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Vol. 7974 ● Monday, November 10, 2025 ● 100,000 rials ● 8 pages

Iran's tourism diplomacy in Riyadh

Tehran, Baghdad set target of 5m cross-border visitors in new tourism accord

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran and Iraq agreed on Sunday to raise mutual tourist travel to five million visitors a year, in what officials described as a new stage in cultural and pilgrimage cooperation between the two neighbors.

The agreement came as Iran's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Tourism Minister Reza Salehi-Amiri held talks with Iraqi Minister of Culture, Tourism, and Antiquities, Ahmed Fakkak Al-Badrani on the sidelines of the 26th UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) General Assembly in Riyadh, chn.ir reported.

Salehi-Amiri said the plan aims to institutionalize "civilizational and people-to-people diplomacy" through tourism. "Iran and Iraq share centuries of history, culture and faith," he said, calling the Arbadeen pilgrimage "the world's largest spiritual gathering" and urging its inscription on UNESCO's Intangible Heritage list. Arbadeen, 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.

He added that Iran seeks to expand both pilgrimage and leisure tourism, saying more than

3.5 million people already travel annually between the two countries. "We are determined to raise that to five million next year by easing border procedures and improving accommodation and transport," he said.

Al-Badrani welcomed the initiative, describing Arbadeen as "a shared heritage and pride of both nations." He pledged to improve road access and hospitality facilities, saying the cooperation "strengthens the human bond between our peoples."

The two ministers also agreed to form a joint technical committee to coordinate tourism projects, streamline visa processes and promote combined pilgrimage, leisure and health travel packages.

Salehi-Amiri praised Iraqi hospitality toward Iranian pilgrims, saying the warmth shown during Arbadeen "reflects a heartfelt connection between our nations that must now take an institutional form."

He also invited Al-Badrani to attend the Tehran International Tourism Exhibition in early 2026, proposing wider cooperation in museum partnerships, training programs and academic exchanges.

The minister arrived in Riyadh early Sunday, where he was received by Saudi Deputy Tour-



Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, Reza Salehi-Amiri (2nd R), discusses tourism cooperation with Iraqi Minister of Culture, Tourism, and Antiquities, Ahmed Fakkak Al-Badrani (1st L), on the sidelines of the 26th UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) General Assembly in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on November 9, 2025.

● chn.ir

ism Minister Majed Alhumaid and Iran's Ambassador Alireza Enayati.

During a series of bilateral meetings with counterparts from Indonesia, China, India, Tajikistan, Armenia and Uzbekistan, he underlined Iran's capacity for joint projects in cultural heritage, handicrafts and research.

"Iran's diverse landscapes and ancient civilization can serve as a hub for regional tourism cooperation," he told delegates, noting that cross-border exchanges are still "below potential."

The five-day UNWTO meeting in Riyadh, marking the organization's 50th anniversary, focuses on how artificial intelligence and innovation can reshape global tourism. Over 160 member states are attending.

Salehi-Amiri's participation is part of what Teh-



ran calls an active "tourism diplomacy" drive to expand Iran's role in global policy forums and attract new regional markets amid economic sanctions.

It is said that Iran-Iraq accord could boost hard-currency inflows and diversify visitor sources away from Western markets. Tourism experts estimate that Iraq already accounts for more than half of foreign arrivals to Iran, many

of them seeking religious and medical services. The new framework, they said, could help both countries transform their shared pilgrimage routes into a broader cultural and economic corridor. Salehi-Amiri described the understanding as "a practical step in cultural diplomacy." He added, "Iran and Iraq are not just neighbors; they are partners in faith, heritage and the human story that unites our region."

Two Iranian films, producer Nobakht head to Moroccan festival jury



Arts & Culture Desk

Two Iranian feature films will compete at the 30th Rabat International Author Film Festival this month, where Iranian producer Elaheh Nobakht has also been named to the event's seven-member international jury.

The festival runs from November 8 to 15 in the Moroccan capital, IRNA reported.

Nobakht, an experienced film distributor who has served on juries at more than ten global festivals, joins fellow jurors Jean-Claude Barney of France, Dutch filmmaker Marijke De Koning, French-Burkinabe actor-director Maimouna N'Diaye, and Moroccan producer Karim Debbagh.

They will judge the main competition section, dedicated this year to auteur-driven works described by organizers as "bold, thought-provoking and unconventional."

Competing from Iran are "The Last Act" By Peyman Shahbod and "Without Permission" by Hassan Nazer, a British-Iranian co-production. Nobakht will also help evaluate these entries, alongside international submissions from Europe, Africa and Asia.

Beyond the competition, the festival will

screen "The Camel and the Miller," a trilogy of animated shorts, "No substitute," "The White Winged," and "The Farmer and the Robot," by veteran Iranian director Abdollah Alimorad.

Organized by the Centre Cinematographique Marocain (CCM), the Rabat festival has earned a reputation as a key cultural bridge between continents, spotlighting artistic storytelling and emerging cinematic voices. The CCM lists the 2025 edition from November 7 to 16. Calling the event a "genuine celebration of daring auteur filmmaking," Nobakht said she hopes Iranian cinema will "resonate with global audiences and critics alike."

Over the past three decades, the Rabat International Author Film Festival has carved out a niche for films that challenge conventions and explore new visual languages, securing its place among North Africa's most respected cinematic showcases.

Iran's 'Two Sisters' wins Al Jazeera co-production award at Tokyo Docs 2025

Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian documentary 'Two Sisters,' directed by Farahbakhsh Farhidnia and produced by Yaser Talebi and Setareh Zare, clinched the top co-production award from Al Jazeera Documentary Channel at the 2025 Tokyo Docs international forum, organizers announced.

Chosen from among 20 short-listed projects worldwide, 'Two Sisters' earned what the organizers called the "highest honor" of this year's edition, held from November 4 to 7 in Tokyo.

The event brought together independent filmmakers and broadcasters from Japan, India, Iran, China, and South Korea to pitch and co-finance new documentary projects. Set in the rugged mountains

of northern Iran, Two Sisters follows the quiet resistance of two elderly siblings fighting to save their ancestral home and land from destruction, a story that blends intimate family drama with environmental struggle.

The production team includes Talebi as cinematographer, editor, and producer; Zare as international producer; researchers Ahmad Bavand and Ali Sadeghi; sound engineers Hassan Jafari and Mahmoud Mousavi; production manager Mohsen Pouyanfar; and aerial cameraman Vahid Dorvah.

Currently in post-production, the film is backed by a consortium of broadcasters including Al Jazeera Documentary Channel (Qatar) and NHK Japan, alongside Sweden's Meritis Film. The inter-



national support is expected to accelerate its completion and pave the way for a global release next year.

Farhidnia described the award as "a bridge for stories rooted in local realities to reach the world," adding that Two Sisters "reflects resilience and belonging in a rapidly changing landscape."

Indian city hosts Iran's 'When the Moon Was Full'

Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian filmmaker Narges Abyar joined Indian audiences at a three-day cultural event, "Screening of Iranian Films and Experience Exchange," held from November 7 to 9 in Hyderabad, to present her award-winning drama 'When the Moon Was Full.'

Organized by the Moving Images Society, one of Hyderabad's oldest film clubs with over 20 years of promoting global cinema, the program offered Indian cinephiles a close look at Iran's new generation of directors, actors,

and screenwriters.

Abyar's 2019 feature 'When the Moon Was Full,' based on a true story, opened the festival on Friday before a packed house that included filmmakers, members of the Telugu Film Chamber of Commerce (TFCC), diplomats, and local officials. The screening drew strong applause from the audience and praise from Hyderabad's film community. Viewers described Abyar's film as "profound yet shocking," calling her directorial touch both sensitive and fearless. Indian actor Suman Talwar said the film "not only tells a real story but delves

deep into emotional and social layers that resonate with our culture."

Speaking to local media, Abyar said she was "delighted that Iranian cinema has found a space for dialogue with Indian audiences." She added that such encounters could "build a bridge for future collaborations between Iranian and Indian filmmakers."

Abyar, known internationally for "Track 143," 'Breath,' and 'When the Moon Was Full' has received numerous awards for her portrayals of women and the human cost of conflict.

Iran, China to hold joint workshop on carbon-free construction technologies

Social Desk

Iran and China will launch a three-day joint online workshop on "innovative technologies for decarbonization and sustainable environment in construction," the Iranian National Science Foundation (INSF) announced on Sunday. The event, from November 10 to 12, is co-organized by Tehran's Sharif University of Technology and Chongqing University in southwest China, under the sponsorship of INSF and the National Natural Science Foundation of China (NSFC). The sessions are being conducted in English and streamed virtually, allowing international participants to join free of charge and receive

certificates of attendance.

The opening ceremony will begin on Monday, followed by technical panels on November 11 and 12.

The program brings together environmental researchers and industry experts to exchange expertise on carbon-neutral materials, energy-efficient design, and sustainable construction standards.

Organizers said the workshop aims to "pave the way" for advanced collaboration in green innovation between Iranian and Chinese research institutes. "This initiative strengthens scientific ties while addressing one of the most pressing global challenges, carbon reduction in urban development," an INSF official said during the opening session.

The joint platform also reflects both countries' broader commitment to cutting greenhouse gas emissions and investing in low-carbon technologies amid growing international pressure to curb climate change.

Iran, one of the Middle East's largest emitters, is seeking to diversify its climate diplomacy beyond the West by expanding cooperation with Asian partners in renewable energy and sustainable infrastructure.

The INSF called the event "a valuable step" toward promoting science-based environmental policies and sustainable technologies capable of meeting 21st-century ecological goals.