

# To separate or not to separate nat'l and int'l sections of Fajr Film Festival?

## Which one benefits Iranian cinema more?

The Fajr Film Festival, one of Iran's most celebrated cinematic events in Iran, is set to experience its 43rd edition soon. Over the years, the festival's national and international sections have experienced a tumultuous relationship, oscillating between being held separately and being combined. This has sparked a heated debate regarding whether the festival should continue to operate in tandem or pursue a separate course, and which strategy would ultimately yield greater benefits for Iranian cinema. In his inaugural decree concerning the cinematic landscape, Raed Faridzadeh, the head of the Cinema Organization of Iran (COI), put forth significant changes for the Fajr Film Festival. Notably, he announced the appointment of Manouchehr Shahsavari as the festival's new secretary, replacing Mohammad Khazaei. Plus, Faridzadeh revealed that the international section of the Fajr Film Festival will now operate independently from the national section. This strategic move aims to restore the festival's autonomy and elevate it to the status of premier film festivals worldwide, free from political interference and undue influence.



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In October 2021, shortly after Mohammad Khazaei took the helm of the COI, it was revealed that the national and international sections of the Fajr Film Festival would be held together for the first time in five years. This unexpected decision came as a surprise, particularly given that the international section had only recently been registered with the International Federation of Film Producers Associations (FIAPF) in May 2021. While the registration was heralded as a significant milestone for Iranian cinema, it simultaneously raised doubts about the festival's future direction. These concerns proved to be well-founded, as just a month following the new administration's takeover, the festival's format was altered, resulting in the merger of the international section with the national section. The decision to merge the two sections was met with criticism from some experts, who argued that it would undermine the festival's international credibility and make it harder for Iranian films to compete on the global

stage. Others argued that the merger would make the festival more streamlined and efficient. However, it seems that the new management has had a change of heart, and the international section will be held separately once again. This decision has been welcomed by some, who argue that it will allow the festival to maintain its international reputation and attract more foreign filmmakers and industry professionals.

### Cultural diplomacy



Speaking in favor of the separation of the national and international sections of the Fajr Film Festival, Mehrzad Danesh, a film critic, said that the event has the potential to play a significant role in the country's cultural diplomacy. He believes that if international film festival standards are met, it can have a constructive im-

act on the country's cultural landscape. The Fajr Film Festival, held annually in Iran, gained a high level of recognition globally in recent years, which has added significant value to Iran's cinematic and international reputation.

Danesh hopes that the festival will continue to thrive, especially considering the growing cultural influence of neighboring countries in the region. However, he expresses regret that Iran, with its rich cinematic heritage, is now competing with countries that had no film industry just a few years ago. Despite this, Danesh emphasizes the need to revive Iran's cultural standing with determination.

But the question remains, what guarantees are there that the festival will not be merged again in the future? Some experts argue that the festival's registration with FIAPF should be enough to ensure its independence, but others point out that the festival's fate is ultimately tied to the whims of the government. One solution proposed by some experts is to change the name of the festival, which would make it less susceptible to political interference. Others argue that the festival should be given a fixed date on the calendar to prevent it from being moved or merged with other events.

According to reports, the festival's registration with FIAPF was in danger of being revoked due to the change in format and date. However, thanks to the efforts of Mohammad Mehdi Asgarpour, the deputy of FIAPF, the festival was able to maintain

its registration, albeit with a change in date from May to February. Some experts argue that the festival's international section should be held separately, as it allows for a more focused and specialized event that can attract more foreign filmmakers and industry professionals. Others argue that the festival should be held together, as it allows for a more comprehensive and inclusive event that showcases the best of Iranian cinema.

Ultimately, the decision to hold the international section of the Fajr Film Festival separately is a positive step for Iranian cinema. It allows the festival to maintain its international reputation and attract more foreign filmmakers and industry professionals. However, it is crucial that the festival's organizers take steps to ensure its independence and stability, to prevent it from being undermined by political interference or bureaucratic inefficiencies.

### Resilience amid challenges

In recent years, the festival has faced many changes and challenges, including the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced the festival to be held online. Despite these challenges, the festival has continued to be a major event in the Iranian film industry, and its international section has attracted many foreign filmmakers and industry professionals. It is also worth noting that the festival's registration with FIAPF is a significant achievement for Iranian cinema, and it is crucial that the festival's organizers take steps to maintain this registration

and ensure the festival's independence and stability.

As one expert noted, "The Fajr Film Festival is a unique opportunity for Iranian filmmakers to showcase their work to a global audience. It is crucial that the festival's organizers take steps to ensure its independence and stability, to prevent it from being undermined by political interference or bureaucratic inefficiencies." Another expert added, "The festival's registration with FIAPF is a significant achievement for Iranian cinema, and it is crucial that the festival's organizers take steps to maintain this registration and ensure the festival's independence and stability."

### Bright future ahead

In a nutshell, the Fajr Film Festival's decision to hold its international section separately is a positive step for Iranian cinema. However, it is crucial that the festival's organizers take steps to ensure its independence and stability, to prevent it from being undermined by political interference or bureaucratic inefficiencies.

