



Minister denies Pasargadae buffer change, expands Cyrus restoration crew

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Minister Reza Salehi Amiri said Saturday the UNESCO World Heritage site's protective boundaries will remain unchanged amid growing concerns over development limits near the ancient Achaemenid capital. The minister, who has served in his current role since August 2024, told ILNA following his recent visit to Pasargadae and nearby Persepolis in Fars Province. His comments addressed widespread speculation that Iran might relax construction restrictions around the 6th century BC site containing Cyrus the Great's tomb. Salehi Amiri dismissed reports suggesting the government had given a "green light" to modify Pasargadae's buffer zones. The controversy stems from a recent advisory report recommending construction up to 7.5 me-

ters high outside the site's three-tier protection zones. "The issue concerns building permits outside Pasargadae's buffer zones, not changes to the boundaries themselves," the minister said. He emphasized that any construction decisions must first pass through Fars Province's technical council before reaching the national cultural heritage technical council in Tehran. The minister announced six new restoration specialists will soon join the two-person team currently working at Cyrus's mausoleum, quadrupling the site's restoration capacity. He also ordered the clarification of employment status for contract workers at both Pasargadae and Persepolis. Salehi Amiri stressed that well-drilling and agricultural expansion remain strictly forbidden within Cyrus's tomb buffer zone. "During my Pasargadae visit, modifying the tomb's

protective boundaries was never discussed," he said. The minister insisted that Pasargadae's local parliamentary representative will participate in all technical council meetings reviewing the 7.5-meter construction proposal. Results from both provincial and national technical assessments will be announced within 24 hours of completion. Pasargadae, located about 90 kilometers northeast of Shiraz, served as the Achaemenid Empire's first capital under Cyrus the Great. The site gained UNESCO World Heritage status for its palaces, gardens and royal tomb. During his Fars Province trip, Salehi Amiri addressed longstanding budget shortfalls, staffing issues and security concerns plaguing both Pasargadae and Persepolis. He promised visible improvements at both heritage sites in coming weeks.



● IRNA

Tehran Symphony Orchestra rehearses for 'Namira' Oratorio performances



● IRNA

Arts & Culture Desk

The Tehran Symphony Orchestra held a rehearsal Saturday morning at Vahdat Hall in Tehran as the ensemble prepares for its upcoming performances of composer Behzad Abdi's oratorio 'Namira' on August 19-20. The rehearsal was conducted by Nasir Heydarian, who was recently reappointed as the or-

chestra's permanent conductor after previously holding the position from 2022 to 2023. The performances will mark the orchestra's return to the stage after a months-long hiatus, IRNA reported. Abdi, born in Tehran in 1973, is known for his opera and film compositions, including the opera 'Rumi' released on the Naxos label. The oratorio 'Namira' was specially orches-

trated for large orchestra, choir and soloists, and tells the story of Ashura with themes of freedom and immortality. The production brings together prominent Iranian vocalists including Vahid Taj, Hossein Alishapour, Mojtaba Asgari, Hadi Feyzabadi, Mahmoud Salehi, Behnaz Naderi, Hossein Mirzaiyan and Mohsen Zarabadipour. Heydarian, who studied at the University of Music Graz in Austria, has worked with various European orchestras including the Graz City Opera and Basel Symphony Orchestra. He took over from Manouchehr Sahbaei, who led the orchestra from October 2023 to March 2025. The Tehran Symphony Orchestra, founded in 1933 by Gholamhossein Minbashian, is Iran's oldest and largest symphony orchestra. The ensemble last performed in May 2024 under Sahbaei's direction with a program titled "From the New World" at Vahdat Hall before going on hiatus during the traditional break for Muharram and Safar months.

'Companion' picked for New Orleans Film Festival

Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian filmmaker Alireza Memariani's short film 'Companion' has been selected for the 36th New Orleans Film Festival, scheduled for October 23-29, 2025, in the United States, the New Orleans Film Society announced. The festival, launched in 1989 and recognized by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in three short-film categories, has grown into a major platform for independent cinema worldwide. Its endorsement

allows films screened in New Orleans to qualify for Oscar consideration, ILNA reported. 'Companion' portrays a single sequence from the life of Ali Zahedi, a fisherman from Hormuz Island in southern Iran, and his bond with a pigeon named Ghanbar. The bird, raised by Zahedi three years ago, flies alongside him every evening as he rides his motorcycle through the island's roads. Organizers said the film captures an "extraordinary companionship" that has become a beloved attraction for visitors to Hormuz.



● ILNA

The New Orleans Film Festival, which draws international filmmakers each year, will present selections across narrative, documentary and animation shorts, along with features.

'Black Shawl' lands nomination at HollyShorts Festival in LA

Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian filmmaker Alireza Shahhosseini's short film 'Black Shawl' scored a nomination at the 20th annual HollyShorts Film Festival, which wrapped up Saturday at the TCL Chinese Theatre in Hollywood. The Oscar-qualifying festival, which ran from August 8-18, selected the Iranian drama as one of 10 finalists from among 1,500 submissions, according to the filmmaker's media advisor. Winners from HollyShorts automatically qualify for Academy Awards consideration. 'Black Shawl' has been making waves on the international festival circuit. The film snagged a special jury prize at Spain's Diversimagen

Festival and claimed best film honors at the 22nd San Sebastian International Film Festival.

The psychological drama has screened at festivals across Europe, including Milan, Turin, Porto Femme in Portugal, and France's Cinema Towards Freedom Festival. Shah Hossein Film, an international production company, produced the project.

The film's cryptic plot centers around a disturbing question: "Do you know anything about spiders? They eat their mates." Cast members include Pasha Rostami, Tara Majidzadeh, Lotfollah Seifi, Mohanna Seyedi, and the late Hatam Mashmoli, alongside Javad Falahtkar, Hasti Gharib, Iraj Abe-



di, Nasser Marefat, Ebrahim Naji, and Arshia Cheraghi. HollyShorts awards over 25 categories including Best Short, Best Live Action, Best Director, and Best Animation – all of which carry Academy qualifying status. The festival has become a launching pad for emerging filmmakers seeking Oscar recognition.

Decades of easy access mask Iran's water scarcity

Social Desk

A prominent water resources expert shattered Iran's longstanding perception of water abundance, warning Saturday that decades of easy access have created a dangerous "illusion" masking the nation's true arid climate.

Banafsheh Zahraei, director of the Water Institute at the University of Tehran, told IRNA that Iran's recent technological advances have allowed citizens to forget their country's historical water scarcity. The nation now faces mounting pressure to adapt to climate change while managing severely strained resources. "The easy availability of water in recent years has created the false impression that Iran is a water-rich country," Zahraei said. "This perception is completely wrong." Iran sits in an arid and semi-arid region where precipitation falls well below one-third of the global average. Throughout history, Iranians adapted to these harsh conditions. But modern infrastructure masked the underlying scarcity. "When we turn on taps in cities, water flows," Zahraei explained. "This creates the illusion of an unlimited source." The country now grapples with its



● ASIRAN

fifth consecutive year of drought in Tehran province. Nationwide precipitation has dropped below long-term averages, signaling widespread drought conditions. Climate change has intensified Iran's predicament beyond its natural geographic constraints. Both rainfall patterns and volumes have shifted dramatically, Zahraei noted. The frequency and intensity of droughts over the past two decades suggests Iran will face even more severe water shortages ahead. Industrial and economic expansion has compounded the crisis, particularly as massive cities sprouted in naturally water-poor regions. Tehran exemplifies this challenge. The capital, home to over 10 million people, ranks as Iran's poorest province in renewable water resources per capita. Dam construction and inter-basin water transfers now pump water from neighboring provinces including Alborz, Qazvin and Mazandaran.

Multiple water transfer projects remain under construction to sustain Tehran's population. But these schemes essentially shift water scarcity from destination to source regions, Zahraei warned. "When we build cities where natural water sources can't support them, drinking water supply becomes the priority," she said. "This means water needs get transferred from other provinces and regions." Tehran already exports its water shortage to Mazandaran province through the second phase of the Lar water transfer line. Additional transfers from Karaj and Taleghan dams push scarcity onto Alborz and Qazvin provinces. The agriculture sector, while consuming the largest share of Iran's water, cannot shoulder blame alone for conservation efforts, Zahraei argued. Multiple provinces now bear Tehran's water burden. "Every glass of water Tehran residents save – whether for drinking or other uses – reduces pressure on people in other provinces," she said. Iran must overhaul urban lifestyles to align with water realities. Cities need consumption management systems ensuring minimum water use for health and sanitation without imposing excessive pressure on neighboring regions.