

Experts call for global geopark development in Lut Desert

Iranica Desk

A specialized meeting on the Lut Desert, part of a series of expert sessions on Kerman studies, was held at Shahid Bahonar University of Kerman. Ibrahim Mohammadi, a faculty member at the Graduate University of Advanced Technology in Kerman, spoke at the meeting about the province's tourism potential. He noted that Kerman is home to 10 sites inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List and covers an area larger than the combined land area of 115 countries, according to ISNA. Pointing to the province's re-

markable diversity of natural, geological, historical, cultural, religious and spiritual attractions, Mohammadi said Kerman accounts for approximately 11 percent of Iran's total area but attracts only around 0.7 percent of the country's tourists. The paleontology PhD holder outlined the benefits of establishing a UNESCO Global Geopark in the Lut Desert. These include strengthening the desert's international standing and bringing its valuable heritage under a unified management framework; promoting sustainable geotourism; developing tourism, scientific and nature-based

routes; encouraging longer visitor stays; and showcasing the Lut's unique natural and geological features. He added that a geopark could boost the local economy and create jobs for tour guides, traditional accommodation providers, transport operators, handicraft producers and other local businesses. It could also expand research and education, facilitate geological and geomorphological studies, and encourage greater participation by local communities in protecting natural heritage and benefiting sustainably from tourism. Mohammadi emphasized that

the initiative would also help strengthen protection of the Lut Desert by linking key geosites through coordinated management and reducing damage caused by tourism and inappropriate exploitation. Other objectives include developing an integrated tourism destination, promoting the Shahdad Kaluts and other geological attractions through complementary routes and visitor experiences, enhancing Kerman's international profile, and raising awareness of the province's natural and geological assets. He further highlighted the potential for international scientific



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cooperation, sustainable regional development, environmentally responsible tourism, job creation and a more equitable distribution of tourism revenues among local communities. Achieving these goals, he said, would re-

quire science-based and participatory management, a comprehensive conservation and tourism plan, documentation of geosites, public education, and the involvement of relevant institutions and local residents.

Pomegranate Festival promotes investment, tourism development in Khalkhal

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The third Nemahil Pomegranate Cultural and Tourism Festival was held in Khvoresh Rostam District, Khalkhal, Ardabil Province, on Thursday, attracting large numbers of tourists. The festival featured stalls selling orchard produce, handicrafts and local foods, alongside cultural and artistic performances.

tourism investors to explore opportunities in the region, highlighting the extensive potential of southern Ardabil Province, and added that government agencies would provide the necessary support to businesses and investors in the sector. Outlining the department's efforts to develop tourism across the province, Jabari noted that, alongside organizing festivals



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Jalil Jabari, Director General of the Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Department of Ardabil Province, said at the festival that Khvoresh Rostam District, located in the southern part of the province, has significant potential across various sectors. He said the pomegranate festival, held for the third consecutive year along the banks of the Ghezel Ozan River, aims to showcase these local assets and promote regional economic development.

"In a region with unique tourism attractions, agricultural resources and handicrafts, we are working to connect these sectors and develop the tourism industry in order to improve local livelihoods and contribute to the development of the province," Jabari added. He stressed that by organizing such events, the provincial organization seeks not only to foster social vitality, showcase local potential and attract tourists, but also to strengthen cultural identity across the province, pass the experiences of previous generations on to future generations, revive traditions and promote national unity.

Referring to tourism-related issues in Khalkhal, Jabari said they were being pursued in cooperation with the city's governor's office. He invited

and tourism events in different areas, the department had secured first place nationally in the public relations category, as well as first place in foreign tourism advertising and marketing. He said these achievements reflected the efforts of the department's staff to promote the province's tourism assets and support the growth of its tourism industry. The Nemahil Pomegranate Festival welcomed visitors with colorful stalls showcasing orchard produce, authentic handicrafts and local cuisine, attracting people who had traveled to the region to discover the remarkable potential of southern Ardabil Province. Khalkhal, with a population of approximately 90,000, is located in the south of Ardabil Province and is home to a wealth of historical, natural and agricultural attractions. Khvoresh Rostam District, with its favorable climate and fertile orchards, is one of the major pomegranate-producing hubs in Ardabil Province. More than 600 tons of high-quality pomegranates are produced in the area each year. Their superior quality and distinctive flavor set Khvoresh Rostam's pomegranates apart from those grown in other regions.

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The registration of 32 historic, cultural and industrial sites in Masjed Soleyman Khuzestan Province, by Iran's National Heritage Registration Council marks a significant milestone in preserving the city's rich heritage and advancing efforts to secure UNESCO World Heritage recognition for its cultural and industrial landscape. Beyond protecting the city's valuable historic assets, the initiative could help highlight Iran's contribution to the development of the Middle East's oil industry and the social, architectural and urban transformations that followed.

Mojtaba Gahestouni, a cultural heritage expert wrote in a note published by chtn.ir that during meetings of the National Heritage Registration Council held on October 20 and 21, 2026, at the Khuzestan Province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization in Ahvaz, 32 dossiers relating to historic, cultural and industrial sites in Masjed Soleyman were reviewed. The meetings were attended by a registration delegation from the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts. The dossiers, prepared and documented by the National Site for the Cultural and Industrial Landscape of Masjed Soleyman, were approved for final inclusion on Iran's National Heritage List.

The achievement reflects the specialized work, sustained efforts and professional expertise of the national site, alongside cooperation from experts at the Masjed Soleyman Cultural Heritage Office and support and guidance from the provincial director-general and central office staff. These efforts have focused on identifying, documenting, protecting and promoting the enduring heritage of one of Iran's most important historic and industrial cities. The newly registered sites encompass a diverse range of industrial, architectural, social, educational, religious and infrastructure-related heritage. Together, they tell the story of the emergence and expansion of Iran's oil industry while reflecting far-reaching changes in lifestyles, architecture, public services and urban planning in the modern era.

The significance of this collection extends beyond the historical value of individual buildings and sites. It is the connections between them that create a distinctive cul-

Masjed Soleyman's industrial heritage moves closer to global recognition

tural and industrial landscape. Masjed Soleyman's landscape comprises an interconnected network of oil installations, administrative and residential buildings, bridges, service centers, social spaces, religious buildings and historic sites. Collectively, these elements illustrate how the oil industry became part of everyday life and transformed Iran's urban and social structures. According to information pro-

vided by the National Site for the Cultural and Industrial Landscape of Masjed Soleyman, 136 heritage registration dossiers have so far been prepared to identify, document and protect the city's historic, cultural and industrial assets.

This extensive body of work highlights the richness of Masjed Soleyman's heritage and the need for a comprehensive conservation strategy — one that treats national registration as a starting point and continues through effective protection, scientifically guided restoration, the management of protected areas, ongoing documentation and public outreach.

Alongside this achievement, the prospect of including the Cultural and Industrial Landscape of Masjed Soleyman on UNESCO's Tentative List of World Heritage Sites represents an important opportunity for the city's cultural heritage. The national site has prepared a World Heritage nomination dossier for Masjed Soleyman and submitted it to UNESCO. The initiative could help bring the city's historical significance to wider international attention. But why is World Heritage recognition important for Masjed Soleyman, and why

should the effort not be postponed indefinitely?

The answer lies in countries' growing efforts to identify, protect and promote their industrial heritage internationally.

Industrial heritage is far more than a collection of factories, oil wells, pipelines and old buildings. It tells the story of major economic, technological, social and cultural changes that have shaped the modern world. Countries that present this his-

World Heritage List. Inclusion on the Tentative List does not constitute definitive world heritage recognition, nor does it, by itself, establish historical precedence or a country's exclusive ownership of a particular historical narrative. Nevertheless, the Tentative List is an official and important stage in identifying potential World Heritage nominations and can indicate which sites countries intend to prioritize for future consideration.

The case for world heritage recognition for Masjed Soleyman, therefore, should not be viewed simply as competition with neighboring countries. The central issue is safeguarding Iran's historical contribution to the emergence of the oil industry and the transformations it brought about across the Middle East. Without a comprehensive nomination supported by credible documentation and comparative research, the international account of these

developments could fail to adequately reflect Masjed Soleyman's role. The city's importance lies in the fact that its industrial sites cannot be understood separately from the social and urban context in which they developed. Oil installations, company bungalows, bridges, schools, healthcare centres, clubs and religious buildings together offer a multilayered picture of the emergence of an industrial city in Iran.

The relationship between these industrial, architectural and social elements could form the basis of a cultural and industrial landscape nomination — one that looks beyond individual buildings to encompass the connections between historic sites, their surrounding environment, the history of labour and the life of the community. Accordingly, a world heritage nomination for Masjed Soleyman should present a well-documented and comprehensive account of these connections. In addition to explaining the city's historical role in the oil industry, it should address its architectural and urban-planning values, technological developments, social relations and the industry's impact on residents' lives.



tory through credible historical evidence, effective conservation and rigorous research have a greater opportunity to establish their place in the international narrative of industrial development.

Despite their different historical contexts and characteristics, these proposals raise an important issue for Iran. As countries across the region seek recognition for their industrial and urban heritage, delays in systematically presenting Masjed Soleyman's historical legacy could limit the international visibility of one of the Middle East's most significant centres in the history of oil.

It is important, however, to distinguish between inclusion on UNESCO's Tentative List and final inscription on the