UNESCO inscription decision on Masouleh to follow expert evaluations

Iranica Desk

The final decision on the inscription of Masouleh on the UNESCO World Heritage List will be made following the completion of expert assessments and in accordance with UNESCO's world heritage procedures.

Shaiful Shahidan, an evaluator with the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), made the remarks during a meeting with Gilan Province's Governor General Hadi Haqshenas, highlighting the significance of Masouleh's world heritage nomination, according to ISNA.

He said the preparation and pursuit of the nomination dossier had been the result of cooperation among various executive bodies, experts, and relevant institutions, adding that the support of the province's highest-ranking executive official reflected the importance attached to the initiative at the provincial level.

Referring to Masouleh's historical and cultural significance, he said the referral of the dossier for further examination had provided an opportunity for a more detailed assessment of the town's values and distinctive characteristics.

Explaining the evaluation process, the ICOMOS representative stressed that the on-site assessment was only one stage of the world heritage nomination procedure. Once completed, the resulting report would be submitted to the relevant expert bodies for further consideration. The findings would then be examined through ICOMOS's specialist mechanisms.

He expressed hope that continued cooperation among the responsible institutions and the completion of the required assessments would help advance Masouleh's world heritage bid.

Haqshenas, for his part, said the documentation and evidence submitted as part of the nomination dossier demonstrated the town's historical and cultural significance, expressing hope that the evaluation process would proceed successfully.

He praised the efforts of experts and those involved in preparing Masouleh's nomination dossier, adding that the specialist studies conducted so far had shed light on various aspects of the town's historical and cultural value and provided a sound basis for the next stages of assessment.

Haqshenas said Masouleh's historical background formed part of Gilan Province's broader civilizational heritage, noting that the province was home to numerous valuable historical monuments and archaeological sites, each reflecting the long history of settlement, knowledge, and culture in the region across different periods.

Referring to the historic Marlik Cup, discovered in Rudbar, he said the approximately 3,000-year-old artifact, whose image once appeared on Iranian banknotes, demonstrated the ancient inhabitants' expertise in metalworking, mold-making, and artistic craftsmanship.

He also identified the historic Espi Mazget structure as further evidence of Gilan's rich cultural heritage, saying the monument, whose origins date back to the pre-Islamic period, reflects an important part of the region's historical identity and architectural tradition.

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Espi Mazget is an ancient sanctuary dating back to the pre-Islamic period that was also used during the Seljuk and Safavid eras. It is located 80 kilometers west of Rasht and 22 kilometers south of Talesh.

Haqshenas further referred to the discovery of a skull dating back approximately 1,200 years in the village of Buyeh, which reportedly bears evidence of surgical intervention. He said the historical find, currently preserved at the Gilanology Research Institute, was a notable example of the region's medical knowledge in the past.

Other historical landmarks, including structures in Rasht dating back around 700 years, the centuries-old Rudkhan Castle, and numerous other monuments across the province, demonstrate the continuity of cultural and civilizational life in Gilan, he added.

The governor noted that Rasht had also emerged as a regional center around 500 years ago, saying that the combined historical evidence highlighted Gilan's considerable potential for national and international recognition.

Emphasizing the importance of Masouleh's historical standing in the international evaluation process, Haqshenas said the town's cultural and historical significance was already well recognized by the people of Gilan and Iran.

Its inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List, he said, would constitute international recognition of a status that had long been established in the historical and cultural memory of the Iranian people.

He stressed that Masouleh possessed valuable historical assets and supporting documentation for its world heritage bid, warning that failure to secure inscription would mean losing an important opportunity to introduce part of Iran's historical and cultural heritage to the international community.

The Gilan governor expressed hope that, with the completion of specialist assessments and continued cooperation among the relevant authorities, Masouleh's nomination would successfully proceed through the remaining stages of the world heritage evaluation process.

Isfahan steps up efforts to restore historic Risbaf Factory

Iranica Desk

The governor general of Isfahan Province has announced that efforts to restore the historic Risbaf textile factory and transform it into the region's largest museum are being pursued through cooperation and coordination between national and provincial authorities.

Mehdi Jamalinejad said protecting the province's historic heritage and removing obstacles to tourism development projects, particularly the national Risbaf project, remain key priorities.

Speaking to IRNA, Jamalinejad said efforts to turn the Risbaf Factory into a museum meeting international standards were being pursued in earnest. He added that the latest progress and implementation plans for the historic complex were reviewed at the second meeting of the Risbaf Strategic Council, attended by Seyyed Reza Salehi-Amiri, Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts.

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Describing the factory as one of Iran's outstanding symbols of industrial architecture and its history of labor and production, the governor said Risbaf holds a special place in Isfahan's historical and urban identity. The meeting also examined ways to transform the complex into a museum meeting international standards, a long-standing demand of the province, he added.

Jamalinejad said discussions also focused on protecting other major historical sites and heritage complexes across Isfahan Province, accelerating efforts to resolve legal and administrative obstacles facing tourism projects, and making effective use of the province's exceptional heritage assets to promote sustainable development and preserve them for future generations.

He added that accelerating the implementation of the national Risbaf project through greater cooperation and coordination among relevant organisations at both national and provincial levels was one of the main priorities of the Strategic Council meeting.

Earlier, the Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts had stressed the importance of preserving the independence of decision-making on the Risbaf project and announced that full responsibility for the initiative would be entrusted to a qualified national council.

Salehi-Amiri also said the project's design and implementation would move forward through the establishment of a steering council, drawing on the expertise of universities and securing the necessary financial resources.

According to the minister, the council should comprise three main groups: heritage experts and academics from the universities of Isfahan and Tehran; executive officials, including provincial governors and local authorities; and institutions and officials with the capacity to provide financial support, including the Plan and Budget Organization.

The minister has described the aim of restoring Risbaf as transforming the complex into a landmark structure and the largest museum of its kind established since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. The proposed museum is intended to reflect Isfahan's industrial heritage and historical identity while bringing together the city's cultural, economic and heritage potential within an integrated framework.

The historic Risbaf Factory is among the last surviving wool-spinning mills in Isfahan. Located along the city's historic Chaharbagh-e Bala thoroughfare, the complex occupies a site of approximately 74,000 square meters, with a built-up area of nearly 54,000 square meters.

Risbaf is regarded as one of Iran's significant industrial heritage sites. It was constructed during the Pahlavi period, when Iran was beginning its transition towards industrialization. The factory was one of nine industrial complexes established as part of Isfahan's textile industry, playing an important role in the city's industrial history.

The building was registered on Iran's National Heritage List in 2002 and remained under the ownership of Bank Melli for many years. Later plans were put forward to transfer ownership of the complex to the Ministry of Cultural Heritage for the establishment of a regional museum in Isfahan. However, the transfer was delayed by disputes over the factory's financial assets and the rights of Bank Melli shareholders.

Finally, in December 2023, as part of efforts to rescue and preserve the historic site, the Risbaf Factory was officially handed over to the Isfahan Provincial Department of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts. The transfer paved the way for renewed efforts to restore the complex and develop it into a regional museum.

Chalsara preserves its ancient heritage amid Ilam's urban expansion

Iranica Desk

Chalsara, a village on the southwestern outskirts of Ilam, offers a rich combination of archaeological heritage and natural attractions. Home to around 7,500 people, the village covers approximately 110 hectares under its rural development plan.

As Ilam expands, however, Chalsara is facing significant changes. The growth of Qods Township has brought new roads and development closer to the village, with some local streets increasingly serving as connecting routes between the township and the city.

Jaber Qobadi, head of Chalsara's village council, said the built-up areas of the village and three neighboring villages are set to be incorporated into Ilam's municipal boundaries. The move is expected to contribute to the city's population growth, potentially taking it beyond 200,000, ISNA wrote.

Yet Chalsara's significance extends well beyond its changing urban landscape. The village is home to several archaeological sites that shed light on the region's ancient past.

The Bakheh Nam archaeological site, which dates back to the Bronze and Iron ages, covers an area of about five hectares, measuring approximately 500 meters by 100 meters. Its two sections, known as Bakheh Nam 1 and Bakheh Nam 2, were registered on Iran's National Heritage List in 2003. Recent archaeological surveys have focused on defining the site's boundaries and identifying its protected zones.

The ancient Mil Hill, another archaeological landmark, is also located near the village.

Chalsara's historic attractions include the Geriyan and Khandan watermills. Geriyan Mill dates back to the post-Islamic period and was registered as a national heritage site on April 29, 2003.

The village also boasts considerable natural appeal. Its walnut orchards, vegetable farms, natural springs and proximity to the Godar Khosh River create a landscape that could support rural and nature-based tourism.

Farzad Sharifi, director general of Ilam Province's Department of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, has highlighted the area's natural and cultural assets as potential foundations for tourism development.

With its archaeological remains, historic watermills and scenic countryside, Chelsara has the potential to become a destination for visitors interested in both history and nature. Realizing that potential, however, will require careful planning to ensure that development does not come at the expense of the village's identity and heritage.

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