



Fajr Int'l Film Festival to welcome 200 foreign guests to Shiraz

Arts & Culture Desk

The 43rd Fajr International Film Festival plans to host close to 200 foreign guests and a slate of 16 international films in Shiraz from November 26 to December 2, its director Rouhollah Hosseini said in Tehran on Saturday, casting the upcoming edition as part of a broader push to re-establish Iran's cultural links after years of cooled relations with Western markets.

Speaking at a media briefing at the Cinema Museum of Iran in Tehran, Hosseini said teams from Europe, the United States, East Asia and the Middle East have confirmed travel, calling their arrival a "big step" in breaking what he sees as cultural isolation, IRNA reported.

He argued that the festival's overseas turnout matters as much as its screenings because most guests act as "a kind of media", shaping how Iran is seen abroad.

Hosseini said the festival's return with a new structure, three competitive strands and three sidebars shows its ambition to re-anchor itself in the international circuit. The main International Competition will screen 16 films from 21 countries, including Greece, Hungary, Japan, South Korea, Italy, Romania, France, Norway and Saudi Arabia.

Parallel programs, Eastern Vis-

ta, New Perspective and the long-running Broken Olive section devoted to films on conflict and resilience, add titles from the United States, China, Indonesia, Turkey, Germany, Sweden and several Arab states.

He said Turkey will have an outsized presence this year, with filmmakers, producers and actors travelling as part of a cultural cooperation initiative between Tehran and Ankara. Festival workshops will dissect contemporary Turkish cinema as organizers again attempt to revive an old bilateral agreement on joint productions.

Hosseini confirmed an invitation to acclaimed Turkish director Nuri Bilge Ceylan, a Palme d'Or winner, to sit on the international jury.

"He is a treasure of Asian and world cinema," he said, adding that organizers expect him at the opening in Shiraz.

Pressed about censorship, Hosseini insisted that "no film was barred for reasons of review" and that the selection followed the same procedures used by major festivals worldwide. One film from 2022, he said, was simply too late in seeking to join after the slate had been locked. The festival, now relocated from Tehran to Shiraz, marks the government's new decentralization policy for cultural events. Hosseini said Shiraz offers both the infrastructure and the symbolic



Rouhollah Hosseini, director of the 43rd Fajr International Film Festival, addresses the press at a Tehran conference on November 22, 2025.

● IRNA

weight needed for a festival emphasizing a "poetic" cinematic approach.

He argued that poetry forms a core component of Iran's cultural identity and can be meaningfully paired with modern filmmaking. He cited Iranian masters such as Sohrab Shahid Sales, Amir Naderi, Abbas Kiarostami and Majid Majidi as examples of filmmakers whose lyricism gained global standing. Hosseini said the event's compressed preparation schedule, far shorter than previous years, forced organizers to move quickly with invitations and logistics. The government of Fars Province and the city of Shiraz, he added, shouldered much of the hospitality, including accommodation, foreign flights and on-site services, while the Cinema Organization of Iran funded promotional material.

According to festival officials, the New Perspective section for first and second features includes 11 films from 10 countries, among them Turkey, Tunisia, China, South Korea, Serbia and Italy. The Eastern Vista sidebar brings 12 films from 18



countries, with contributions from Iran, India, Taiwan, Indonesia, Malaysia and Japan. The Broken Olive program screens six films from 15 countries, covering themes from Gaza to regional conflicts.

In total, eight Iranian films compete across the festival's three main competitive categories. A separate "Festival of Festivals" strand screens prize-winners from Portugal, Colombia, Sweden, Switzerland, Argentina, Uruguay, Germany and Spain.

The festival's training arm, Darolfonoun, returns with 60 film students, including 38 from

abroad, taking part in workshops led by Iranian filmmakers and jury members. Some alumni are returning to mentor the latest cohort.

Hosseini emphasized that hosting foreign guests in Shiraz carries a tourism dimension: Daily visits to heritage sites are planned so visitors can "show the real face of Iran" to global audiences.

He said experienced industry figures such as actor Hassan Majouni, director Iraj Tahmasb and producer Manouchehr Shahsavari have advised the festival as it refines its international posi-

tioning.

Hosseini also said the International Federation of Film Producers Associations (FIAPF) lists the festival under its accredited events, noting that the scheduling, November 26 to December 2, was fixed before his appointment to comply with FIAPF's calendar rules and avoid overlap with other A-category events.

As final preparations proceeded, he said organizers will keep working to ensure the festival "holds its own name with dignity", even as they acknowledge that "first-year execution always brings imperfections".

Iran's 'Cause of Death: Unknown' joins packed 2026 Oscars eligible list



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The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences on Saturday placed Iran's 'Cause of Death: Unknown,' directed by Ali Zarnegar, on its long slate of eligible titles for the 98th Oscars, as it rolled out more than 300 contenders across the animated, documentary and international feature categories.

The Academy's animation branch will sift through 35 animated features this winter, trimming them to five nominees once each title meets the Academy's year-end qualifying rules. Several films still need their US qualifying run and must "tick every box" before they move to the ballot, IRNA reported.

Animated submissions can also compete for best picture, though such cross-category breakthroughs have been rare since Pixar's 'Toy Story 3' and 'Up.'

Documentary feature again drew the heftiest slate with 201 entries, though a number of films have yet to complete their theatrical requirements. The documentary branch plans to carve out a 15-title shortlist on December 16, the same day shortlists for animated short and documentary short land. Documentaries officially submitted by countries for the international race can also vie for the non-fiction trophy.

The international feature category attracted 86 submissions this year. The rules define the category as feature-length works

produced outside the United States with mainly non-English dialogue.

The Academy has loosened language rules over the years, allowing countries to submit films that do not necessarily use the national language, a shift that let France enter this year's Cannes Palme d'Or winner 'It Was Just an Accident,' directed by the Iranian filmmaker who works there.

Ballots for preliminary voting open on December 8, and close on December 12. Members across all branches may take part if they fulfil the minimum viewing requirements. The 15-film shortlist for the international race will also be unveiled on December 16.

Nominees for all categories will be announced on Thursday, January 22, 2026, with the ceremony set for March 15, 2026, at the Dolby Theatre in Hollywood.

This year's regional standouts include Norway's 'Sentimental Value,' Brazil's 'The Secret Agent,' South Korea's 'No Other Choice,' Spain's 'Sirât,' and France's 'It Was Just an Accident.' Iraq's 'The President's Cake,' Taiwan's 'Left-Handed Girl,' co-written with Oscar-winner Sean Baker, and Ukraine's documentary '2000 Meters to Andriivka' by 2024 Oscar-winner Mstyslav Chernov also made the cut.

'The Sweet Perfume' globetrots with Argentina prize, new festival stops

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Iranian filmmaker Mohammadreza Mohammadi clinched the top award at Argentina's Short Long World Festival this week as his short drama 'The Sweet Perfume' chalked up fresh competition slots in Poland, Italy and Nigeria. Mohammadi, who wrote the script with Samira Gandom-Goon and produced the project himself, picked up the Best Film prize at the festival's ninth edition in the north-eastern city of Corrientes, which ran from November 12 to 14, ILNA reported.

The Argentinian event, known for championing cinematic craft with an educational bent, positions its program as a visual "message" aimed at strengthening communities as well as individuals.

The 20-minute film now heads to Europe, where Euroshorts, a Polish festival founded in 1992 to back emerging creators, will screen 75 titles from December 1 to 13 in several Baltic-coast venues. The organizers folded in an international short-film competition seven years after



● ILNA

launch, turning the event into one of central Europe's more durable showcases for new directors.

Mohammadi's drama also enters Italy's Rieti and Sabina Film Festival on November 25 in Rome. The Italian platform, which seeks to spark crossover between established practitioners and younger talent, has built a reputation for spotting new writers and directors before they push into larger European circuits.

Nigeria's Benin City Film Festival will close out the film's November run from 27 to 29 November. The southern Nigerian gathering, regarded as one of the country's more ener-

getic indie forums, brings together newcomers and veteran filmmakers to swap ideas and forge partnerships that often outlive the festival cycle.

'The Sweet Perfume' follows Roghayeh, a schoolgirl who reels from a sharp bout of dizziness and nausea during a national examination after catching the "sweet" scent of a classmate's perfume. Another pupil notices her vulnerability and starts picking on her, driving the drama's emotional arc.

The cast includes Roghayeh Nikou, Shahla Rahmani, Nazanin Asgari, Mohaddeseh Rahimi-Rad, Nahid Sarvari and Saeedeh Gazrani.