

Minister Presents Iran’s Roadmap for Islamic Tourism



Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Reza Salehi-Amiri (1st left) speaking at the D8 meeting in Egypt.

CAIRO (Dispatches) -- At a meeting of tourism ministers from the Developing Eight (D8) member countries, Iran’s Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Reza Salehi-Amiri presented a comprehensive roadmap aimed at transforming relations within the Muslim world through tourism.

Addressing the event here, Salehi-Amiri described Iran as a leader in smart governance, cultural diplomacy, and civilization-building investment.

The minister offered a strategic analysis of tourism across the Islamic world, highlighting the need to redefine the sector as a pillar of civilizational diplomacy, a driver of sustainable development, and a source of social capital.

Acknowledging ongoing geopolitical shifts and the rise of transformative technologies such as artificial intelligence,

Salehi-Amiri underscored the need for a new global order shaped by Islamic rationality, Eastern wisdom, and technological innovation.

The minister detailed Iran’s evolving approach to tourism, which he said has been shifting from traditional methods toward a technology-driven, development-focused, and economic model.

He noted that Iran, with its rich tangible and intangible heritage, is striving to become a regional hub for health tourism, reviving historical trade and travel routes, developing smart infrastructure, and attracting international investment.

He proposed the establishment of a tourism investment center, and launching the country’s first artificial intelligence unit in the tourism sector is an important step in that direction.

2,000-Year-Old Zahhak Castle in Hashtrud



TEHRAN -- Located 20 kilometers southeast of Hashtrud in Iran’s East Azarbaijan Province, Zahhak Castle also known as Narin Qala or Zahhak Qalasi is a remarkable relic of Iran’s ancient past.

Dating back over 2,000 years, the fortress is believed to have been constructed during the Parthian and Sasanian eras.

Built with distinctive red brickwork, Zahhak Castle sits majestically among the Surmeli Mountains, flanked by the Qarangoo and Shurchai rivers. Its strategic position and architectural design suggest it once served both defensive and religious purposes.

According to some researchers, the castle may have func-

tioned as a sanctuary dedicated to Anahita, the ancient Persian goddess of water and fertility.

The site spans approximately 10 kilometers in length and 2 kilometers in width, making it one of the more expansive archaeological remains in the region.

One of its most prominent surviving features is a well-preserved chahartaqi, a domed structure commonly found in Zoroastrian architecture.

Spring, especially the months of April and May, is considered the best time to visit Zahhak Castle, when the surrounding nature is in full bloom and the weather is ideal for exploration.

Tehran International Book Fair Opens

TEHRAN — The 36th Tehran International Book Fair officially opened on Wednesday under the slogan of “Let’s Read for Iran.”

Held at the Imam Khomeini Mosalla complex, this year’s fair spans nearly 75,000 square meters of indoor space and will run for 11 days, welcoming over 2,300 publishers from Iran and abroad.

Key officials, including Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf and Culture Minister Abbas Salehi, attended the opening ceremony.

The exhibition is divided into several thematic sections, including educational publishers, the children and young adult section, university-level publishers, and Arabic and Latin books.

The main hall hosts general publishers, and the international and media section.



Iraq is the official guest of honor this year.

A key highlight is the launch of the first Tehran Literary Fellowship Program, set to open on May 12 with participation from domestic and international publishers and cultural figures.

Special subsidies for book purchases are available to students, scholars, and seminary members, with individual allowances co-funded by the Ministry of Culture and the participants.

Iraq’s Minister of Culture and Tourism Ahmed Fakak expressed astonishment at the vast size and scope of the event.

Speaking after visiting Iraq’s national pavilion, Fakak praised the number of participating publishers and the wide variety of titles on display.

“I’ve just visited the Iraqi booth, but I’m already impressed by the immense scale of the Tehran Book Fair. I hope I’ll have time to see all it has to offer,” he said.

More than 30 Iraqi publishers and cultural figures, both public and private, are participating in this year’s edition.

Minister Salehi emphasized the importance of cultural diplomacy between Iran and Iraq, highlighting shared historical and cultural ties.

He expressed hope that Iraq’s prominent presence would mark a new chapter in bilateral cultural cooperation, particularly in publishing.

Qanat: Ancient Iran’s Engineering Miracle

TEHRAN -- The Iranian Plateau inherits a civilization that has undergone urbanization for more than 10,000 years, marked by perennial struggle to cope with fluctuations in rainfall throughout history.

The Persepolis World Heritage Site is one of the rare landmarks that provides insight into the culture and beliefs of ancient Iranians, Press TV wrote.

Etched on one of the walls, the largest known inscription by King Darius the Great reads, “May the land of Iran be protected from enemies, drought, and lies.”

Water scarcity has been a permanent feature of Iranian history and a very important force in shaping the socio-political landscape of Iranian society for many centuries.

Since ancient times, Iranians have had to effectively adapt to the climatic vulnerability, developing some advanced water management systems, the most prominent of which is the underground canal or qanat.

In fact, Iran is one of the few countries with a history of storing and supplying water. Qanats were first invented by ancient Iranians about 3,000 years ago and then spread to other countries, the traces of which can be seen today in Asia, Africa, and Spain in Europe.

Beginning in the Iron Age, the Persians learned how to dig aqueducts that would bring mountain groundwater to arid plains.

Two-thirds of Iran is either desert or mountains. Deserts make up more than 300,000 square kilometers of the country.

The irrigation tunnels that collected water from different layers of earth by relying only on gravity allowed agriculture to bloom in the arid desert and one of the oldest civilizations in the world to flourish.

The typical design of a qanat is that of a series of well-like vertical shafts, which are all connected by a gently sloping tunnel. This taps into groundwater and delivers it to the surface via gravity, therefore eliminating the need for pumping.

Although the methods are simple, the construction of a qanat requires a detailed understanding of subterranean geology and a degree of engineering sophistication.

The gradient of the qanat must be carefully controlled, since too shallow a gradient yields no flow and too steep a gradient will result in excessive erosion, collapsing the qanat.

A deft understanding of the soil conditions is also essential, the lack of which leads to collapses, requiring extensive rework at best and fatality for the crew at worst.

To begin with, surveyors would have to find an elevated source of water,

usually at the head of a former river valley or even in a cave lake and then cut long, sloping tunnels from the water source to where it was needed.

Based on a survey, some 37,000 out of a total of 120,000 ancient qanats are still in use throughout Iran.

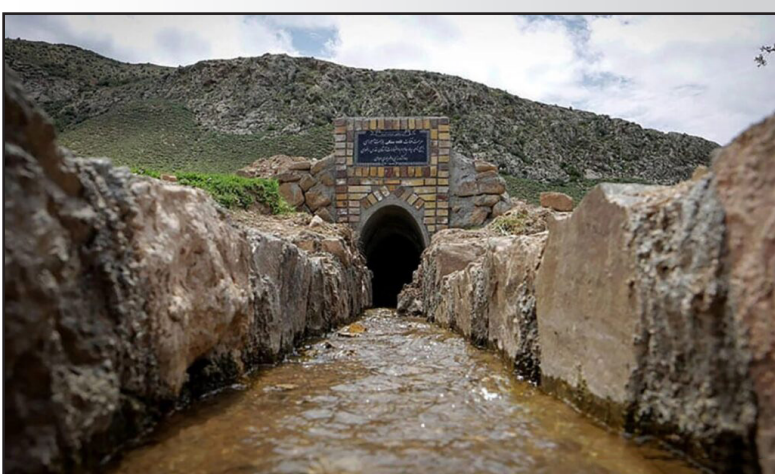
The decline of these engineering marvels began in the 1960s and 1970s when former monarch Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi initiated a land reform. The subdivision of the large estates that relied on qanats caused an administrative tangle, and many qanats fell into disrepair.

Subsequent “modernization”, marked by excessive water pumping and dam building and the declining use of qanats, has left Iran faced with a severe hydrological drought.

Fortunately, there is reason for hope. Faced with recurring droughts of high severity and duration, the Islamic Republic is vigorously following restoring qanats and other traditional historic hydraulic structures for sustainable development.

For example, Article 35 of Iran’s development plan calls for rehabilitation, repair, and dredging of qanats at an annual rate of five percent under the country’s watershed and aquifer management policies.

Modern engineering techniques can enhance the efficiency and capacity of qanats, making them a viable solution for sustainable water supply in areas facing severe water shortage.



The Mazhar (outlet) of a Persian Qanat

Experts say the restoration of qanats, in addition to preserving the valuable heritage, will improve sustainable agricultural yield and reverse migration of villagers, and boost life satisfaction among local communities.

According to official statistics, about 60,000 qanats are up for restoration, which can provide more than 7 billion cubic meters of groundwater a year to the agricultural sector.

This volume of water recovered through pumping requires using 800 megawatts of electricity which some Iranians power plants currently produce by burning mazut.

Qanats drain groundwater naturally without using any energy and environmental pollution involved in it.

They also enable water to be transported over long distances by largely eliminating the risk of evaporation which accounts for up to 16% of the storage capacity of the dam reservoirs in water-stressed regions.

The underground aquifer system also has the advantage of being fairly resistant to natural disasters, such as floods and earthquakes, as well as to man-made disasters, such as wartime destruction and water supply terrorism.

A comprehensive review of the watershed and aquifer management is not a choice, but a must for Iran’s resilience in the face of challenges and the qanat system - though not a magic bullet – is a crucial solution.

The only way forward is to change our approach, take timely action, and learn from past mistakes.

Picture of the Day

A photograph showing two men in traditional Persian Gulf attire performing a dance on a beach. They are wearing long, flowing black and white robes with colorful patterns. One man is playing a drum, and the other is playing a wind instrument. The background shows the ocean and some ships in the distance.

Celebrating Persian Gulf.

Photo by ISNA