



Brimming with passion, devotion

# Over five million pilgrims cross Iran-Iraq border for Arbaeen

## Social Desk

More than 5.4 million Iranian pilgrims have crossed the country's borders en route to the Arbaeen religious procession in Iraq since July 26, police and government officials reported on Tuesday.

According to Colonel Ahmad Karami-Asad, head of the traffic police, the number of pilgrims moving through six official border crossings has steadily increased amid efforts to streamline the flow and enhance safety, inn.ir reported.

Arbaeen, a major Shia Muslim event commemorating the 40th day after the martyrdom of Imam Hussein (PBUH), draws millions annually to the holy city of Karbala in Iraq.

The massive movement marks one of the largest annual religious gatherings worldwide, with Iranian authorities closely monitoring border traffic and road safety. Despite the surge in crossings, fatal accidents linked to the pilgrimage have dropped compared to

last year, though officials emphasize ongoing risks, particularly during nighttime hours.

Colonel Karami-Asad said that from July 26 through the morning of August 12, 125 deaths and 2,917 injuries related to traffic accidents were recorded across five border provinces. "More than 90 percent" of these incidents stemmed from driver errors such as inattention, loss of vehicle control, sudden lane changes, and improper overtaking. Still, this represents a reduction compared to the previous year's figures.

According to official statistics, a total of 3.4 million pilgrims have exited Iran, while about 2 million have returned as of August 12. Nearly 44% of the departing pilgrims crossed through the Mehran border, with others using Shalamcheh, Khosravi, Chazabeh, Tamarchin, and Bashmaq checkpoints.

Traffic flow patterns have shifted recently, with the share of exits via Mehran and Shalamcheh declining in favor of Khosravi, Chazabeh, and air travel routes.

Authorities expect daily returnee numbers to reach 350,000 to 400,000 by week's end, highlighting the peak of the homebound wave.

The total vehicle movements over the 17-day period amounted to 58 million, slightly down from last year. Bus traffic fell by 13 percent, while private cars and light trucks increased by about 5 percent. Vehicle congestion at border crossings has eased in the last two days; about 13,000 vehicles cleared the Mehran crossing and 4,000 vehicles exited Khosravi in the past 24 hours.

Also, Iranian Interior Minister Eskandar Momeni visited the Khosravi border on Tuesday to oversee operations and meet officials. He confirmed that more than half a million pilgrims have passed through Khosravi this season, twice the volume recorded last year. "Thanks to close coordination with Iraqi authorities and the implementation of the Sajjad system, traffic flow has become smoother and delays minimized," Momeni said.

He also emphasized that all six official



border crossings are fully secured by police, military, and border forces, with no major security incidents reported. Momeni praised the efforts of minis-

tries, municipalities, volunteer groups, and local communities for their support in ensuring pilgrims travel with safety and dignity.

## Aghelizadeh joins jury of South Korea's DMZ documentary festival



### Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian writer and filmmaker Pouya Aghelizadeh, also a member of the International Federation of Film Critics (FIPRESCI), will serve as a jury member at the 17th DMZ International Documentary Film Festival, taking place September 11-17, in Goyang and Paju, Gyeonggi Province, South Korea.

The festival, held near the Korean Demilitarized Zone, promotes themes of "peace, life and communi-

cation" through documentary storytelling, Mehr News Agency reported. Aghelizadeh's inclusion signals growing international recognition of Iranian voices in global documentary discourse. Festival organizers, showcasing a slate of global entries, have tapped Aghelizadeh for his critical perspective and creative background that includes award-winning works like 'PlayBack,' 'Room of Light,' 'Room No. 4,' and 'Nest'.

These films have earned honors for best film, experimental experience, best actress, cinematography, and student film, and secured the Independent Festival of America's honorary award.

Festival sources confirm that Aghelizadeh is currently writing the feature screenplay and a series titled 'Tenth Symphony'. He will bring both his creative insight and critical acumen to bear when deliberating the international competition.

## Iranian filmmaker Ahmad Zaeri named goodwill ambassador at London festival



### Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian filmmaker Ahmad Zaeri was named goodwill ambassador for humanitarian narratives at London's Earl's Court International Film Festival.

The 10-year-old festival has tapped Zaeri to champion international storytelling projects, support emerging filmmakers and strengthen cinema's role in social awareness campaigns, Mehr News Agency reported.

Zaeri's film 'Saad's Olive Tree' tells the story of a Syrian child who lost his sight from a mortar shell while playing with friends, according to the festival website. The movie follows the child's self-imposed isolation and his mother's efforts to draw him back into the world with help from neighbors in their war-torn town.

Festival director and founder Caroline Todrich-Richardson praised Zaeri's ability to transform human suffering into "deep and compassionate narratives" that align with the festival's mission. She called his appointment to the ambassador program "an honor."

The acclaimed Iranian director has previously won awards at multiple

international festivals for films including "Saad's Olive Tree" and "War Citizen." His work has been recognized at festivals in the Netherlands, Russia, England, Iran and the United States.

Zaeri's humanitarian focus centers on children caught up in conflicts and crises. His appointment comes as the Earl's Court festival prepares for its 11th edition, running November 14-21 in London.

The festival has carved out a niche showcasing films that tackle social issues and human rights themes. Organizers said Zaeri's new role will help expand their international reach and mentor young filmmakers working on similar projects.

Zaeri joins a roster of cultural ambassadors working to promote cross-cultural understanding through film. The Earl's Court festival has made humanitarian storytelling a cornerstone of its programming since launching in 2015.

## Iran's Oscar selection committee returns to House of Cinema after several years

### Arts & Culture Desk

Iran has reestablished its official Oscar selection committee under the House of Cinema, the country's main film industry guild, marking a significant shift after years of oversight by the Farabi Cinema Foundation.

The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences set October 1, 2024, as the deadline for countries to submit films for the Best International Feature Film category at the upcoming Academy Awards, inn.ir reported.

The move restores control to the House of Cinema, which now holds the majority of seats on the committee responsible

for choosing Iran's official Oscar submission. The committee includes representatives from both the House of Cinema and government sectors.

This decision follows years of controversy surrounding the film selection process, which in the past sparked calls for a more transparent and artist-driven approach. The House of Cinema had formally petitioned in 2018 for the selection committee to be returned to an independent guild-based body, emphasizing that Oscar submission responsibilities should rest with a jury comprised solely of filmmakers and cinema professionals, free from government officials. Under Academy rules, eligible films must

have been publicly screened in their home country for at least seven consecutive days between October 1, 2024, and September 30, 2025.

The new committee's formation and mandate signal a renewed commitment to aligning Iran's Oscar submissions with international standards and to giving artists a greater voice in the selection process.

In recent years, the Farabi Foundation, a government-backed institution, had been the official body handling the Oscar submission, but this shift back to the House of Cinema marks a notable recalibration of authority within Iran's film industry.

