

# 'Lovely Phantom' unveiled

Iraqi official's kiss on Iranian pilot's forehead

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The book 'Lovely Phantom' was unveiled at the Iran Cultural & Press Institute on Tuesday, recounting conversations with five phantom pilots of the Iranian Air Force who defended Iran against the Ba'athist invasion during the early months of the Iraqi-imposed war (1980-1988).

The book's writer, Sadeq Vafaei, discussed the book in a conversation with Mohammad Atighehchi, Muhammad Sadiq Qaderi, Mohammad Reza Salavati, and Ja'far Emadi. Mahmoud Zarrabi was one of the prominent Iranian pilots who died a few months ago. A chapter of the book features interviews with some of his colleagues, depicting the bravery and contributions of this pilot. The unveiling ceremony was



● SAJJAD SAFARI/IRAN DAILY

attended by former Iranian Air Force pilots including Qaderi, a phantom pilot who was captured by the Iraqi Army in the early days of the war, shared memories of his 10-year captivity in Iraq, and remembered some of his martyred comrades. In the book's introduction, it is written: "During the Iraqi-imposed war, the Iranian Air Force, in view of its mission and quick response along with the effective use of military tools, swift-

ly made a response to Ba'athist Iraqi Army invasions by reaching high-value enemy targets deep within their territory. This was done with great power, strength, and speed, disrupting the enemy's equations in the quickest possible time." Qaderi recounted an incident during his captivity, "One day, while I was injured, they took me to the office of a leader of the Mukhabarat, the Iraqi intelligence service, Barzan Ibra-

him al-Tikriti. They handed me a prepared text full of insults on the Islamic Republic of Iran, the army, and the air force, and asked me to read it aloud in front of the cameras." He continued, "I laughed and told them I have nothing to say to you, and I won't read this text." "They broke my hand, but I raised my other hand and said, 'You can break my other hand, too, but I won't read this text.'

Then, they showed me a picture of my wife and children, saying they could take us out of the country and offer many benefits if I cooperated. However, I stood firm, saying I am an officer and value my colleagues. I am proud of them, and I won't say anything against them." According to Qaderi, the Iraqi official came forward, kissed his forehead, and said, "I wished an Iraqi officer held captive in Iran would resist like you."

## Malaysia to host Iranian Film Festival



Arts & Culture Desk

Six Iranian films will be held in the cinemas of Kuala Lumpur, Putrajaya, and Penang as part of the Iranian Film Festival in

Malaysia from February 29 to March 10, announced Iranian Cultural Attaché in Malaysia, Habib Reza Arzani. The festival is supported by the Islamic Culture and Rela-

tions Organization (ICRO) and the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Malaysia, aiming to strengthen cultural ties between the two nations, IRNA wrote. Arzani highlighted Iran's cinematic achievements post-Islamic Revolution, emphasizing the increase in film production, expansion of cinema halls, global participation in significant film events, and the introduction of young Iranian filmmakers. He underlined the festival's role in familiarizing Malaysians with the world of Iranian cinema.

The cultural figure stressed the festival's significance in promoting cultural values, religion, and ethics of the Iranian society. Arzani expressed optimism, referencing the success of the Iranian Film Festival in 2018, noting an increase in films and the presence of Iranian directors, making this year's event more attractive. The films, including 'Hanas' (2022), 'The Painting Pool' (2013), 'Track 143' (2014), 'Bodyguard' (2016), 'No Prior Appointment' (2022), and 'Today' (2014), will be screened at GSC cinemas in Kuala Lum-



pur and Penang. Arzani announced the participation of Iranian directors Behrouz Shoeibi and Narges Abyar, representing the creative minds of Iranian cinema,

in the festival's opening ceremonies in Kuala Lumpur and Penang. Arzani noted the festival's consideration of the Palestine issue in film selection.

## 500 signatories criticize PEN America's stance on literary figures killed in Gaza

An open letter from writers and literary professionals to PEN America calling on the organization to take a stronger stance on the Israel-Gaza war has reached more than 500 signatories, including writers Roxane Gay, Maaza Mengiste and Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah. The letter, dated 3 February but still open to signatures, condemns PEN America for being "silent" about "Palestinian journalists, writers, and poets murdered by Israel" outside of "press releases buried on its website", The Guardian reported. Four days later, on 7 February, PEN America published a press release stating it was "anguished about the direct impact of the current conflict between Israel

and Hamas on writers, artists, culture". "We hope that the multinational negotiations now under way will lead to a mutually agreed upon ceasefire, ending deadly airstrikes, and that a resolution can be reached that will save lives in the region, preserve rich and varied cultures, and pave the way toward a lasting peace that enables freedom and creativity for all," it added. However, several authors responded critically to the statement. "Don't 'hope' for a ceasefire, PEN America, CALL for one like other PEN Centers have done," wrote novelist Eman Quotah in a post on X. The 3 February letter, cosigned by writers including Jamel Brinkley, Saeed Jones and Laura van

den Berg, called on PEN America to "wake up from its own silent, tepid, neither-here-nor-there, self-congratulatory middle of the road and take an actual stand against an actual geno-

cide". It added that PEN America should "find the same zeal and passion" as it has for banned books to speak out "about actual human beings" in Palestine. The letter said that PEN Amer-

ica should "disband" if it "cannot live up to its mission of protecting, platforming, and amplifying those writers made most marginalised by nefarious forces". It also criticized the organization for hosting an event featuring Mayim Bialik, who has opposed calls for Israel to agree to a ceasefire, and asked for PEN America to apologise to Palestinian-American writer Randa Jarrar, who was dragged out of the event for protesting. "While most protesters left after expressing themselves, one declined and was removed by security. We regret that this step had to be taken in order for the event to proceed," PEN America wrote in a statement. PEN America also refutes the fact that it has been "silent" on

the war. "Since Oct 7, PEN America has responded to the crisis in Israel and Gaza with nearly two dozen statements on the crisis itself and the resulting fallout for free expression and free speech in response to the conflict", a spokesperson told the Guardian. The open letter has coincided with #BooksforGaza, a fundraising sale of signed books donated by authors including Salman Rushdie, Sally Rooney, Ali Smith and Kamila Shamsie. The auction, which ends on Monday evening, has raised over £55,000 for The Ghasan Abu Sittah Children's Fund, an organization that helps transport injured Gazan children to Lebanon for medical and social treatment and care.

