



Afghan ensemble calls to ‘fade borders through music’ at Tehran’s Fajr festival

Arts & Culture Desk

The head of the Afghan ensemble “Salam Afghanistan”, said that his group seeks to “fade borders through music” as it performed at Tehran’s Rudaki Hall during the 41st Fajr International Music Festival. The Kabul-rooted ensemble took to the stage on the evening of February 10 as part of Iran’s flagship annual music event, a state-backed fixture that has long served as a barometer of the country’s cultural climate. For Afghan musicians, whose domestic space has narrowed sharply in recent years, the Tehran platform carries added weight, ILNA reported.

Hamid Sael, who has appeared at several previous editions of the Fajr festival, described the event as a source of hope for professional musicians. Its continuity, he said, signals that the musical sphere remains alive, offering performing groups a rare opening to present new work before large audiences.

The 41st edition of the Fajr International Music Festival officially opened on February 9, and will run until February 15. He stressed the deep historical and literary ties binding Iranian and Afghan music. Shared poetic heritage underpins much of the repertoire on both sides of the border, with contemporary Iranian and Afghan verse circulating widely in compositions in both countries. Salam Afghanistan works closely with Iranian collaborators, setting poetry to music through joint composition and ensemble performance. Its output spans anthems and popular songs as well as traditional pieces. While vocal traditions and poetic structures overlap, instrumental practice can diverge. Sael pointed to the Rabab/Rubab (lute-like musical instrument of Central Asian origin), often cited as a shared instrument, noting that in Iran and Afghanistan it shares little beyond its name. The instrument differs in shape and playing technique, and



The Afghan ensemble ‘Salam Afghanistan’ performs at Tehran’s Rudaki Hall on February 10, 2026, during the 41st Fajr International Music Festival.

● IRNA

certain notes are rendered differently in performance. Afghan instrumentation also reflects affinities with the Indian classical tradition in some regions. The Tehran concert featured indigenous and folk music drawn from several Afghan provinces, alongside pieces dedicated to the western city of Herat, long regarded as a cultural bridge between the two nations. The program was designed to foreground musical continuities while acknowledging regional distinctiveness. Sael also alluded to the acute pressures facing musicians inside Afghanistan. Music, he said, has been declared forbidden under the current authorities, with public performance and even the audible presence of instruments effectively banned.



Yet he rejected the notion that Afghan musical heritage has vanished. Rather, he argued, it has been suppressed by recent decrees and destruction. Music, he said, is intrinsic to both societies and cannot be excised without

hollowing out the social fabric. Beyond entertainment, it functions as a vehicle for cultural transmission and collective memory. In that sense, cross-border collaboration becomes more than artistic exchange; it is an assertion of continuity.

VP says government welcomes criticism from film community

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran’s First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref, visiting the 44th Fajr National Film Festival in Tehran on Tuesday, dismissed what he described as attempts to portray a rift between the government and artists, saying the administration “openly welcomes” criticism from the country’s film community and that no estrangement exists between the two sides.

Speaking to reporters at the Mellat Cineplex, the main venue of the annual state-backed festival, Aref said this year’s edition had drawn strong public attendance despite what he called negative messaging following unrest in January, IRNA reported. He added that the quality of entries had improved compared with previous years and that many films



Iran’s First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref waves as he stands on the red carpet in front of the backdrop of the 44th Fajr Film Festival at the Mellat Cineplex in Tehran, Iran, February 10, 2026.

● fypresident.ir

He said cinema should be leveraged to promote cultural heritage and project Iranian civilization abroad.

He also signaled that a proposal to establish a permanent home for the Fajr festival could be examined by the Supreme Council of Cinema, the country’s top policymaking body for the sector. The Fajr festival, founded after the 1979 Islamic Revolution and held each February to mark its anniversary, remains Iran’s most prominent cinematic event and a key barometer of the relationship between the state and its influential film industry.

adopted youth-oriented and socially critical approaches. “The artist is the mirror of society,” Aref said, urging officials to raise their tolerance threshold and framing cinema as a space for dialogue and the exchange of ideas. At the same time, he said filmmakers, given their influence on younger generations, should remain attentive to social realities. During his tour, Aref met festival organizers and se-

nior officials from the Cinema Organization of Iran and attended a screening of ‘Mola,’ directed by Abbas Lajevardi. In a closed-door session, officials briefed him on audience turnout, production standards and structural challenges facing the industry. Aref called for a more strategic approach to the economics of culture, stressing the need to bolster infrastructure and draft a clear governmental roadmap for the film sector.

Iran’s foreign policy ...

Human security and a country’s position within global value chains have emerged as key instruments in building sustainable security. Yet the prevailing theoretical framework in Iran leaves out these concepts, effectively depriving the country of the opportunity to draw on such resources.

This framework also shapes Iran’s posture in international negotiations. An exclusive focus on certain issues without considering how to integrate into global value chains or forge regional alliances aimed at sustainable security cannot ensure genuine national security. In today’s world, security takes shape in countries that are embedded in global value chains,

not merely through missile arsenals or military strength. At various historical junctures, this fallacy has exerted a decisive influence. Whenever Iran’s foreign policy has been confined to survival alone, the country has been pushed toward periods of decline or deep crisis. The current situation suggests that once again the focus of foreign policy has been narrowed to mere preservation. The result has been a widening gap between Iran and the realities of the international system, transforming the country into a passive actor that waits on the decisions of others and merely falls back on reactive measures.

A proper understanding of foreign policy and the safeguarding of na-

tional security therefore require a theoretical framework capable of enhancing statesmen’s ability to comprehend global dynamics and engage intelligently with the international system. Without revisiting and revising this framework, an accurate reading of global realities and the design of an effective foreign policy will remain out of reach.

In other words, preserving national security today demands recognition that foreign policy is not simply about survival. It requires active and intelligent engagement with global structures, participation in value chains, and regional cooperation — capacities that the current theoretical framework in Iran does not fully possess.

US, Iranian religious leaders, academics issue joint call for peace amid rising global conflicts

Social Desk

A group of prominent religious leaders, scholars and faith-based peace advocates from the United States and Iran issued a joint statement opposing war and urging governments to take “concrete steps towards reconciliation” before further catastrophes unfold.

The signatories include Ayatollah Mostafa Mohaghegh Damad, dean of the Department of Islamic Studies at the Academy of Sciences of Iran; Professor Gholamreza Aavani, member of the Iranian Academy of Sciences; Dr. Reza Davari Ardakani, distinguished emeritus professor of philosophy at the University of Tehran; most reverend John C. Wester, Catholic Archbishop of Santa Fe; Bishop Vashti Murphy McKenzie, president and general secretary of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA; Rabbi Amy Eilberg, peace and justice activist; and Professor Jim Wallis of Georgetown University.

In their joint declaration, titled ‘A Time for Peace,’ the leaders say the world is “ensnared in armed conflicts that engender despair, anxiety, and the unending slaughter of innocents,” and call for urgent action to prevent the spread of war.

Below is the full text of the statement:

Today the human family is ensnared in armed conflicts that engender despair, anxiety, and the unending slaughter of innocents. We are a group of religious leaders from the United States and Iran. With profound sympathy for all victims of war and oppression, we together implore our governmental leaders and those of other countries to take concrete steps towards reconciliation before even greater catastrophes befall us. Now is the time for religious leaders everywhere to take meaningful,

constructive steps toward lasting peace and to extinguish the flames of enmity and hatred. Mutual trust must be forged between nations and faith communities, grounded in our sacred texts that call us to extend good will even in the hardest circumstances.

Genuine peace means more than the cessation of hostilities. It entails cooperation across differences to address injustice, poverty and hunger, environmental degradation, and threats to public health.

To realize true peace which blesses all parties to conflict, religious leaders must call those wielding political power to oppose all aggression and tyranny, to acknowledge the rights of others, and to uphold universal human rights. Religious leaders with moral authority, sustained by their communities, must courageously stand for human dignity and nonviolent means of resolving conflicts.

The Golden Rule – do unto others as you would have them do unto you – is a cornerstone of our shared heritage and comes from God speaking directly to Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad.

If action to transform violent conflicts is not taken now, the horrors of war and devastation will spread and engulf thousands, if not millions, of innocent lives. We cannot allow that to happen.

We stand ready to partner with governments, other faith communities, and civil society organizations to prepare the ground for genuine peace and cooperation, allowing hope to overcome cynicism and despair. And we pray that such a concerted effort, across national and communal borders, will bear fruit, so that our children and grandchildren can share an increasingly interdependent world in which all inhabitants flourish in lasting peace and security.