

Fajr Int'l Theater Festival, launchpad for new talent, legacy for Iranian dramatic arts

Mr. Astaneh, having served as secretary of the festival for four terms, how significant do you consider this festival from a theatrical perspective?

The Fajr International Theater Festival is the nation's largest theatrical event and, in a sense, serves as the identity card of Iranian theater. Therefore, it holds immense importance for the theater community. Many of our nation's leading and prominent figures in theater are individuals who have emerged, been recognized, and introduced through this festival over the years. A wealth of brilliant talents have been discovered within this festival, and they are now among the best in the country. The festival has been seen both nationally and, in many editions, globally, and this visibility is essential for the vitality of Iranian theater. Each year, the festival has striven to endure amidst shifting social, political, and other conditions, because theater is an inextricable part of human societies. The theater community insists on the continuation of theater throughout the year, under all circumstances, and I hope that the life of this festival and Iranian theater, as long as there are theater artists in Iran, will always endure, remain vibrant, and flourish.

What is the festival's standing in the region and on the international stage?

In recent years, certain issues have somewhat tarnished our international connections. However, for many years prior, the bond between Iranian theater and the Fajr International Theater Festival with major theater festivals and companies in other countries has positioned the festival as one of the most established and recognized festivals in Asia, the entire region, and even parts of Europe.

The festival enjoys considerable international recognition, with prominent figures from the world of theater – from the East, including countries with rich theatrical traditions like China, Japan, Korea, Singapore, and India – and from the West, such as Germany, France, England, and the Netherlands – participating in it. For example, major companies like the German "Theater Ensemble," one of the world's largest, have dispatched their directors to the festival. The positive experiences and testimonials shared by these international guests serve as testament to the fact that the festival is among the most serious and influential theatrical events.

How do you assess this year's festival?

This year's festival, naturally, is being held with limitations due to the pre-

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INTERVIEW

The 44th Fajr International Theater Festival, a cornerstone of Iranian cultural life and the nation's most prominent theatrical event, is currently captivating audiences in Tehran. Recognized by experts for its vital role in connecting artists, audiences, and the broader cultural sphere, this year's festival marks a significant milestone: For the first time, the opening ceremony was held in the historic city of Kerman. From January 12 to 17, Kerman hosted five distinct sections of the festival, radio drama, stage and street theater, and a compelling exhibition of photography and posters. The festival's vibrant energy then shifted to Tehran on January 22, continuing its run until February 1. Throughout its storied history, the Fajr International Theater Festival has served as both a launchpad for

emerging talent and a vital forum for the nation's leading theatrical figures. Many celebrated names in Iranian theater have risen to prominence through this very festival, its evolution consistently reflecting the shifting currents of the nation's social and political landscape. Our conversation centers on Hossein Mosafer Astaneh, Senior Advisor to the Secretary of the 44th Fajr International Theater Festival, a seasoned and influential voice in Iranian theater. Having served as secretary for four terms, Mr. Astaneh brings a wealth of experience and an unparalleled insider's view of the festival's triumphs, challenges, and enduring legacy.

In this discussion, we explore the festival's past and present, a celebration that Astaneh himself views not merely as an artistic endeavor, but as an "act of devotion" by Iran's theater community, dedicated to preserving the vibrant spirit of Iranian theater.

Hossein Mosafer Astaneh



IRNA

vailing socio-political conditions, but it is being held nonetheless; because, as I mentioned earlier, the life of theater must continue under all circumstances.

This year, there may certainly be limitations in the number of venues and performances, particularly in the international section, but this does not diminish the significance of holding the festival itself. Regardless of its size or scope, with however many theaters in Tehran and a portion of theaters in other provinces

(like Kerman) are utilized, there is a fervent desire to hold it. Ultimately, judging will take place in the various sections, and the top groups will be selected.

Some people believe the festival is a government festival and does not represent the Iranian theater community. What is your view on this?

The organizers of the festival are no different from the Iranian theater community. Sometimes, people assume that

purely government officials are running the festival, when in reality, from the secretary to the managers of various sections, they are selected from within the Iranian theater community, and the government only provides budgetary support. Those from the theater community who take on the responsibility of running the festival are essentially putting their own year-long programs and performances on hold to support the works that have been produced

war against the Islamic Republic, has a long history. This project should be analyzed under a "cognitive-perceptual operation"; an operation whose goal is not only to tarnish the international image but also to disrupt internal decision-making systems, erode social capital, and create a rift in the government-people relationship through the production of threatening perceptions.

One strategic advantage of this pattern for domestic opponents and their Western-Israeli supporters is that even in the event of tactical failure, the project leaves at least a form of "percep-

tual residue" in the minds of the audience. This residue acts as a pre-assumption in later stages and provides the necessary ground for activating and facilitating further projects against the Islamic Republic. From the perspective of cognitive warfare, each narrative operation has a cumulative effect and is defined in a continuous chain. In this regard, after the terrorist events of January 2026, Israeli-affiliated media outlets, selectively citing figures from the identification number on the body bag of one of the victims, began to claim "thousands of ca-

sualties" in these events. However, a constant principle exists in the fatality creation project: the higher the numbers announced, the more successful the project appears to public opinion. In other words, statistical exaggeration is not a media mistake, but part of the deliberate plan of this campaign; a plan that even in some informal documents and confessions of its masterminds, refers to targeting a much higher death toll. Statistics in this project serve two simultaneous functions: first, to reignite unrest and continue the cycle of unrest and casualties; and second, to convey success and "return on investment" to American and Israeli supporters of this campaign, who assess public opinion and social destabilization as a measurable project. The criminals who have killed more than 70,000 people in the Gaza Strip and for whom the people of Gaza have become meaningless numbers whose slaughter continues, are certainly not well-wishers of the Iranian people and will not be. For them, the more victims Iran suffers, the more successful their fatality creation project will be.

Failed Mossad operation ...

Israel and Europe are jointly carrying out a project to provoke Trump against Iran, with different objectives. Europeans are keen to drag Trump into a devastating war with Iran so that the US will be diverted from the issue of Greenland's annexation. Europeans are well aware that the next war between the US and Iran will cost Washington dearly and Trump will be forced to back down from his claims about Greenland.

2. Marring Iran's image: Following a failure to pull off a coup in January 2026, American and Israeli propaganda has taken the issue of Iranian unrest to human rights organizations. Few in the world remain unaware that the killings of Iranians in the streets of Tehran were a joint Mossad-CIA scenario designed to ruin the relationship between the government and the people of Iran. The "fatality creation" project, as one component of the hybrid