

Iran, Pakistan to initiate Silk Road tours



Arts & Culture Desk

Iran and Pakistan are seeking to increase cross-border tourism by easing group visa procedures, expanding transport links and developing joint cultural and medical tourism programs, officials said at a meeting in Tehran. Anoushirvan Mohseni Bandpey, Iran's deputy tourism minister, met Pakistani Ambassador Imran Ahmed Siddiqui in Tehran to discuss joint tours focused on the Silk Road and investment in tourism facilities along their shared border, IRNA reported on Monday. The talks highlighted the potential of Khorasan Razavi and South Khorasan provinces in northeastern Iran, as well as Sistan and Baluchestan province in the southeast, to attract Pakistani visitors.

Other priorities included religious pilgrimages, medical tourism and programs for university professors, particularly scholars of Persian language and literature. Eight scheduled flights currently operate each week from Tehran and Mashhad in northeastern Iran, to Islamabad, Lahore and Karachi in Pakistan. Both sides called for more affordable and regular air, road, rail and sea connections. Mehdi Shojaei, Iran's director general for foreign tourism marketing and development, said a list of 26 qualified Iranian travel agencies had been submitted to the Foreign Ministry to help coordinate group visa applications. Iran has also asked Pakistan to provide lists of approved tour operators and tourism

influencers for joint promotional activities. "Pakistanis were familiar with Iranian landmarks such as Persepolis and Pasargadae and the works of Persian poets Hafez and Saadi," Siddiqui said. He said awareness of Pakistan's history and literature, particularly Urdu poetry, was more limited in Iran and called for greater cultural exchange and cooperation in television productions. The Silk Road was a network of trade routes linking Asia and Europe, with Iran serving as a key crossroads between Central Asia, the Indian subcontinent and western Asia. Beyond commerce, it fostered cultural and intellectual exchange, offering Iran and Pakistan a shared historical legacy that could support joint tourism initiatives.

Iranian photojournalist Alfred Yaghobzadeh injured in Paris protests

Social Desk

Iranian photojournalist Alfred Yaghobzadeh, known for documenting wars and international crises, was injured during ongoing student protests in the French capital, Paris on Saturday and is recovering, IRNA reported on Monday. Mehdi Ashena, head of the House of Theater Photographers Association, told state media about Yaghobzadeh's injury without providing further details about how he got injured or its nature and severity. Ashena added that the



prominent photographer's condition was stable and that he was recovering. Born in Tehran, in 1959 to an Armenian father and an Assyrian mother, Yaghobzadeh abandoned his studies in interior design after Iran's 1979 revolution and began photographing political and social events. When the Iran-Iraq War broke out in 1980, he

began documenting the conflict, an experience that shaped his career as a photojournalist. He worked with the Associated Press (AP) and photography agencies Gamma and Sygma, and spent time documenting fighting in Lebanon during its civil war. He later joined Sipa Press. Over the course of his career, Yaghobzadeh has covered wars and humanitarian crises across the Middle East, Central Asia and Africa. His photographs have appeared in international media, and he has received multiple awards for photojournalism.

War damages 149 cultural heritage sites in Iran, official says

Arts & Culture Desk

The number of historical and cultural sites in Iran damaged during the 40-day war waged by the United States and Israel against the country in late February has climbed to 149, a senior Iranian heritage official said at a regional meeting. Ali Darabi, Iran's deputy minister of cultural heritage, said an earlier report submitted in March 2026 to the head of the Alliance for Cultural Heritage in Asia (ACHA) had documented damage to at least 56 museums, historic buildings and cultural sites nationwide. Speaking at a session on protecting endangered cultural heritage during ACHA's fourth meeting in Hangzhou, China, Darabi said the reported toll had since increased to 149 sites.

He proposed new mechanisms for Asian countries to cooperate in protecting cultural heritage during conflicts and other emergencies. He also highlighted damage to intangible heritage and elements linked to traditional arts and historical practices, including traditional wooden boats along Iran's southern coasts and mirror-work decorations at Golestan Palace in Tehran. Darabi offered to establish an Asian task force for cultural heritage protection during crises, creating a regional network of emergency heritage specialists and exploring an emergency funding mechanism to support conservation efforts. The proposed task force would develop a shared framework covering prevention, preparedness,

emergency response and recovery. The specialist network would facilitate the exchange of expertise in architecture, conservation, structural and decorative restoration, archaeology, museum management, digital documentation and crisis management. The proposed funding mechanism could support emergency stabilization of buildings, protection of movable artifacts, documentation, measures to prevent further damage and preliminary restoration studies. Darabi said Iran was prepared to share its expertise in conserving and restoring historic buildings and urban areas, emergency protection, crisis management and traditional skills. If the proposals are approved, Iran would also take part in



Iran's deputy minister of cultural heritage Alireza Darabi addresses the ACHA meeting in Hangzhou, China on October 19, 2026. ● IRNA

developing common guidelines, organizing training courses and implementing pilot projects. He argued that wars, natural disasters, climate change, fires and earthquakes cross national borders, making cultural heritage protection a shared regional responsibility rather than solely a national one.

Iran's northern corridors ...

This has created new opportunities for cooperation between Iran and the countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus. For example, Caucasian countries such as Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia can use Iranian territory to connect with Turkey and Europe. They can also reach South Asia, including Pakistan and Afghanistan, through Iran for both transportation and trade. Iran, in turn, can connect to the Black Sea and Russia through the Caucasus. Via Azerbaijan, Iran can ship its goods to Russia, while routes through Azerbaijan and Georgia allow Iranian goods to reach the Black Sea ports of Poti and Batumi. From there, commercial shipments can continue across the Black Sea. The situation is even more favorable in Central Asia, where both road and rail networks are available. For example,

a railway route originating in China can enter Iran through Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan before connecting to Iran's nationwide rail network. From there, goods can be transported onward to Europe, Turkey or South Asia. The route also enables Iran to export its own goods to Central Asian countries and even China by rail. Road transport is another available option. These days, Iranian and foreign trucks can be seen traveling along highways leading to border crossings in the region, and their numbers have been increasing. In addition, Iran maintains maritime links across the Caspian Sea with Azerbaijan, Russia, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan. These countries can use the route to export goods to and import goods from Iran, while Iran can transport cargo to ports in each of these countries.

Under current circumstances, consultations between Iran and these countries through the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development, alongside efforts by the Foreign Ministry to establish the necessary groundwork for resolving logistical problems more quickly, are particularly important. With routes through the Sea of Oman and the Persian Gulf currently facing difficulties due to US aggression and the military presence near the Strait of Hormuz, these countries can also turn to Iran and alternative routes for their exports and imports. Russia faces a similar situation. It has direct maritime links with Iran across the Caspian Sea, as well as connections through Azerbaijan and another route that runs toward Uzbekistan before entering Iran through Turkmenistan. Russia, like Iran, is operating under sanctions. Consequently, cooperation between the two countries, both

of which are facing sanctions-related pressures, is particularly important for maintaining transportation links and commercial exchanges. In this regard, the two countries appear to be activating new routes at an increasing pace and seeking to iron out the problems affecting maritime and land transportation. As far as possible, Iran seeks to avoid competing with Russia, Turkey, China, Central Asia and the Caucasus, instead making cooperation the basis of its approach. Iran believes that all countries lose out when competition, particularly unconstructive rivalry, takes precedence. By contrast, interaction within a framework of cooperation would undoubtedly bring greater benefits to all the countries concerned. Accordingly, Iran currently faces no economic challenges with Russia, Turkey, China, Central Asia and the Caucasus. There are, of course, some

political differences between Iran and Turkey over the use of the Zangezur route. However, as the route has yet to be built, these issues are not currently at the forefront and have receded into the background. Iran has also participated in meetings under the 3+3 format, which brings together Iran, Russia and Turkey as countries outside the Caucasus, alongside Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan as the countries of the region. The purpose of these meetings is to encourage greater cooperation. Holding more such meetings and strengthening the format would be important for deepening Iran's ties with these countries, as well as with Central Asian nations. Iran's membership in regional groupings such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Eurasian Economic Union and the Economic Cooperation Organization can also help Central Asian countries, the Caucasus states,

Russia and Iran expand their cooperation at this critical juncture. Such engagement, backed by political will among the participating countries, would undoubtedly strengthen regional cooperation and pave the way for more durable economic arrangements. Overall, it appears that although the closure of the Strait of Hormuz has created economic difficulties and challenges for Iran and regional countries, particularly those in Central Asia and the Caucasus, it has also prompted them to consider closer cooperation and explore alternative ways of working together. This is a positive development, as once the Strait of Hormuz is reopened, the new routes established as alternatives during this period could complement existing ones and help boost economic activity in Iran, Central Asian and Caucasian countries, Russia and China.