

Oscar buzz builds around 'Dolphin Boy 2' as sequel outshines original



Arts & Culture Desk

Following the critical and commercial success of 'Dolphin Boy 1', director Mohammad Kheirandish says its sequel could go a step further—perhaps even to the Academy Awards. "Dolphin Boy 1" made it to the Oscar shortlist and ranked second among 53 submissions," Kheirandish told local media. "Considering the clear improvement in quality, it wouldn't be far-fetched for Dolphin Boy 2 to be selected." The filmmaker described the new installment as a standalone sequel with a 20 to 30 percent upgrade in both narrative and structure. "It's more refined, more universal," he said. "Even those who haven't seen the first film can fully engage with this one." Remarkably, 'Dolphin Boy 2' passed the country's strict review process without any cuts. "Not a single second

was censored," Kheirandish emphasized. "That's rare, especially considering how tough the review board has been with other titles." The film is now gearing up for theatrical runs in Turkey, Russia, and other international markets post-holiday. Early feedback from foreign audiences has been encouraging. "A Russian journalist once asked if our story about the 'mother of the seas' was based on Slavic mythology. I explained it comes from ancient Iranian lore—specifically Mithraism," Kheirandish said, noting the journalist later confirmed the cultural connection. The studio behind 'Dolphin Boy' is also working on a spin-off animated series. The show will feature side characters and build on the film's narrative world. "We brought back characters that performed well in merchandising," the director added. The creative process was closely supervised, especially

during the development of the show's universe and age targeting. According to Kheirandish, the production has attracted animators who previously preferred working with foreign studios. "Now they see their names credited properly, which often isn't the case due to sanctions. Some even returned from abroad to join us." He attributed this shift to improved production quality and more competitive payments. "When they realized their work finally had visible impact, they chose us—even with lower pay at first. Plus, with dollar-based revenues, we can offer more attractive compensation now." Despite budget constraints, the director said the film was produced on par with international titles. "It takes about a million dollars to start an animation project today. We kept costs around \$500,000—but quality didn't suffer."

Over 60 Iranian artworks featured at Russia's exhibition

Arts & Culture Desk

The 'Art Russia' contemporary art exhibition featuring over 60 pieces by Iranian painters was held at the Gostiny Dvor exhibition center in Moscow from April 3 to 6. Masoud Ahmadvand, the cultural attaché of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Russia, made the announcement during the exhibition's opening ceremony, which was attended by prominent figures from Russia's cultural and artistic community, ILNA reported. Ahmadvand emphasized the exhibition's role in fostering mutual understanding among artists, gallery owners, and collectors from Russia and beyond. "This event helps familiarize audiences with the capabilities of each other and strengthens the bond between our nations," he

said. In addition to showcasing the works of a new generation of Iranian artists, the event featured a series of lectures by experts, university professors, and artists from both Russia and Iran. The official noted, "These discussions will provide valuable experiences in the realm of artistic collaboration." During a press conference, Ahmadvand highlighted the active participation of Iranian artists in various international exhibitions. He stressed the importance of this event in providing an opportunity for the Russian public to engage directly with Iranian art and its creators. He also recalled the recent cultural week celebrating Iran in Moscow and St. Petersburg, and expressed hope for a reciprocal cultural week

for Russia in Iran in the coming months. "We wish this event will allow Iranians to connect more deeply with your country's artists," he added. Organized by the Synergy company in collaboration with several Russian art institutions, the show featured an extensive collection of artworks, including sculptures, paintings, and digital art from over 200 artists displayed across 110 booths. Additionally, the exhibition included creative works by children and teenagers, as well as a series of 95 workshops led by specialists aimed at enthusiasts of contemporary art. For the sixth consecutive year, 'Art Russia' has brought together collectors, gallery owners, experts, and art lovers, reinforcing its status as a vital platform for modern art appreciation.



Four Iranian films to be screened at Annecy festival

Arts & Culture Desk

The 49th Annecy International Animation Film Festival is set to showcase four short animations from Iranian filmmakers. The selected films include 'Nagofteh Namad' by Mahboobeh Kalae and Ali Fotoohi, 'Dark Orange' by Zahra Azadpour, 'Thank you Dr. Farsi' by Samaneh Shojaei, and 'At Night' by Pooya Afzali, ISNA reported. The festival will run from June 10 to 13 in the picturesque town of Annecy, southeastern France. This year marks a significant achievement for Iranian animation, following its first Oscar win for Best Animated Short with 'In the Shadow of the Cypress' co-directed by Hossein Molayemi and Shirin Sohani. The inclusion of these four films at Annecy reflects a commitment to showcasing diverse voices and innovative storytelling in animation. As the festival approaches, anticipation builds for the contributions of Iranian artists to the global animation dialogue. Out of the 3,900 films submitted from around 100 countries, 72 films from 33 countries were selected to compete in this year's edition. Thirty-six films will compete in the Official category, 9 in the Off-Limits category, 17 in the Perspectives category, and 10 in the Young Audiences category.

Job insecurity, gender gaps fuel Iran's falling birthrate, researcher warns



Social Desk

Job instability and unbalanced family policies are driving Iran's fertility rate to historic lows, a population expert said, warning of growing socio-economic threats if the trend persists. Sepehr Karami, a researcher in population and family studies, told state media that "72% of Iranian men see job insecurity as the main obstacle to having more children." Meanwhile, 67% of employed women experience "stress from the conflict between professional and domestic roles," he said in an interview

with IRNA. According to Karami, Iran's fertility rate has dropped from approximately 6.5 children per woman in the 1980s to fewer than 1.6 in recent years. The sharp decline, he noted, is accelerating population aging and placing mounting pressure on the country's social insurance system. "This trend threatens Iran's economic security and sustainable development," he stated. While the government has launched incentives to raise the birthrate, Karami said they are largely focused on wom-

en. This approach, he argued, fails to reflect the economic burden and decision-making power held by men in Iranian households. "The family is a joint economic unit. If men are excluded from the equation, women will face disproportionate physical and psychological costs," he said. Citing a 40% inflation rate and a 15% unemployment rate among men aged 20 to 35, Karami stressed that under current conditions, most men are unable to shoulder additional financial responsibilities. "Policy must shift to recognize men not only as providers, but also as active partners in child-rearing," he said. Suggestions include progressive tax breaks for large families, long-term housing loans, and free health insurance for third children and beyond. Karami pointed to gaps in Iran's 2021 Family and Youth Law, where fathers' roles are often underdefined. "In custody and parenting, legal emphasis is placed on mothers. Fathers' authority in matters like education and health is unclear," he said. He also noted contradictions between family legislation and Iran's passport law, which grants fathers sole authority to approve a child's travel abroad. "This lack of alignment can weaken paternal

involvement and fuel family conflict," he said. A 2022 parliamentary research report cited by Karami found that while Iranian couples desire an average of three children, actual fertility remains below two. The gap is attributed to structural barriers, such as housing costs, unemployment, and gender inequality. "Policies relying solely on psychological encouragement directed at women are destined to fail," he warned. Karami also pointed to differing attitudes between men and women. While a slightly higher percentage of men (2.3%) prefer to remain childless compared to women (2%), more men (25%) expressed a desire for three or more children, compared to just under 19% of women. Economic concerns are cited by 36.4% of men as the main reason for avoiding parenthood, while only 10.9% of women shared that view. By contrast, nearly half of women (47.3%) said they simply lacked interest in having children, compared to 28.8% of men. "Men and women approach parenthood differently," Karami concluded. "A successful population strategy must reflect these differences and promote shared responsibility—only then can we overcome the demographic crisis."