



# President urges ‘dignified’ return of Afghan migrants amid repatriation

## Social Desk

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian on Saturday urged authorities to ensure the ongoing return of undocumented Afghan migrants is carried out with “respect and calm,” amid rising scrutiny over Tehran’s migration policies. Speaking in a meeting with officials from the Foundation of Martyrs and Veterans Affairs, Pezeshkian acknowledged flaws in managing the mass return operation but pushed back against accusations of mistreatment, accusing critics of “hypocrisy” in selectively invoking human rights, president.ir reported. “It’s surprising when those who stayed silent on the bombing and starvation of innocent women and children now suddenly discover human rights over migrant regulation,” he said. Iran, home to one of the largest Afghan diasporas, has ramped up efforts to expel undocumented Afghans, citing

economic pressures and the need for tighter border control.

Pezeshkian said the deportations ultimately serve Afghans’ interests by providing a structured path forward. “Our Afghan brothers and sisters deserve a regulated, dignified presence,” he said. Mohammad Ismail Salim, head of the Taliban-led Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Herat, described Iran’s handling of the repatriation as “respectful” and “appreciated,” during a joint visit to a processing camp in Taybad on Saturday alongside Noor Ahmad Islamjar, the Governor of Herat province. “We won’t forget the generosity of the Iranian people over the past four decades,” Salim told reporters. The Herat delegation arrived at the Dogharoon border crossing for a three-day visit, touring migrant camps and regional facilities including hospitals and tech parks in Mashhad. Several co-operation agreements are expected to be signed during the trip, signaling co-



Afghan migrants arrive from Iran at the Pul-e Abrisham border crossing between Afghanistan and Iran in Afghanistan’s Zaranj on July 13, 2025.

● AFP

ordination between Tehran and Kabul on the contentious migration file. Interior Minister Eskandar Momeni said Iran has worked closely with Afghanistan’s government to ensure coordination and humane treatment. “Seventy percent of those who left this year did so voluntarily,” he said in recent remarks to domestic media. “This is not about hostility. We are not anti-migrant, but a country can only absorb so much.” Iran hosts around six million Afghans, including refugees, documented migrants, and an estimated two million undocumented residents. Since March 21, 2025 nearly 800,000 unauthorized migrants have been repatriated. “We have clear laws. Those who enter illegally must leave,” Momeni said, re-



iterating that legal migrants will not be affected. “We’re not racist. We’re not

chasing people out. We’re applying order—with dignity.”

## Iran pushes to revive handicraft sector

### Arts & Culture Desk

Iran’s Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, Reza Salehi Amiri, said that Tehran is seeking to shield the country’s fragile handicraft industry from mounting economic strain by rolling out emergency support tools including special credit lines, new social responsibility programs, and a national assistance fund. The comments followed several high-level meetings with industry stakeholders, including hotel owners and eco-lodge operators. Salehi Amiri said the government is drawing up a crisis-response package to keep the country’s centuries-old handicraft sector from falling apart under pressure. “If the production chain breaks down,” he warned, “a large number of people will lose their jobs.”

The minister said two types of support are under discussion: routine programs like banking facilities and training, and crisis-time actions that require “field research” and targeted intervention. The proposed National Handicrafts Support Fund, discussed in recent days with industry associations, is expected to play a “critical” role. Salehi Amiri also urged greater engagement from the private sector through corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives. “Adapting to the new situation,” he said, “must be part of any sustainable solution.” The minister stressed that restoring the natural cycle of production, distribution, and market access is essential to stabilizing the industry. Without it, he warned, rural workshops and small-scale producers could be pushed out of business.

According to Salehi Amiri, three strategy meetings were held in recent days with hotel operators, eco-lodge owners, and artisans to develop a coordinated plan. Among the ideas floated was the creation of technical working groups to monitor and respond to ongoing challenges. Tourism’s sharp slowdown has also taken a toll on handicraft sales, the minister said, noting that the two sectors are “deeply interlinked.” As visitor traffic dwindles, so too does demand for traditional handmade goods, many of which are sold in tourist-heavy regions. Salehi Amiri said the government has approved a new support package aimed at small workshops and rural artisans. The plan, which includes financial aid, will soon be added to Iran’s broader economic relief programs.

## Iranian short film ‘Punishment’ to be screened in Kosovo, China

### Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian filmmaker Pouya Mofid’s debut short film ‘Punishment’ has been selected for competition at two major international festivals. The film will screen at the 24th DokuFest in Kosovo from August 1 to 9, and is also nominated for Best Screenplay at the 13th Ningbo Short Film Festival in China, to be held from September 19 to 21, ILNA reported. ‘Punishment,’ distributed by Madakto Pictures, is written by Mehdi Asghari Azghadi and marks Mofid’s first professional short with a cast and crew drawn from Iran’s theater and film circles. The Kosovo event is accredited by the European Film Academy and BAFTA, while Ningbo’s recognition by the Short Film Conference (SFC) adds another layer of prestige. Set in a primary school, the 15-minute drama centers on a traumatic incident in which a Black student develops a severe stutter after a harsh punishment from his teacher. Doctors trace the speech disorder to psychological shock. As the boy’s family pursues



legal action, the narrative explores themes of institutional violence and accountability. The lead roles are played by Mohammad Sedighi-Mehr, Shayan Darmipouran, and Sahar Aghasi. Mofid, who co-founded ‘Khate Farzi,’ Isfahan’s first school of filmmaking and visual arts, also teaches directing there alongside his production partner Emad Sedighin. While ‘Punishment’ is his first film to enter the global festival circuit, Mofid is already in pre-production for his feature debut.

## Iranian photographer awarded at Canada’s Fine Shot Photo Festival

### Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian photographer Amirhossein Honarvar was awarded the Jury Commendation at the 2nd Fine Shot Photo Salon in Canada for his image of an elderly givah maker, a traditional Iranian footwear artisan, working at his bench. Honarvar, who also collaborates with Iran’s Handicrafts Department under the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts captured the moment in a dimly lit workshop. The photo was selected from entries submitted by artists across more than 45 countries, including the United States, Germany, Australia, France, Italy, China and Brazil, ILNA reported.



The festival is held under the auspices of the Fédération Internationale de l’Art Photographique (FIAP), a global body recognized by UNESCO. Seven other works by Honarvar were also accepted by the festival’s jury, several of which spotlight elements of Iranian handicraft. The photographer,

who has won 24 international awards to date, holds two honorary distinctions from FIAP. Some of his pieces are part of the permanent collection at the Musée de l’Élysée in Lausanne, Switzerland. Honarvar’s winning shot was described by judges as “intimate” and “timeless,” paying homage to disappearing crafts. “Documenting these fading traditions is a duty,” the photographer said. “It’s not just about beauty—it’s about memory.” Fine Shot has built a name for itself as a high-profile showcase of visual storytelling rooted in cultural identity and human connection. The 2025 edition wrapped up in Toronto on July 15.

## Qajar-era bridge minarets restored in northeast Iran

### Arts & Culture Desk

Iran has completed the four-month restoration of the minarets on the historic Salar Bridge in Roshtkhar County, Khorasan Razavi Province, according to local heritage officials. The project wrapped up in early July after repairs costing around \$2,270, Roshtkhar’s cultural heritage chief Kazem Kamiyab told IRNA on Saturday. Built during the Qajar era by Kazem Khan Qaraei and designed by Haj Mirza Mohammad, a master architect of the Astan Quds Razavi shrine, the Salar Bridge is a major example of 19th-century brickwork in northeastern Iran. The bridge features seven arches, stands seven meters high, and spans roughly 75 meters across



the Salar stream near the Roshtkhar-Torbat Heydariyeh road. Its four brick minarets, two of which had suffered serious decay, are considered standout features of the region’s architectural legacy. Work included stabilizing the foundations, replacing crumbling bricks, reinforcing the arches, re-grouting, and fully restoring the southeastern and northwestern minarets. Kamiyab said the restoration was a joint effort by the Cultural Her-

itage Office and local volunteers from the village of Sangan. One-quarter of the budget, about \$570, came from Mohammad Karim Kazemi Qaraei, a philanthropist and descendant of the bridge’s original patron. “It’s a way to honor a family legacy and protect our roots,” he said. Listed as a national heritage site since April 13, 2003, the bridge lies 27 kilometers from Roshtkhar, a town about 216 kilometers south of Mashhad. The district is home to 300 registered tourist attractions, but many remain off the beaten path. Kamiyab said the county will soon host its first cultural heritage donors’ forum to pool private and public funds for the preservation and promotion of Roshtkhar’s historic landmarks.