

Iran nominated for 2026 IBBY-Asahi Reading Promotion Award

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Children's Book Council nominated the Children Cultural Development Center as the country's official candidate for the 2026 IBBY-Asahi Reading Promotion Award. The announcement comes after a national review concluded the center's long-standing contribution deserves international recognition, IRNA reported. The council, which serves as Iran's IBBY national section, selected the center following a competitive process involving a jury of experts

including Fatemeh Chaykar, Roya Shahri, Neda Movahedipour, Jafar Tozande-Jani and Abdolhakim Bahar. The IBBY-Asahi award, sponsored by the Asahi Shimbun of Japan, is bestowed biennially to groups whose efforts deliver sustained impact in reading promotion for children and youth worldwide. Winners receive a diploma and US \$10,000 at the IBBY Congress. Iran previously won the prize in 2016, when its "Read with Me" program led by Zohreh Ghaeni was honored. The nominated center, known for

its expansive "Book in Circulation" scheme, brings books and educational games to remote villages and nomadic settlements in provinces such as South Khorasan, Lorestan and Khuzestan. Mobile sacks of reading materials are rotated weekly among schools and homes. Local teachers manage the collections, nurturing a love of reading deep within underserved communities. Zohreh Ghaeni, head of the Read with Me project and co-author of Iran's research on the history of children's literature, has commended the center's ability to "build trust" among rural families. The

center's methodical outreach and sustainable model underpin its qualifications for the award. It is the third time the organization has represented Iran for the Asahi award, after nominations in 2022 and again in 2024. No Iranian finalist has yet secured the final award since Read with Me's win in 2016. Preparations are under way to forward Iran's nomination dossier to the IBBY Executive Committee ahead of their selection meeting. A decision on the 2026 award is expected by mid-2026, likely coinciding with the next IBBY Congress.



Artists to honor Abbas Kiarostami with group show in Tehran

Arts & Culture Desk

A group exhibition featuring works by 161 Iranian visual artists from multiple generations will open at the Iranian Artists Forum in central Tehran to commemorate the late filmmaker and artist Abbas Kiarostami. Curated by Arash Raisian, the show, titled 'In Praise of Life', brings together a wide range of media including painting, sculpture, photography, installation, digital art, and video works, ISNA reported. The tribute coincides with the anniversary of Kiarostami's death in July 2016 and aims to celebrate what organizers described as his "life-affirming vision." Public viewing begins Fri-

day, August 8, and continues through Sunday, August 17, with daily visiting hours from 2 p.m. to 9 p.m. Kiarostami, who won the Palme d'Or at Cannes in 1997 for 'Taste of Cherry,' was widely regarded as one of Iran's most influential cultural figures. While best known internationally for his films, he was also an accomplished poet and visual artist whose minimalist approach left a lasting imprint on contemporary art in Iran and abroad. The exhibition title was inspired by Kiarostami's own philosophy, Raisian said, pointing to his "profound attention to the ordinary and the poetic." Works on display reflect that ethos, with many artists opting for subtle, con-



ceptual interpretations rather than direct references to the director's cinematic style. Iranian Artists Forum, a major cultural hub in Tehran, has previously hosted several tributes to Kiarostami, but organizers noted this year's event is the largest of its kind to date.

Two Iranian films to be screened at Italy's Della Lessinia festival

Arts & Culture Desk

Two Iranian films will be featured at the 31st Della Lessinia Film Festival, scheduled to run from August 22 to 31 in northern Italy. The festival, founded in 1995 in Verona province, originally focused on Italy's Lessinia mountains but later broadened its scope to include mountain cultures and traditions around the world, ILNA reported. This year's lineup includes 'Baraftoo,' translate into 'Within the Sun' a documentary by Sepideh Jamshidi, in the competition section, and 'The Plain Sings,' a short fiction film by Gita Feizi, in a special screening. The films shine a light on women's roles and rural resilience in Iran's mountainous west. 'Baraftoo,' co-produced by Ali and Sepideh Jamshidi, documents the lives of "hardworking women of



the Zagros," and was previously selected for the 56th Visions du Réel in Switzerland. Feizi's 'The Plain Sings,' written and directed by her and produced by Deyman Zandi, follows a young shepherd girl whose routine is disrupted by a wolf attack, forcing her to make a life-changing decision. The cast includes Darya Kakayi, Afshin Khedri, Sara Ahmadnejad, and Saman Saed Moucheshi. The film's interna-

tional distribution is handled by Daricheh Cinema. Both selections mark a growing presence of Iranian cinema on the international mountain film circuit, offering global audiences fresh insight into the country's rural narratives. The Della Lessinia Festival continues to draw attention for its focus on films that portray "life, history, and traditions" of mountain communities across continents.

Iranian leopard spotted beyond core reserve in conservation breakthrough

Social Desk

A Persian leopard was spotted and photographed last week in the Mo'ala heights of central Iran, Isfahan, signaling an expansion of the species' range beyond the Abbasabad Wildlife Refuge, local officials told state media on Sunday. The sighting, confirmed by Mohammadreza Halvani, director of the Abbasabad reserve, is being hailed as a milestone for the country's long-term conservation efforts, IRNA reported. Mo'ala, a community-managed buffer zone near Abbasabad in Isfahan Province, is one of several privately protected areas now showing signs of leopard activity. "It's a strong indication that our efforts are paying off," said Halvani. "What we're seeing now is the natural dispersal of male leopards in search of new territory." Roughly a decade ago, Abbasabad recorded its first confirmed leopard sighting in 40 years. Since then, under the backing of Iran's Department of Environment, the number of leopard observations has steadily risen to seven or eight per year. Some camera traps have captured mothers with cubs, a clear sign of successful breeding. According to Halvani, steady births over the past six years made it "predictable" that younger males would eventually move out. The latest image, taken by a local volunteer ranger in Mo'ala, likely shows one such individual establishing new ground.



Grassroots patrols have helped pave the way. Environmentalist Mohammad Akhavan, working with nearby communities in Nain County, has spent the past three years monitoring the area and ensuring safety for the wildlife. Halvani credited this "local commitment" for enabling secure conditions for the elusive predator. Abbasabad spans 400,000 hectares and is also a critical habitat for the endangered Asiatic cheetah. Both big cats remain on the IUCN Red List. Conservationists say expanding protected zones and formalizing local stewardship could ease human-wildlife conflict and build long-term population resilience.

Zoroastrians gather for annual pilgrimage at Pir-e Naraki shrine in Yazd

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Zoroastrian community launched its weeklong annual religious gathering on Sunday at the Pir-e Naraki shrine near Mehriz, in the central province of Yazd. Held each year on the Zoroastrian calendar day of Soroush Izad—this year falling on August 3—the event draws worshippers from across the country to the foothills of Mount Naraki, 20 kilometers northwest of Mehriz. The ceremony includes prayers, cultural events, and tributes to outstanding students, benefactors, and newlyweds. Pir-e Naraki is among the oldest Zoroastrian pilgrimage sites in Iran, nestled beside a spring in a low mountain range. Roughly 100 mud-brick rooms, known locally as kheylehs, have been constructed by the community to house pilgrims during the gathering. According to Zoroastrian belief, the site marks the mysterious disappearance of Nazbanou, a Yazdi noblewoman who was said to be



the bride of a Persian king and fled to Yazd after the Islamic conquest of Fars. Yazd is home to several significant Zoroastrian shrines, including Pir-e Sabz, Khatoun Banu, Seti Pir, Pir Herisht, and Pir-e Mehr Izad. These sacred sites remain central to the spiritual and cultural identity of Iran's Zoroastrians, whose roots trace back over 5,000 years. An estimated 6,000 Zoroastrians live in Yazd Province today. Mehriz County, where the Pir-e Naraki shrine is located, has a population of around 55,000 and lies 30 kilometers south of the provincial capital.