



# Cultural exchange ‘cannot be fenced in’ as Shiraz hosts 15-nation film forum: *Iran’s cinema chief*

## Arts & Culture Desk

Head of Cinema Organization of Iran (COI) Raed Faridzadeh said on Saturday that cultural exchange “cannot be fenced in” and that attempts to disrupt artistic engagement amount to ignoring the “depth” of Iran’s long-standing cultural identity. Speaking to domestic media in Shiraz on November 29, he defended the Fajr International Film Festival’s restored independence, the arrival of prominent foreign filmmakers, and the need for a structural policy to bring foreign films back into Iranian theatres, IRNA reported.

“Art always finds its way,” he said, even when political currents try to block dialogue. The remarks come as Tehran seeks to reposition itself as a regional film center at a moment when cultural diplomacy in the Middle East is shifting. Officials hope the festival’s move to Shiraz, coupled with this year’s high-level attendance, will shore up Iran’s influence in a competitive landscape. The government also views the event as proof that the country’s cinematic appeal endures despite geopolitical friction and market constraints.

Faridzadeh said the idea for a regional summit of film authorities dates back more than a decade. Ministers, deputy ministers, cultural envoys and heads of national film bodies from 15 countries began arriving on Saturday ahead of a closed-door session and a ministerial meeting. He said the goal is to “deepen” co-operation, draw up timelines for joint productions and revive partnerships that had stalled.

Shiraz, now the permanent host of the international festival after its separation from the domestic Fajr event, has pulled in more than 200 foreign guests, according to the provincial culture office. About half had arrived by November 29. Workshops in filmmaking, photography and other crafts are underway. France’s ambassador attended earlier in the week, and visiting delegates toured the festival market, short-film pavilion and an exhibition on the 12-day war. Pakistan has taken a prominent role this year. Its culture minister, Aurangzeb Khan Kichi, is due in Shiraz on November 30, leading a team whose films ‘Umro Ayyar,’ ‘Taxali Gate’ and ‘Actor in Law’ screen for the

first time in the festival. Iranian officials see the participation as an opening for stronger bilateral cultural ties after several quiet years. The Pakistani roster includes directors, producers and actors seeking distribution and training opportunities.

The festival’s jury president, Turkish auteur Nuri Bilge Ceylan, issued a forthright statement after criticism of his attendance. He said boycotts risk depriving audiences rather than governments and described Iranian film students as possessing “an extraordinary spark”.

Ceylan said accepting invitations to festivals should not be mistaken for political endorsement but seen as a way to cross borders “created by political regimes”.

Faridzadeh echoed this point, noting that efforts to frame cultural participation as political support “misread” the role of cinema.

Faridzadeh also repeated his call for a structured regime to regulate foreign film screenings in Iran. He said several studies, including research led by senior adviser Hosseini, had outlined a regulatory pathway to allow regular circulation of quality



Raed Faridzadeh

international films. The presence of foreign filmmakers in Shiraz, he said, should be a “wake-up call” for institutions to push through the overdue reforms.

He toured the festival’s various sections on Friday, saying the event’s components “fit together” and that Shiraz had

proven itself a capable host. This year’s theme, centered on the poetic strain of Iranian cinema, is meant to underline what he called a “distinct aesthetic spirit” that runs through Iranian filmmaking.

Officials expect the summit’s technical and ministerial meetings to map out timelines for

co-financing schemes, talent exchanges and regional training programmes.

Faridzadeh said Iran’s status as a “cinematic parent” stems from shared cultural roots with its neighbors and from an industry that has sustained global standing despite sanctions and budget pressures.

## ‘Alone Together’ wins Best Int’l Short at US Anthem Festival

### Arts & Culture Desk

The Iranian short film ‘Alone Together,’ written and directed by Omid Mirzaei, produced by Saeed Khani, won the Best International Short Film award at the 15th Anthem Film Festival in the United States.

The win signals a rising appreciation for Iranian cinema that boldly tackles civil-rights themes. ‘Alone Together’ joins a growing wave of socially conscious works making inroads abroad and rubbing shoulders with global festival staples, ILNA reported.

The film unfolds on a frigid



id winter night aboard a long-distance coach halted at a roadside checkpoint. Suspicion falls on a lone

boy passenger. That momentary moment becomes a quiet capsule of fear, empathy and moral unease.

In the cast are Alireza Sanifar, Parham Gholamlou, Mohammad Movahednia, Saba Amiri and Mohammad Rashidi. International sales and festival submissions are handled by Solmaz Etemad.

The Anthem Film Festival is known for spotlighting works that explore autonomy, civil liberties, personal freedoms and the struggle against coercion. ‘Alone Together’ fits squarely within that mission with its sharp, atmospheric narrative.

## ‘Dialogue of Creativity’ showcases works of Iraqi, Iranian women artisans

### Arts & Culture Desk

A joint Iraqi–Iranian handicrafts exhibition ‘Dialogue of Creativity’ went on display in Baghdad, aiming to deepen cultural and artistic ties between the two neighboring nations.

The exhibition went beyond a simple display of traditional crafts. It created a tangible forum for cross-cultural exchange and long-term collaboration between Iranian and Iraqi women artisans.

In a region where soft power often complements formal diplomacy, grassroots cultural initiatives like this serve as strategic instruments to reinforce bilateral goodwill, ILNA reported.

Over 100 female artisans from both countries presented a wide range of traditional works, including embroidered garments,

calligraphy, woven textiles, home décor, sculptures, paintings, handmade handbags, shoes, and other regional crafts.

One Iranian exhibitor with two decades of experience showcased hand-stitched tablecloths, blankets, and children’s clothing, noting strong demand for her handcrafted sandals and bags.

First-time Iraqi participant Hawraa al-Daikan called the exhibition a “valuable platform” for women to present and market their work, particularly given prohibitive booth costs at major fairs.

Iran’s Cultural Attaché in Baghdad, Sheikh Gholamreza Abazari, who attended the event and toured the exhibits described the initiative as laying the foundation for “broader future collaborations,” underlining that joint exhi-



bitions can facilitate both cultural and economic cooperation.

In addition to immediate displays, organizers announced the formation of women-led craft collectives in Iraq, comprising over 100 skilled artisans active in weaving, ceramics, metal engraving, marquetry, jewelry, glasswork, painting, regional clothing, embroidery, leatherwork, and natural soap and candle making.

The program aims to empower women, foster peer learning, and open stable markets for their handcrafted goods.

## Iran presses to block down-listing of peregrine falcon at CITES CoP20



### Social Desk

A delegation from Iran has lobbied vigorously during the 20th meeting of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, held from November 24 to December 5, to prevent moving the coastal peregrine falcon *Falco peregrinus* from Appendix I to Appendix II.

According to delegates from the Iranian Department of Environment and

Iran’s Foreign Ministry, they engaged in wide-ranging diplomatic efforts with countries including China, Russia, the EU, Armenia, Kenya and New Zealand, IRNA reported.

In effect, Iran argues that relaxing the falcon’s status would “normalize trade” in the species, a move that could undercut decades of conservation gains. The delegation submitted detailed scientific documentation to underpin its appeal.

The push comes at a moment of

heightened stakes for global biodiversity. CITES CoP20 is reviewing 51 proposals to amend species listings, alongside a broader agenda of trade-regulation and ecosystem-safeguarding measures. Parties to the treaty, 185 in total, are considering changes affecting more than 250 species.

Iran’s stand underscores its commitment to safeguarding vulnerable wildlife. The peregrine falcon once suffered dramatic population declines mid-20th century due to pesticides

such as DDT; only after its ban and concerted breeding and conservation efforts did populations begin to recover. Conservationists argue that a downgrading now could erase those gains.

Negotiations at CoP20, the first to be held in Central Asia, have been described as complex and highly political. Feelings within the Iranian camp are decisive: National authorities view the species as emblematic of biodiversity resilience, not a commodity for trade.