

Restoration underway for war-hit historical sites

Iranica Desk

Restoration work is underway for historical and cultural heritage sites damaged during the recent military conflict, including museums, historic urban fabrics, and UNESCO World Heritage properties, according to the deputy minister of cultural heritage. Ali Darabi, deputy head of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, said 149 sites across 18 provinces were damaged during the Israeli-US military attacks. The affected properties include 54 museums, seven historic urban fabrics, and five sites inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. Speaking to IRNA, Darabi said restoration has so far been completed at 10 historical sites, while work is currently underway at 21 other cultural heritage complexes. He said emergency conservation and restoration have been completed at Tehran's Golestan Palace, Sa'dabad Palace, the Glassware and Ceramic Museum of Iran, the Museum of Contemporary Art, the Museum of Decorative Arts, the Under Glass Painting Museum, and the ministry's headquarters. Restoration has also been completed at two historical buildings in West Azarbaijan Province, as well as at Khansari Tekyeh, Baba Rokn al-Din Tekyeh, and Madar Shah Tekyeh, the Jobekkhaneh Mansion in Isfahan Province, and the Ziaei House in Zanjan. Re-



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pairs to the windows and equipment of the Grand Mosque of Qom have also been completed. Darabi added that work on Chel Sotun Palace in Isfahan's Naqsh-e Jahan Square and the Rakibkhaneh building is in its final stages. Documentation of the Gonbad-e Kabud Monument in Maragheh and another historic house in East Azarbaijan Province has been completed, while restoration of Khosroabad Mansion and Moshir Mansion in Kurdistan Province is ongoing. He said documentation for structural reinforcement of the Tomb of Baba Taher in Hamedan is underway. In Lorestan Province, military authorities have completed debris removal within the protected zone of Falak-ol-Aflak Castle, while repairs to museum windows and display cases are in progress. Repairs to the Darreh Shahr Museum have

also been completed, although structural reinforcement of the building continues. According to Darabi, only 38 of the 149 damaged sites are directly owned by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, while the remaining 111 belong to private owners, military institutions, religious endowments, municipalities, and other organizations. He said restoration teams have not yet been able to access some sites because of military restrictions, although access has improved over the past two weeks. Many of the inaccessible sites are located in southern Iran, where conditions have not yet fully stabilized. Responding to a question about sites outside the ministry's ownership, Darabi said Iranian law requires each responsible institution to carry out restoration and conservation of historical



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properties under its control. He added that the ministry has issued emergency restoration guidelines, including preserving visible traces of the war where appropriate, and has offered technical supervision through its experts. Darabi said the ministry is completing a comprehensive database of damaged heritage sites and will continue to press relevant institutions to fulfill their restoration responsibilities. He noted that 21 heritage complexes are currently undergoing restoration and said the ministry has held a series of expert meetings with veteran specialists and distinguished figures in the field to develop a national roadmap for post-war reconstruction and restoration. The deputy minister also stressed the need to prohibit the establishment of high-risk facili-

ties near historical monuments. While expressing appreciation for the armed forces, he said fuel storage facilities and other hazardous installations should not be located near museums and archaeological sites. He added that the ministry is preparing a letter to senior national authorities calling for such facilities to be relocated away from heritage sites during peacetime. On international assistance, Darabi said the ministry has sent more than 17 official communications to international organizations, including UNESCO, ICOM, ICOMOS, and ICCROM, but described the response so far as disappointing. He added that despite meetings with the Chinese ambassador and follow-up efforts through international heritage protection networks, Iran has not yet received financial assistance.

UNESCO, he said, has conditioned any technical assistance or deployment of experts on the restoration of security and the reopening of air routes. Referring to legal measures, he said the ministry is documenting damage in preparation for international legal action, noting that attacks on cultural property constitute a violation of the 1954 Hague Convention. However, he acknowledged the political challenges facing international institutions and said Iran is primarily relying on domestic expertise and resources. Darabi praised ministry staff for safeguarding museum collections during the conflict, saying that thanks to preventive measures and the transfer of valuable artifacts to secure storage facilities, not a single historical object was damaged. He also announced that a nationwide public movement, including a 110-night human chain described as a symbol of national unity during the recent conflict, has been inscribed on Iran's National Cultural Heritage List to preserve its historical record for future generations. Calling on philanthropists, entrepreneurs, and investors to support restoration efforts, Darabi said the damaged monuments would be restored with the same quality and craftsmanship that previous generations had entrusted to the nation. Asked when museums would reopen, Darabi said the decision depends on security conditions and directives from the country's senior authorities. "Our hearts long for the reopening of museums," he said, noting that summer is an important season for visitors and tourists, but stressing that museums should reopen only when conditions are safe and stable.

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Scattered across the landscapes of West Azarbaijan Province, ancient archaeological hills stand as enduring symbols of the region's rich history, preserving the legacy of civilizations that flourished thousands of years ago. Each site tells a unique story of Iran's past, offering invaluable insights into the cultural, political, and social development of one of the country's oldest inhabited regions. These archaeological hills have yielded remarkable discoveries over decades of excavation, many of which have transformed scholars' understanding of the ancient Near East. While numerous sites remain only partially explored, they continue to hold the promise of revealing new chapters in Iran's long history, according to IRNA. Among the province's most renowned archaeological sites is Hasanlu Hill (Hasanlu Tappeh) in Naqadeh, one of Iran's best-known prehistoric settlements. Iranian and international archaeologists estimate that the architectural remains uncovered at Hasanlu date from approximately 1400 to 800 BCE. The site's most celebrated discovery is the Golden Bowl of Hasanlu, regarded as one of the masterpieces of ancient Iranian art. Weighing about 950 grams and standing 21 centimeters high with a diameter of 25 centimeters, the vessel is currently preserved at the National Museum of Iran in Tehran. Dating to around 800 BCE, the gold bowl is decorated with intricate reliefs depicting mythological and heroic scenes that scholars believe may illustrate an epic narrative. It remains one of the most significant archaeological discoveries ever made in Iran. Located about 12 kilometers southwest of Lake Urmia and nine kilometers northeast of Naqadeh, Hasanlu has been under archaeological investigation since 1956. Excavations have

West Azarbaijan's archaeological treasures trace Iran's ancient past



Hasanlu Hill
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uncovered nearly 7,500 artifacts made of bronze, bone, and pottery. The site also contains large columned halls, elongated porticos, spacious rooms, and substantial stone architectural remains dating back nearly 3,000 years. Since 2004, Hasanlu has served as one of Iran's national archaeological sites dedicated to scientific research and conservation. Another important archaeological site is Qalaichi Hill, situated near Qalaichi village, about 12 kilometers northeast of Bukan. Archaeological excavations began there in 1985, revealing remains dating to the first millennium BCE. Excavations have uncovered a central temple, defensive towers and walls, a paved courtyard, stairways, numerous rooms, and beautifully decorated glazed bricks bearing human, geometric, and floral motifs. The discoveries have significantly expanded knowledge of the ancient Mannaeen Kingdom, which once ruled parts of northwestern Iran. Nearby, Hajji Firuz Hill (Hajji Firuz Tappeh), located about two kilometers southeast of Hasanlu in the Solduz Valley,

preserves evidence of one of the earliest farming communities in the region. Archaeologists have identified sixteen occupation layers and eleven major construction phases at the site. Excavations indicate that during the sixth millennium BCE, the settlement consisted of separate residential units containing living rooms, kitchens, storage spaces, and large jars used for preserving food supplies. Archaeologists also discovered that children were buried beneath house floors, a funerary practice common among Neolithic communities. The buildings were primarily constructed from mud walls and hand-made mud bricks, while some interior walls were coated with a mixture of plaster and straw. Traces of red pigment have been found on both walls and floors, and the site's painted pottery represents one of the defining cultural features of the Hajji Firuz tradition. Another major archaeological landmark is Gug Hill (Gug Tappeh), located about six kilometers southeast of Urmia. Measuring roughly 455 meters

from north to south and 600 meters from east to west, the mound rises approximately 24.5 meters above the surrounding plain. Among its most notable discoveries is a bronze plaque depicting the Mesopotamian hero Gilgamesh lifting two wild bulls, an artifact dating to the eighth century BCE. Archaeologists also uncovered a Babylonian-style cylinder seal nearly eight meters below the surface, believed to date to around 2,000 BCE. The seal is currently housed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Scientific excavations have identified seven successive occupational layers at Gug Hill, documenting continuous settlement from the fourth millennium BCE through the first millennium BCE. Archaeologists believe the surrounding village of Gug Hill has significant potential for development as an archaeological park, combining cultural heritage with sustainable tourism. Another important site near Urmia is ancient Kordlar Hill, situated approximately 25 kilometers east of the city beside Kordlar village. Excavations

have revealed architectural remains dating from the fourth to the first millennium BCE. The settlement was primarily constructed using mudbrick and packed-earth walls, many of which have deteriorated over time. Covering roughly two hectares, the oval-shaped mound has yielded pottery fragments and the remains of ancient dwellings uncovered by Iranian and Austrian archaeological teams. According to some historians, Kordlar may represent one of the earliest locations along the shores of Lake Urmia where permanent urban settlement first emerged. Also overlooking the Urmia Plain is Bash Qal'eh, also known as Bash Gala, an imposing archaeological mound located near the Shahid Kalantari Road. Rising prominently above the surrounding farmland, the site has attracted travelers' attention for centuries. According to Behrouz Khan Mohammadi, an archaeologist with West Azarbaijan Province's Cultural Heritage Department, Bash Qal'eh dates back approximately 2,700 years to the Urtarian period during the first millennium BCE. He explained that the fortress originally functioned as a military outpost responsible for guarding the surrounding region. The surviving architectural layout strongly reflects its defensive purpose, and before the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the site attracted archaeological missions from Germany and Italy. West Azarbaijan Province is home to more than 1,800 nationally and internationally registered historical monuments. Among its UNESCO World Heritage properties are Takht-e Soleyman in Takab, the Monastic Ensembles of the Armenian Churches of Iran — including Qara Kelisa (St. Thaddeus Monastery) and the Chapel of Dzordzor — and the Shah Abbasi Caravanserai of Khoy, underscoring the province's exceptional place in Iran's cultural heritage.