, Jewish-Iranian cultural figure Shalmo Aghalian and members of Iran's Jewish academic community. Salehi-Amiri said the synagogue, damaged during the closing days of the last Iranian calendar year's conflict, would be rebuilt "in a manner worthy" of Iran's Jewish community and formally documented as a nationally registered historical event.

"We will submit its documents to international bodies so the world can see what the Iranian nation endured," he told reporters on the sidelines of the ceremony.



Musicians performed amidst the rubble of the damaged Rafi-Nia Synagogue in Tehran during the 'Harmony at Tehran's Wounded Synagogue' cultural event held on May 14, 2026.

● IRNA

The minister described Iran's Jewish community as an "esteemed" and longstanding part of the country's social fabric, saying Iranian Jews had "stood beside the nation in difficult times." He also proposed converting part of the restored synagogue into a museum and archival space preserving testimonies and documents related to the wartime damage.

The event showed Iran's emphasis on interfaith coexistence and cultural continuity, with organizers framing the synagogue's restoration as both a heritage project and a symbol of national solidarity. Iran is home to one of the Middle East's oldest Jewish communities, with active synagogues in Tehran, Isfahan and several other cities.

## 'Les Misérables'

# When literature goes beyond human rights

By Amir Bi Parva  
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### OPINION

From mid-January 2026, for the third time in my life, I began reading Victor Hugo's novel 'Les Misérables' with great attention, and I completed it in mid-April 2026. This time, however, my focus was placed on its human dimensions, and I found it striking how prominently human rights themes are reflected in this historical novel.

Some literary works are merely narratives of individual lives, while others rise to a higher level, becoming something akin to an "ethical manifesto on humanity." Victor Hugo's 'Les Misérables' is one such work. It not only tells the story of Jean Valjean, a former prisoner in nineteenth-century France, but also engages with fundamental questions that today lie at the heart of modern human rights systems: What is justice? How is human dignity preserved? And is a person forever bound to their past?

At the center of this narrative lies the issue of poverty. Jean Valjean is imprisoned for stealing a loaf of bread to feed starving children, and as a result, he is socially excluded and trapped within the penal system for years. This raises a fundamental question: Should punishment be determined solely by the "act," or should the broader "human and social context" also be taken into account? In contemporary human rights discourse, the principles of proportionality in punishment

and consideration of individual and social circumstances are essential elements of criminal justice. Yet Hugo, a century before the development of modern human rights instruments, raises this issue in a deeply literary and philosophical way.

In 'Les Misérables,' poverty is not merely an economic condition; it is a mechanism for the deprivation of human dignity. The character Fantine represents a deeply moving example of a human being gradually stripped of all her rights due to structural poverty. She is not punished for a crime, but rather excluded and humiliated because of her social condition. This image directly corresponds to the concept of "economic and social rights" in modern human rights discourse, rights based on the principle that a human being can only be free if they enjoy a minimum standard of living and dignity.

Another important dimension of 'Les Misérables' is the issue of children's rights, a concept that was not yet formally articulated in legal instruments at the time of the novel's writing, yet is clearly depicted by Hugo. Children in this novel are often silent victims of poverty and injustice. Fantine's daughter, Cosette, is a powerful example of a child deprived of her most basic rights, including the right to care, security, education, and dignity. She is subjected to forced labor and lives in humiliating conditions. From a modern human rights perspective, this situation stands in clear contradiction to the fundamental principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, such as

protection from exploitation, the right to grow up in a safe environment, and the right to family care or appropriate alternatives. Through Cosette's suffering, Hugo anticipates a critique of a society that treats childhood not as a protected stage of life, but as a source of labor and survival.

One of the most significant human rights dimensions of the novel is its critique of a rigid and inflexible penal system. Inspector Javert represents a legal order that is blindly loyal to the letter of the law, even when it results in injustice. In contrast, Jean Valjean represents moral transformation, a human being who, through suffering, develops ethical awareness and social responsibility. This tension reflects a continuing debate in modern criminal law between retributive justice and rehabilitative justice.

A turning point in the story occurs when the Bishop forgives Jean Valjean instead of punishing him. This act of forgiveness is not merely moral; it marks the beginning of a profound human transformation.

From a human rights perspective, it symbolizes one of the core principles of modern justice: punishment should aim not at revenge, but at rehabilitation and reintegration into society. Following this experience, Jean Valjean not only changes his own life but also becomes someone who dedicates himself to helping others. The novel also highlights the vulnerability of women in society. Fantine, as a poor and abandoned woman, becomes a victim of social and economic structures. Her story illustrates

how social vulnerability can lead to the gradual exclusion of individuals from their fundamental rights. This issue is now widely discussed in human rights literature under concepts such as the "feminization of poverty" and gender-based vulnerability.

Perhaps the most important question raised by the novel is the tension between law and morality. Is a law that punishes individuals for their circumstances truly just? Can strict adherence to law, without regard for humanity, achieve real justice? Hugo does not provide a direct answer, but through his narrative he shows that law without morality can become an instrument of oppression.

Ultimately, 'Les Misérables' can be seen not only as a novel, but also as a moral blueprint for modern human rights. Concepts such as inherent human dignity, the right to reintegration into society, criticism of structural poverty, and opposition to inhumane punishment are all present in this work long before they were formally codified in international human rights instruments.

The enduring relevance of Jean Valjean lies in this very idea: he is not a mythical hero, but a symbol of the possibility of human transformation. A human being who, even after being cast out, can regain meaning and dignity. In a world still facing poverty, injustice, and social exclusion, 'Les Misérables' is not merely a story, it is a reminder: a human being is, before anything else, a human being.

'Les Misérables' will be read as long as humanity exists.