

Khorramabad moves closer to UNESCO status

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The Director General of the Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization of Lorestan Province, Ata Hassanpour, has announced significant progress in the nomination process for the global registration of Khorramabad's historic sites, stating that the supplementary dossier for the complex has been prepared for submission to UNESCO's World Heritage List following archaeological excavations at Falak-ol-Aflak Hill and prehistoric caves.

Speaking to ISNA, Hassanpour said the dossier, which was submitted to UNESCO on Feb. 1, 2026, is expected to be reviewed and evaluated in July 2026, according to the usual process. He expressed optimism that the site could be inscribed on the World Heritage List alongside the Alamut nomination, noting that the necessary criteria for registration have been met.

He also announced the approval of a comprehensive 12-hectare development and conservation plan for the Falak-ol-Aflak area. The plan includes reorganizing the military complex located on the slopes of the castle, as well as restoring and rehabilitating historic walls while preserving their traditional architectural style. As part of the project, a 22-meter-long section of the wall on Dovazdeh-Borji Street will be reconstructed in line with historical methods and traditions.

Hassanpour also referred to planned changes in traffic management and public access around the site. He said the eastern side of Gap Bridge will be converted into a pedestrian zone.

He added that access from Mojahedin-e Islam Street toward the river-side area will also be redirected near Jalal Hosseini Park to reduce congestion in the area.

According to Hassanpour, the street leading to the entrance of Falak-

ol-Aflak Castle will also become pedestrian-oriented. The current entrance gate will be converted into an exit, while the main entrance will be relocated to another area. The new entrance will include an urban plaza and resting spaces for visitors, creating a welcoming gateway to the cultural and historic complex.

The official expressed hope that, with the implementation of these plans this year, residents and tourists will witness a new and unique face of Khorramabad's 12-hectare cultural, natural, and historical landscape, describing it as an exceptional site in Iran.

Hassanpour also highlighted plans to transform the province's caves into "cave museums." He said the project to convert six registered prehistoric caves around Falak-ol-Aflak Castle into cave museums, where prehistoric human life will be reconstructed and presented to visitors, is being actively pursued.



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Kamar Zarrin where Isfahan's development met its history

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In historic cities, whenever an excavator begins work on an urban development project, it encounters more than soil and stone — it confronts the identity and history of the city itself. The Kamar Zarrin passage rehabilitation project in Isfahan became a clear example of navigating the delicate boundary between urban development and cultural heritage preservation. What began as an implementation challenge and an institutional dispute eventually turned into a bittersweet experience that could reshape the approach to urban management in Iran's historic cities.

The recent opening of the Kamar Zarrin Site Museum marked the completion of one of Isfahan's most challenging and controversial urban and heritage projects in recent years. From its earliest stages, the project was caught between the municipality's development priorities and archaeologists' preservation concerns, according to IRNA.

After more than two years of controversy surrounding the historic passage, the first phase — including the passage and the site museum — has become operational. The second phase, involving the construction of a protective roof, has prepared the site for future scientific excavations, provided that the required funding is secured.

The story of Kamar Zarrin reflects the complexity of development in historic urban areas. The initial goal was simply to improve a passageway and implement an infrastructure project to facilitate movement. However, what lay beneath the surface revealed a different reality. During rehabilitation works, the discovery



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of archaeological evidence and historical layers halted excavation activities and transformed the project into something far beyond a conventional construction plan.

The sudden discovery of ancient layers changed the nature of the project and led to the creation of Isfahan's first urban archaeology model. At the time, objections raised by experts and archaeologists became a turning point, shifting the project from a purely construction-focused initiative into one integrated with archaeological research and the creation of a site museum.

Following the necessary approvals, official excavations began at Kamar Zarrin. What emerged from the ground exceeded initial expectations. The discovery of production workshops along what had once been a market corridor — including glassmaking, pottery, and metalworking workshops — revealed that this was not merely a historic route but a vital economic and social center of the city in previous eras.

These findings transformed Kamar Zarrin from an ordinary

passage into an open urban site museum: a place where citizens can continue their daily activities while visitors can explore the history of everyday life in Isfahan.

The second phase of the project, however, highlighted the challenges of coordination between institutions responsible for urban projects and those responsible for heritage protection. A leveling project near the Kamar Zarrin Mosque, conducted while archaeological surveys had already uncovered artifacts, pottery, and coins, became a source of tension between the municipality and cultural heritage authorities.

The situation escalated when, amid the atmosphere following the 12-day war period, excavation trucks entered the site unexpectedly at night through municipal contractors without coordination with the Cultural Heritage Protection Unit. The move raised concerns over possible irreversible damage to archaeological layers and historical evidence. The operation was halted after the intervention of heritage protection officials and, later, judicial authorities.



The incident became a significant lesson for urban management and heritage institutions, demonstrating that even temporary miscommunication between responsible bodies can impose serious costs on a city's historical identity.

Despite its challenges and controversies, Kamar Zarrin delivered something beyond a conventional construction project. It became a national experience in urban archaeology, demonstrating that urban development and heritage preservation should not be treated as opposing forces but should advance together through flexible and coordinated planning.

Isfahan, a city whose tourism economy is deeply connected to its cultural heritage and historical identity, cannot sacrifice history for development — nor can it consider history an obstacle to progress. The city's heritage is not merely a collection of old structures; it represents a sustainable economic resource. Failure to preserve historical identity within development plans could pose a serious threat to Isfahan's future economy.

The evaluation of the Kamar Zarrin project can be viewed from two perspectives: a specialized academic perspective, which may identify several shortcomings, and a practical perspective focused on managerial capacity and real-world constraints. From a realistic viewpoint, the project can be considered a relatively successful initiative.

The site museum represents a turning point in Isfahan's urban archaeology and offers a potential model for other Iranian cities struggling with the discovery of underground historical remains. The project has received a relatively positive assessment in Isfahan's municipal record because, according to some archaeologists, creating a public narrative around archaeological discoveries within an active urban environment has rarely been achieved in Iran.

Kamar Zarrin now serves as a living record of Isfahan's history, from traces of the pre-Islamic era to modern transformations. Visitors can observe evidence of everyday life across different periods, including workshop remains, water transfer systems,

historic routes, and production spaces that reflect the culture of the traditional marketplace.

These artifacts are not merely bricks and pottery fragments; they are witnesses to the city's growth, transformation, and decline throughout history.

The lessons of Kamar Zarrin offer valuable guidance for future urban projects. The most important recommendation is a shift from reaction to prevention: archaeological assessments should become an essential part of planning before any construction begins in historic areas.

If archaeological studies and preliminary surveys are carried out before construction equipment reaches historical layers, many financial costs and social tensions caused by project interruptions can be avoided.

The Kamar Zarrin experience shows that historic cities require a new approach: development aligned with heritage. This means urban projects must be designed from the beginning with archaeological considerations and preventive strategies, rather than addressing historical discoveries only after construction has already begun.

The project also highlights the need for careful decision-making and stronger cooperation among institutions. Avoiding future conflicts between stakeholders requires moving toward more integrated and multi-institutional management structures.

For future development projects in historic districts such as Isfahan, incorporating archaeological planning before construction is not only essential for protecting national heritage but also creates opportunities to design projects that support progress while strengthening the city's identity.

New archaeological season opens at Hegmataneh

Iranica Desk

The director of the Hegmataneh World Heritage Site has announced the beginning of the 25th season of archaeological excavations and studies at the historic site.

Reza Nazari said the excavations will continue until the end of July this year.

He added that the research is being carried out under an agreement between the Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Department of

Hamedan Province and the Research Institute of Cultural Heritage and Tourism of Iran. The new excavation season follows the archaeological studies conducted during the 24th season, which took place in December 2025 and January 2026, chtn.ir wrote.

Referring to the objectives of the latest archaeological research, Nazari said the main goal of the 25th excavation season is to identify and clarify the defensive walls and fortifications in the southern and southeastern sec-

tions of the Hegmataneh historic site. He explained that before excavation activities began, interdisciplinary geophysical studies, including geomagnetic surveys and ground-penetrating radar investigations, were carried out. These studies aim to provide a clearer understanding of possible structures and architectural remains in the excavation areas.

He noted that the 25th excavation season at Hegmataneh is being led by Yaqub Mohammadifar, a professor of archaeology at Bu-Ali Sina University,

with the participation of students and under the supervision of the Hegmataneh World Heritage Site.

The continuation of archaeological research at Hegmataneh is expected to provide further insight into the historical development and urban structure of one of Iran's most significant ancient sites. Researchers hope that the findings from this season will help reveal more details about the site's defensive systems, architectural features, and the civilizations that shaped the region throughout history.



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