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# Iranian film wins top honors at Philadelphia's festival

Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian filmmaker Ali Atshani picked up two awards at the 28th FirstGlance Film Festival in Philadelphia, according to a statement from the film's publicist. His film 'My Little Moon' won Best Director for Atshani and Best Lead Actress for Natalia Polo. The event ran May 16–18 at the Film Society Bourse Cinema in downtown Philadelphia. 'My Little Moon' had been nominated in five categories, including Best

Film, Best Director, Best Actress, Best Sound Design, and Best Cinematography. The FirstGlance Film Festival, founded in 1996, is one of the longest-running indie film events in the US. It showcases independent features and shorts from around the globe. The film follows two teenage girls—one in Iran, the other in the United States—who build a deep online friendship. Despite borders and cultural divides, the story underscores a universal message: friendship and



*Iranian filmmaker Ali Atshani poses for a portrait during the 28th FirstGlance Film Festival in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, US, May 18, 2025.*  
● IRNA

love know no boundaries. Natalia Polo stars alongside Nicole Amato, Brent Kubelik, Matthew Firman, and Elnaz Bagheri. 'My Little Moon' has already earned awards at festivals in Canada, Kansas City, Santa Fe, and Riverside, California.



## Iran eyes deeper spiritual diplomacy with Vatican amid 2025 pilgrimage push

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran is ready to open "a new chapter" in spiritual diplomacy and interfaith dialogue with the Vatican, Culture and Tourism Minister Reza Salehi Amiri said, citing shared values and deep religious traditions. Speaking during a meeting with Archbishop Richard Gallagher, the Vatican's Secretary for Relations with States, Salehi Amiri pointed to the Islamic Republic's "civilizational experience" and holy sites as a foundation for a broader push in faith-based diplomacy, IRNA reported. "The year 2025, declared by the Pope as '2025 Holy Year' must become a turning point," he said, calling it a chance to "revive the role of religions in reimagining meaning" in a world rattled by conflict and confusion. Pilgrimage, he added, is more than

just ritual. It is a "shared narrative" of truth, compassion, and peace that binds peoples together. Salehi Amiri, who traveled to the Vatican as the special envoy of President Masoud Pezeshkian for the inauguration of Pope Leo XIV, said Iran seeks to help shape global pilgrimage routes, promote "peace caravans," and invest in scholarly exchange on interfaith dialogue. "What the world needs today," he said, "is a return to a shared religious understanding of human dignity." Gallagher welcomed Iran's stance and praised what he called an "intelligent and accurate" linkage between pilgrimage and global peace. He said the Catholic Church supports initiatives that promote coexistence, spiritual exchange, and joint pilgrimage routes. Iran's active role in 2025-related



programs, Gallagher added, could "reinforce the divine identity of contemporary humanity." He emphasized Iran's vast potential in Islamic theology, pilgrimage culture, and interfaith cooperation. The Vatican and Iran have engaged in occasional high-level talks since formal diplomatic relations were established in 1954. Pope Francis has often spoken of the importance of dialogue with the Islamic world, notably during his historic visit to Iraq in March 2021.

## Persian Gulf poem strikes chord at Russia-Islamic world forum

Arts & Culture Desk

A student's recital of a poem about the Persian Gulf drew attention at the closing of the 16th International Economic Forum 'Russia - the Islamic World: Kazan Forum' in Kazan, the capital of Tatarstan. During the "Iranian Cultural Noon" part, organized by the Iranian Consulate and Iranian students in Kazan, audiences were introduced to Iranian traditions, classical music, regional costumes, calligraphy, and historic heritage, IRNA reported. One highlight stood out: the reading of "I Am the Daughter of Iran" by a young Iranian woman. Her voice rang clear with the line, "This gulf deep in the earth, is forever the Persian Gulf of Iran." Audience members, Iranians, Russians, and delegates from both Muslim and non-Muslim countries, responded with applause. Several called the performance "moving" and "powerful." Although not present, Iranian singer Salar Aghili's song "Iran" played in the background. Its lyrics—"Iran, for your



tears and laughter... your beating, blazing heart..."—added emotional weight to the ceremony. Iran's consul general in Kazan, Davoud Mirzakhani, delivered speech on the nation's cultural legacy. Other parts spotlighted Iran's arts, crafts, and ancient civilization. Tatarstan, long regarded as a cultural bridge between Islam and the north, hosted the May 14–17 forum, which covered a broad spectrum—economics, politics, science, and the halal industry among them. First launched in 2009, the forum aims to build ties between Russia and the Islamic world.

## Steadfast guardians of community health, family doctors lead the way



By **Ebrahim Noori Goushki**  
Family medicine specialist

PERSPECTIVE  
EXCLUSIVE

World Family Doctor Day (May 19) is an opportunity to remind everyone of the tireless efforts of my colleagues in the field of health. We live in a world that is changing at an amazing pace; from health crises and natural disasters to psychological pressures, social changes and human lifestyles. In the meantime, "resilience" as the ability to adapt and withstand hardships is the key to our individual and collective health. In this turbulent path, family doctors, as the backbone of the primary health care system and an important link between people and the health structure, who provide primary health care with a community-oriented and community-centered perspective based on continuous communication with people and a complete understanding of their family and social context, are undoubtedly a solid and reliable companion. The family doctor is not only a healer of diseases, but also a supporter of mental health, a guide for making the right treatment decisions, and an informed listener to our physical and mental concerns. With the family doctor, psychological and

social resilience is strengthened in families, diseases are identified earlier and better managed, health education continues continuously and effectively, and trust and human connection become the foundation of peace in crises. In an unstable world, the family doctor is the pillar of our health sustainability. To commemorate the International Family Doctor Day and to appreciate the efforts of colleagues and to raise awareness of the important role of family physicians, it is suggested that by holding specialized conferences or meetings, organizing awareness campaigns on social media, incentive plans for family doctors, producing educational and informational content, collaborative activities with educational centers, and the presence of family physicians in the media, we point out the unique role of these physicians in maintaining the health of the community and remind them not to pay attention to family physicians only on May 19, but to appreciate their efforts and their unique role in the health system every day of the year. Finally, as a small member of the large family of family doctors around the world, I extend my congratulations and best wishes to all family doctors around the world and clinical specialists in this field on this auspicious day. May your path be green and your thoughts be rich.

## 'Serious alarm': Iran facing drop in birth rate

Social Desk

Iran's birth rate has hit a historic low, dropping 7.4% over the past Persian calendar year, Vice President for Executive Affairs Mohammad Jafar Ghaempanah warned Monday, calling it a "serious alarm" for the nation's future. At a National Population Day event in Tehran, Ghaempanah revealed that fewer than one million births were recorded last year, with total fertility falling to 1.44—far below the replacement level of 2.1, Tasnim News Agency reported. "The statistics and figures indicate the decline of the productive population," he said, warning of "irreversible" consequences if the trend continues. The warning comes amid new national survey results showing that nearly 78% of married Iranians of childbearing age have no desire to have children. Marzieh Vahid Dastjerdi, Secretary of the National Population Task Force, presented the findings Monday, noting that this sharp reluctance stems mainly from "worry about the future" of potential children. Economic insecurity, housing shortages, and job instability were cited



as key reasons couples are choosing not to grow their families. "This decline is no longer due to disease or disaster," Dastjerdi said. "It's driven by human will." The country is also aging fast. Officials project the proportion of citizens over 65 could jump from 10.4% to 26.5% within 25 years, making Iran potentially the oldest population in the region. The average age of first marriage—28 for men and 24 for women—is climbing, and officials are calling for plans to reverse that trend. The drop in population is viewed not just as a demographic

issue but also as a national security concern. A shrinking population in a region with growing neighbors, Dastjerdi warned, could disrupt the "balance of power." While the government has focused on boosting quantity, officials now stress improving quality too, with calls to invest in maternal care, early childhood health, and education. Ghaempanah also slammed previous policies banning fetal screening, calling them "unscientific" and counterproductive. "There needs to be hope," he said. Without it, families won't take the leap.