

Ardabil to host Iran's first handicrafts city

Iranica Desk

The head of the Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Department of Ardabil has announced the construction of the country's first and largest city dedicated to handicrafts and traditional arts at the Aali-Sara Tourism Complex, also known as Dehkadeh Sangi.

Mohammad Reza Shayeghi said the project is being developed entirely through private-sector investment and is expected to be ready for operation by the end of autumn this year, according to chtn.ir.

The Ardabil Carpet and Handicrafts City is being developed with the aim of creating a specialized hub for introducing, showcasing, promoting and expanding the market for the province's handi-

crafts and traditional arts.

The complex covers an area of more than 6,000 square meters. One of its key features is a dedicated exhibition hall with a floor area of approximately 1,000 square meters and a height of more than 10 meters. Designed specifically for exhibitions, the hall will provide suitable space for specialized exhibitions, the presentation of handicrafts and carpets, traditional arts events and related programs.

Shayeghi emphasized the important role of private investment in the development of the project, noting that all funding for its construction has been provided by the private sector. He described the project as an example of the significant potential for non-governmental investment in developing cultural, tourism and handicraft infrastructure in Ardabil Province.

The official added that the launch of the handicrafts city could provide a platform for bringing together artists, craftspeople, producers, retailers and other professionals in the handicrafts sector. It could also create a dedicated destination for tourists and make the introduction and sale of locally produced handicrafts more organized and targeted.

He further said that one of the main objectives of the project is to establish a direct connection between tourists and the local handicraft-producing community. This would allow visitors, in addition to exploring the province's historical and natural attractions, to become familiar firsthand with the art, culture and productive capabilities of the people of Ardabil and purchase locally made handicrafts.



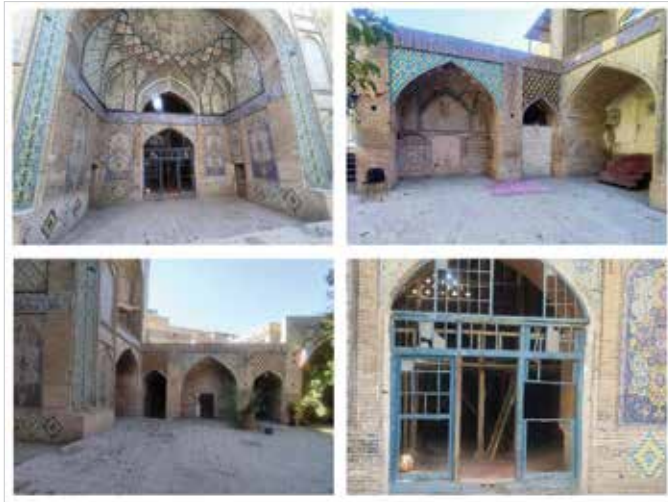
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Haj Rajab-Ali Mosque at risk due to restoration delays

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The Haj Rajab-Ali Mosque, located in the heart of Tehran's historic Sangelaj neighborhood, is a structure more than a century old featuring valuable tilework and inscriptions. Today, however, the mosque is deteriorating amid cracked walls, structural decay and years of uncertainty over its restoration. Heritage enthusiasts warn that the building, once at the center of a much larger cultural and social complex, could become another lost piece of Sangelaj's historic identity if restoration is delayed further.

According to IRNA, those involved in the activities related to cultural heritage and tourism, say what is happening at the Haj Rajab-Ali Mosque, goes beyond ordinary deterioration and amounts to a historic crisis. When an old building reaches such a critical condition without a sustained support and restoration plan, they argue, fu-



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ture generations may have little tangible heritage left to inherit. The neglect reflects a situation in which the perceived value of preserving history has fallen below the cost of restoration. Hamidreza Narenji-Nejad, a tourism advocate, described the condition of the mosque's surviving elements as an ar-

tistic and historical disaster. He pointed to hundreds of remaining fragments of the mosque's historic tiles, which he considers among the building's most remarkable features, as well as the delicate signatures left by the tile craftsmen. These signatures, he said, are now being

gradually lost to erosion and destruction.

Referring to some of the fragments that are barely recognizable, Narenji-Nejad said their delicate nature makes them easy for ordinary visitors to overlook, which in turn leaves them vulnerable to further damage. Some of the tiles are only palm-sized, yet bear the signatures of the artists who created them. Over time, he said, these details have been allowed to fade from view.

For years, efforts by various institutions to find sponsors and donors for the mosque's restoration have reached an impasse. More recently, however, reports have emerged that funding may finally have been allocated to the site. "We repeatedly held talks with the cultural heritage authorities, the Municipality and the Endowments Organization and worked to find a sponsor or donor, but we have yet to see the results," Narenji-Nejad said. "Recently, however, it was announced that the cultural heri-

tage authorities have allocated a budget for the site."

He believes a proper restoration could transform the mosque into a landmark for the Sangelaj neighborhood.

"If this mosque is restored properly, it can become the pride and centerpiece of Saneg-laj neighborhood," he said. "We are dealing not only with a religious site, but with one of Iran's potentially important cultural tourism destinations. If the way forward is cleared, our weekly heritage tours could end here." Narenji-Nejad also highlighted the exceptional quality of the mosque's tilework, saying it compares with that found at some of Iran's most renowned historic monuments.

"The tilework here is on a par with what you see at the Jaame Mosque or the magnificent buildings of Isfahan," he said. "Some of these works are even comparable in delicacy to the tilework of Golestan Palace." According to him, the mosque once functioned in practice as

a neighborhood congregational mosque and formed part of a much larger social and religious complex. The complex extended from the Dargah neighborhood and included a school, bathhouse, water reservoir and Tekyeh, meeting the community's everyday and spiritual needs.

One of the building's most remarkable engineering features, he said, is the way its architects addressed the orientation of the qibla — the direction of prayer toward Mecca.

Pointing to the mosque's distinctive mihrab, Narenji-Nejad said the building took 17 years to construct. "What is astonishing is that, despite the geographical constraints of the site, the architects used highly precise engineering to align the qibla perfectly with the structure," he said.

He argued that this level of precision demonstrates that the mosque should be viewed not simply as an old building, but as an architectural achievement.

Gerivan women weave memory into wool, color

Iranica Desk

In a corner of North Khorasan Province, where mountains merge with the morning mist and the silence of village life blends with the sound of wind moving through the trees, an ancient art continues to shape the lives of local women while preserving its identity across generations.

In the village of Gerivan, kilim weaving is more than a job or pastime. It is a form of meditation, a silent language and a way of recording memories, brought to life through the woolen warp and weft.

Kilim weaving can be regarded as one of the oldest connections between people and nature. The word "kilim," derived from the Turkic root kil, meaning wool, reflects the close relationship between the craft and the wool-bearing flocks that roam the mountain slopes of the province. Unlike pile carpets, which are formed through numerous knots, kilims emerge from the direct interlacing of warp and weft, combining striking simplicity with profound complexity. There are no formal patterns or maps

here. The weaver is an artist who paints with her mind, engraving designs not on paper but deep within her memory and spirit before turning those visions into reality with every beat of the beater and every movement of the weft.

When Gerivan enters the picture, however, the rules change. Gerivan kilim is the authentic creation of the village's Turkic women, an art in which geometry evolves from a mathematical concept into a language of mysticism and aesthetics. In Gerivan weaving, the world is distilled into three simple yet profoundly meaningful forms: the square, the triangle and the circle.

These geometric forms are woven into the fabric with a combination of delicacy and strength. The designs are neither pictorial nor representational; instead, they are abstract and symbolic, as though each shape expresses a fragment of the weaver's ancient beliefs and understanding of existence. The earliest patterns emerged in the hands of the village's young girls as they prepared decorations for their dowries. This hopeful origin has helped give



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Gerivan kilims a sense of freshness and the vitality of everyday life.

Weaving a Gerivan kilim is an intersection of manual skill and patience. Cotton warp threads and woolen weft provide the structure with strength, but what transforms the piece into an artwork is its distinctive weaving techniques. From slit weaving to Pich-Bafi and Jajim-Bafi, each method adds another

layer of complexity to the textile.

The colors of a Gerivan kilim seem to mirror the landscape of North Khorasan. Deep red evokes the warmth of the sun and the blood of life; blue echoes the sky; camel brown recalls the earth and mountains; and ivory white carries the calm of dawn. Together, these colors create a distinctive harmony that is soothing to the eye and calming to the spirit.

In Gerivan, kilim weaving follows the rhythm of nature. When autumn and winter arrive, the land prepares for rest, and women are freed from the demands of farming and orchard work. Looms are then set up inside their homes. It is a season of turning inward, when, amid the silence of cold nights, the sound of warp and weft becomes more prominent than words and stories.

Gerivan kilims also serve practical purposes in village life, including in the form of saddle bags, while providing an important source of household income. Yet they are far more than utilitarian objects. Each kilim is a unique work in which the weaver's hands, time and the history of a people become intertwined.

The craft has been passed from mother to daughter over generations, with each generation adding new patterns to the tradition while preserving its essential character, as firmly rooted as the trees of the region.

Gerivan kilim is more than a handwoven textile. It is a village's memory book, writing the pages of its history in wool and color.