



Tehran, Seoul agree on heritage, tourism cooperation roadmap

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran and South Korea agreed on Friday to expand cooperation in cultural heritage, tourism, handicrafts and creative industries during talks between their culture ministers on the sidelines of the 48th session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee. Meeting South Korean Culture, Sports and Tourism Minister Chae Hwi-young in Seoul, Iranian Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Reza Salehi-Amiri proposed a comprehensive roadmap covering cultural exchanges, smart tourism, digital museums, heritage conservation, creative industries and joint exhibitions, CHTN reported. The two sides also agreed to pursue reciprocal tourism and

handicrafts exhibitions, expand people-to-people exchanges and encourage cooperation among artists, scholars and content creators. "Our civilizations share deep historical roots, and those commonalities can serve as the foundation for lasting cooperation," Salehi-Amiri said. "Culture is the strongest bridge between nations." The meeting coincided with Iran's campaign to have the Alamut Castle and Associated Fortresses inscribed as the country's 30th UNESCO World Heritage site when the committee reviews the nomination. Salehi-Amiri said the inscription would strengthen international recognition of Iran's cultural legacy while supporting heritage preservation and inbound tourism.



Iranian Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Minister Reza Salehi-Amiri (L) and South Korean Culture, Sports and Tourism Minister Chae Hwi-young shake hands during their meeting in Seoul on July 24, 2026, in this photo released by the South Korean culture ministry. ● YONHAP

South Korea, which has built globally recognized creative industries spanning film, television, music and digital content,

offers valuable experience that Iran hopes to draw upon, the minister said, inviting Seoul to deepen cooperation in creative industries, artificial intelligence, digital archives, museum technologies and sports tourism. The two ministers also discussed drafting a comprehensive memorandum of understanding and agreed to maintain follow-up consultations. Salehi-Amiri invited his South Korean counterpart to visit Tehran and participate in future cultural and tourism events. As part of his visit, Salehi-Amiri also held talks at the Korea National University of Heritage (KNUH), where he proposed establishing a joint academic working group and launching faculty and student exchanges focused on archaeology, monument restoration, World Her-

itage management, intangible cultural heritage and advanced conservation technologies. "Iran and South Korea can become a model for academic cooperation in cultural heritage across Asia," he said, calling for closer collaboration in training specialists and transferring conservation expertise. Deputy Cultural Heritage Minister Ali Darabi said South Korea's postwar experience in restoring historical monuments could provide valuable expertise for Iran's restoration programs after 149 historical sites were damaged during recent US and Israeli military attacks. He also proposed joint research on digital heritage, underwater archaeology, artificial intelligence and museum cooperation. Korea National University of Heritage President Kang Kyung-hwan welcomed the proposals, describing Iran as home to "one of humanity's oldest and richest civilizations" and saying expanded exchanges of academics and researchers could "open a new chapter" in scientific and cultural cooperation between the two countries.

Iran proposes action plan to expand BRICS health cooperation

Social Desk

Iran proposed a three-point roadmap to strengthen health cooperation among BRICS nations at the 16th BRICS Health Ministers' Meeting in Chandigarh, India, as senior Health Ministry officials called for joint action on emergency preparedness, pharmaceutical innovation, and regulatory cooperation, according to Iran's Health Ministry. Presenting Iran's official statement, Deputy Health Minister and senior adviser Ali Ja'farian said health is "a fundamental human right" and a cornerstone of sustainable development, urging BRICS members to translate political commitments into practical cooperation, IRNA reported. Reflecting on Iran's healthcare response during the recent conflict, Ja'farian said the country's medical system continued operating despite heavy pressure on hospitals, healthcare workers, and medicine supply chains. "Essential health services in Iran never stopped. This is the true meaning of resilience," he said, noting that doctors in Tehran successfully carried out 15 complex liver transplants during the 40-day crisis in March. He stressed that vulnerable patients "cannot wait for conflicts to end," pointing to Iran's expansion of mental health services through the national 190 counseling hotline and the growth of the country's Seraj mental and social health network to more than 120 centers providing free psychological and social support. Ja'farian urged BRICS to prioritize joint early warning systems, emergency response networks, antimicrobial resistance, and en-



Iran's Deputy Health Minister Ali Ja'farian attends the 16th BRICS Health Ministers' Meeting in Chandigarh, India, where he presented Iran's proposal for expanding health cooperation among BRICS nations. ● IRNA

vironmental health threats while respecting national sovereignty. He also called for shifting pharmaceutical cooperation from one-way technology transfer toward joint research, local manufacturing, and more resilient supply chains. "Iran is ready to expand cooperation in tuberculosis research, new vaccines, and advanced diagnostics," he said, while backing the creation of a BRICS expert working group on traditional, complementary, and integrative medicine. Highlighting digital transformation, Ja'farian said artificial intelligence should be deployed "fairly and intelligently" across health systems. He proposed that, before the next ministerial meeting, every BRICS health cooperation mechanism deliver "at least one joint pilot project, one operational protocol, and one measurable outcome" to turn solidarity into tangible results. On the meeting's second day, Iran's delegation also secured consensus for a proposal to include psychosocial support during crises, particularly for children and adolescents, in the draft BRICS declaration, underscoring the bloc's growing focus on mental health cooperation.

When the breath of donali fell silent

A farewell to Balochestan's musical voice

By Alireza Sepahvand
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OPINION EXCLUSIVE

Shir Mohammad Espandar was not merely a musician, he was the donali (a pair of fipple flutes) itself. With the final breath of this great master, one of the most authentic and singular voices of Iran's regional music also fell silent. For nearly a century, he narrated the culture and identity of Balochestan not through words, but through the sound of his instrument, proving that two slender reed pipes can sometimes proclaim the identity of a land more powerfully than any podium or media platform.

In the history of Iranian music, few artists have become so inseparably intertwined with a single instrument that one seems incomplete without the other. Just as the tanbur (a long-necked fretted lute) is forever associated with Seyyed Khalil Alinejad, the dotar with Haj Ghorban Soleimani, and the sorna with Shahmirza Moradi in Iran's musical memory, the donali will forever be identified with the name of Shir Mohammad Espandar. He was not merely a performer of this instrument, he was its greatest narrator and interpreter. At first glance, the donali appears to be a simple instrument, two slender reed pipes placed side by side. Yet behind this apparent simplicity lies one of the most demanding performance techniques among wind instruments. The musician must simultaneously control two independent streams of sound: shaping the melody with one pipe while sustaining a continuous drone with the other. Such mastery is nearly impossible without complete command of circular breathing and precise control of the diaphragm, tongue, and mouth muscles. The slightest disruption in airflow upsets the instrument's sonic balance. Yet for decades, Espandar performed this extraordinarily difficult technique with such ease and naturalness that its complexity remained invisible to his audience.

The secret of his enduring legacy, however, was not confined to his extraordinary technical skill. Espandar breathed life into



the donali. In his performances, musical phrases, motifs, modes, and figures were never mere repetitions of local melodies. Through subtle variations in dynamics, note duration, melodic ornamentation, and an intelligent interplay between silence and sound, he transformed them into a deeply personal and distinctive musical language. Every performance became a fresh retelling of Balochi music, a story that was never repeated in quite the same way. One could hear Balochestan in the sound of his instrument: the scorching winds of the desert, the slow movement of caravans, the exuberance of indigenous ceremonies, and the pulse of a people who have preserved their history and culture through music for centuries. In Espandar's hands, the donali was not simply an instrument, it became the voice of a land that expressed its identity through melody.

Shir Mohammad Espandar was among the rare artists who, without relying on extensive publicity or media support, introduced the music of Balochestan to audiences far beyond Iran's borders. Wherever he performed, before he ever introduced himself, it was the voice of the donali that introduced the cultural identity of Iran to listeners. For years, without ever holding an official title, he served as a cultural ambassador, a responsibility that even cultural institutions have at

times failed to fulfill.

Yet Espandar's story is the familiar, bittersweet fate of many masters of Iran's regional music: artists who receive little recognition during their lifetime, only to be hailed as "national treasures" after they are gone. For years, we have spoken of preserving the music of Iran's ethnic communities, yet we have done far too little to preserve the lives and livelihoods of those who carry this heritage. Even today, many masters of indigenous music live in the country's most remote regions with the barest of means, their reward amounting to little more than a handful of plaques of appreciation and, ultimately, messages of condolence.

Such neglect is not merely an injustice toward an individual artist; it is a disregard for a vital part of Iran's cultural memory. Regional music is not a book that can simply be reprinted. Much of this heritage resides in the minds, memories, lived experiences, and performance practices of its masters. With the passing of each one, a portion of this priceless legacy disappears forever.

Now that Espandar is no longer among us, perhaps the time has come to rethink our approach to the music of Iran's diverse ethnic cultures. This art should not be remembered only during festivals or special occasions. If we truly value Iran's cultural diversity, we must first invest in those who safeguard it, from educating a new generation of performers and documenting traditional performance practices to ensuring the livelihoods of master musicians and establishing specialized research centers dedicated to regional music.

Espandar has departed, but the breath of his donali will continue to resonate in Iran's musical memory. It was a voice that spoke not through the grandeur of orchestras, but through the breath of a man from Balochestan who narrated the identity of an entire land. Perhaps today, more than ever before, we must acknowledge that cultural heritage is preserved not first in museums or archives, but in the hearts and souls of living artists. And if we fail to value them while they are still with us, a part of our history and identity will fall silent with their passing.