



Asia Cultural Cooperation Forum

Iran proposes 2026 as ‘cultural year’ with China amid deepening ties

Pakistan sees Persian as part of its cultural identity, says Iranian minister



Arts & Culture Desk

Iran proposed designating 2026 as the “Cultural Year of Iran and China” and emphasized the centrality of Persian in Pakistan’s heritage during



separate meetings at the Asia Cultural Cooperation Forum, underscoring Tehran’s push to expand cultural diplomacy with key Asian partners. In Hong Kong, Iran’s Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Abbas Salehi met with China’s Vice Minister of Culture Gao Zheng, where he proposed designating 2026 as the “Cultural Year of Iran and China.” The project, Salehi said, would be a “unique opportunity” to launch joint programs in arts, tourism,

and cultural heritage between the two countries, whose ties stretch back centuries, IRNA reported. “Iran and China are civilizations with deep roots,” Salehi said, referencing the historical Silk Road and a 25-year comprehensive cooperation agreement signed during President Xi Jinping’s 2016 visit to Tehran as milestones in their evolving relationship.

Gao welcomed the proposal, noting that 2026 will also mark 55 years of diplomatic relations. “We fully support expanding cultural and tourism exchanges,” he said, calling for “effective, goal-oriented cooperation” and inviting Iran to participate in two major Chinese cultural events later this year — the Beijing Tourism Festival in July and the Global Travel Expo.

Both officials stressed the importance of shared traditions in painting, folklore, storytelling, and music, and agreed to form a joint committee of deputy ministers to begin preparations for the proposed cultural year.

Meanwhile in Islamabad, Salehi also met with Pakistan’s Minister of Heritage and Culture, Aurangzeb Khan Khichi, where he emphasized the importance of Persian not only as a second language in

Pakistan but as “part of the cultural identity” of its people.

“Civilizational bonds between Iran and Pakistan offer rich ground for cultural cooperation,” Salehi said, calling for joint artistic productions, shared exhibitions, and more Iranian participation in regional festivals.

While acknowledging the large number of Pakistani pilgrims visiting Iran, he pointed to the “low visibility” of Pakistan in Iranian travel culture, urging stronger efforts to promote its attractions. Khichi responded warmly, calling Iran a “brotherly nation” and proposing collaborative documentary projects to explore the two countries’ deep historical and religious ties. “We have far more in common with Iran than with many of our neighbors,” he said. “It’s time to put those shared roots to work.”

He also advocated for easing visa processes for Pakistani travelers and invited Iran to participate in Pakistan’s cultural festivals.

The Asia Cultural Cooperation Forum, held April 21–22, brought together senior cultural officials from 18 countries to discuss regional identity, heritage cooperation, and creative exchange in Asia.

Russian filmmaker hails Iranian cinema, extols Majidi’s global stature

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Russian director Nikita Mikhalkov praised Iranian cinema, calling Majid Majidi “one of the best filmmakers in the world.”

The veteran filmmaker said that the “one-sided structure” of Western media had long overshadowed talents like Majidi, IRNA reported.

Mikhalkov, head of the Moscow International Film Festival and a former winner at Iran’s Fajr International Film Festival,

made the remarks during a meeting with Raed Faridzadeh, Iran’s Deputy Minister of Culture and head of its Cinema Organization.

Speaking at the Russian Cultural Foundation, Mikhalkov said that one of the key goals of the newly launched Eurasia Academy of Cinematic Sciences is to embrace diverse cinematic voices—including Iran’s.

He noted that while Iranian cinema operates on tighter budgets compared to Hollywood, it stands out for its “hu-

man depth” and “emotional clarity.”

“Money isn’t always the issue,” he said, referring to Majidi’s work. “He has shown that even with limited resources, one can create extraordinary films.” Mikhalkov also praised Majidi’s large-scale project ‘Muhammad: The Messenger of God,’ calling it “exceptionally executed.”

Faridzadeh, in turn, welcomed Mikhalkov’s initiative and highlighted Iran and Russia’s long-standing cultural ties.

He expressed hope that the two countries would soon roll out joint film productions, describing Eurasia’s film academy as “a step in the right direction.”

During the meeting, Iran proposed strategies to enhance the academy’s regional role—proposals Mikhalkov reportedly received warmly.

He also expressed interest in visiting Iran to explore collaborative opportunities first-hand. The Eurasia Academy, backed by Russia’s Ministry of Culture, officially launched on April 21,



with delegates from 22 countries attending its opening ceremony in Moscow. It aims to

serve as a platform for regional cooperation and cinematic exchange across Eurasia.

Farhadi’s tenth film ‘Parallel Tales’ to begin shooting in Paris

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Two-time Oscar-winning director Asghar Farhadi will start filming his latest feature, ‘Parallel Tales,’ in Paris this September. The project, his tenth film, boasts a high-profile French cast and marks a return to international co-production for the Iranian filmmaker.

Starring Isabelle Huppert, Vincent Cassel, Virginie Efira, Pierre Niney, and Adam Bessa, the ensemble is also joined by screen icon Catherine Deneuve. The film is a joint production between companies in France, the US, Italy, and Belgium, ISNA reported.

With a budget of €12 million (\$12.8 million), production is scheduled to wrap by late November.

Farhadi will produce alongside Alexandre Mallet-Guy and David Levine. Mallet-Guy, of Memento Production,

has collaborated with Farhadi since ‘The Past’ and originally distributed the director’s earlier films, including ‘About Elly’ and ‘A Separation,’ in France.

Memento leads production in France, while Italy’s Lucky Red, Belgium’s Panache Productions and La Compagnie Cinématographique, and U.S.-based Anonymous Content round out the co-producing partners.

Known for prestige titles like ‘Spotlight,’ ‘The Revenant,’ and ‘Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind,’ Anonymous Content brings serious clout to the table. Its television credits include ‘True Detective’ and ‘Mr. Robot.’ Sales and rights will be launched at the Cannes Film Festival by Charades and UTA Independent Film Group. Charades will handle international sales, with UTA repping US rights. Memento will distribute the film in



France, where it’s slated for a spring 2026 theatrical release.

While plot details are being kept under wraps, the title points to a multi-threaded narrative — a hallmark of Farhadi’s work, known for “layered human relationships” and intense moral conflict.

Farhadi last premiered a film at Cannes in 2021 with ‘A Hero,’ which went on to win the Grand Prix. Expectations for ‘Parallel Tales’ are already running high.

Tehran Int’l Book Fair gateway to affordable reading, cultural exchange

The Tehran International Book Fair is a key opportunity for easier public access to books, as the event gears up for its 36th edition, former Iranian lawmaker Ali Motahari has said.

Motahari described the annual fair as a “good opportunity” both for readers and publishers, pointing to its dual role in bringing books closer to the people and helping publishers showcase their work more effectively, IRNA reported.

“When publishers gather in one place,” he said, it creates a rare chance for book lovers to find titles they’ve been searching for. The event typically offers “special discounts,” making it more accessible financially.

Beyond book sales, Motahari highlighted the fair’s broader cultural value. Alongside sales booths, the fair features side programs such as book reviews and discussions. These, he noted, offer a “cultural opportunity” for the public to engage more deeply with literature.



The 36th Tehran International Book Fair will run from May 7 to May 17, under the theme “Let’s Read for Iran.” The venue is the Imam Khomeini Mosalla, a major exhibition space in the capital.

The fair, one of the region’s largest, has been a fixture on the country’s cultural calendar since its launch in 1987. It draws hundreds of domestic and international publishers and typically sees over a million visitors each year.