

Fajr festival brings AI to the fore as judges fault pop music standards

Arts & Culture Desk

The secretary of the 41st Fajr International Music Festival said at the closing ceremony in Tehran on Friday that the event had prioritized Iranian classical and regional traditions, children's music and the responsible use of artificial intelligence, while judges warned of deep structural weaknesses in the country's pop sector. Arash Amini told the audience at Vahdat Hall that this year's edition, held from February 9 to 15, was conceived as a barometer of Iran's music scene rather than a mere run of concerts, ISNA reported. He said organizers placed Iranian dastgahi music, the country's clas-

sical modal system built around canonical melodic frameworks known as dastgahs, and regional genres at the core of the program, expanding the presence of folk ensembles to offset the incomplete staging of the 17th Regional Music Festival. Amini said a dedicated children and youth strand was mounted in collaboration with the Art Bureau, drawing strong attendance from school pupils. Performances foregrounded traditional instruments such as the Setar, Santur (hammered dulcimer) and Kamancheh (an Iranian spiked fiddle), with repertoire aligned to Iranian modal systems, in a bid to anchor younger audiences in national musical heritage. He added that works were as-

essed across 12 competitive categories, with the Barbad Award presented in fields including Iranian classical, pop and children's music to bolster professional standards. In a notable departure, the closing ceremony featured a segment on artificial intelligence, reflecting its growing use in arrangement, composition and lyric writing. Amini said the aim was to alert musicians to the technology's rapid advance and promote informed, ethical deployment in creative practice. A pop compilation album titled '41 Works', featuring 41 singers performing songs themed on Iran, was unveiled during the ceremony. Four veteran regional musi-

cians from Chabahar, Golestan, Kermanshah and Lorestan were also honored for lifetime achievement. In a statement read out at the event, the Barbad Award jury said the breadth of genres offered a realistic snapshot of Iranian music, combining artistic promise with serious structural challenges. While praising the resilience of dastgahi and fusion forms, the panel criticized much of the pop output for weak composition, poor vocal training and the absence of coherent educational and regulatory frameworks. The jury expressed particular concern over children's productions, citing a lack of policy, planning and targeted support, and de-



Secretary of the 41st Fajr International Music Festival Arash Amini speaks during the closing ceremony at Vahdat Hall in Tehran on February 14, 2026. IRNA

clined to grant any award in the submissions met acceptable literary standards.

44th Fajr Film Festival

Human portrait of Gen. Soleimani's formative years in 'Migration'

By Sadeq Dehqan
Staff writer

INTERVIEW

The feature film 'Migration,' directed by Mohammad Esfandiari and produced by Mehdi Motahar, stood out as one of the more unconventional entries at the 44th Fajr Film Festival. Taking a fresh narrative angle, the film explores the childhood and adolescence of Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani. As the festival's sole literary adaptation this year, it won the Crystal Simorgh for Makeup (Soudabeh Khosravi) and Costume Design (Majid Leilaji), and received an Honorary Diploma for Best Adapted Screenplay. Departing from the conventional, hero-centric biopic template, Migration adopts a grounded, humanistic lens to chart the psychological and moral architecture of a future commander, from early curiosities and hardships to his first encounters with personal and social responsibility. By foregrounding the familial and socio-cultural milieu that shaped general Soleimani, the film offers a rarely depicted portrait of his path toward maturity, making it particularly resonant for audiences drawn to historical cinema and biographical storytelling. On this occasion, we spoke with Mehdi Motahar, the film's producer and co-writer, about the project's genesis, its adaptive strategy, and the production challenges behind the camera.

IRAN DAILY: Could you elaborate on the production trajectory of Migration? As one of your screenplays, it received the Honorary Diploma for Best Adapted Screenplay at the 44th Fajr Film Festival. What drew you to this subject? MOTAHAR: I studied political science and hold a Ph.D. in history, so employing media as a vehicle to articulate the concerns that emerged from years of academic research felt like a natural progression. I initially

worked in documentary filmmaking and became relatively recognized in that arena, then transitioned into short fiction and eventually feature narratives. The story of the Resistance Front, the life of General Qassem Soleimani, and the martyrs who sacrificed their lives for Iran have long preoccupied me. I had previously directed several key documentaries about Soleimani, including '72 Hours,' which chronicles the final three days of his life. After a substantial body of documentaries had been produced and much had been said in that format, we decided to pursue the subject through dramatic storytelling. We collaborated with the "Maktab-e Haj Qassem" (School of General Qassem Soleimani) foundation, which is committed to distancing Soleimani's image from mythologized exaggeration and instead presenting a precise, authentic portrayal. For more than six years following his martyrdom, they had refrained from greenlighting any fictional dramatization, focusing instead on oral histories, memoirs, and documentaries. Notable publications included 'I Wasn't Afraid of Anything,' based on Soleimani's own handwritten memoirs, and 'The Rain Has Set In' by Ahmad Yousefzadeh. Through our discussions, we realized that "The Rain Has Set In" had strong cinematic potential. Initially, however, the foundation was resistant to a narrative feature. Under the pretext of producing a promotional trailer for the book, we secured a commission, but with the same budget, we produced a short film titled 'At Thirteen,' depicting Soleimani's childhood and adolescence. The short was screened at the Tehran International Short Film Festival and the International Resistance Film Festival, and its reception ultimately persuaded the commissioning body to back a feature-length project in the same vein. In effect, that short opened the door for adapting the book into a full-scale feature.

You collaborated with Mohammad Esfandiari, a first-time feature director. Given his debut status, how confident were you about the project's success? In documentaries, shorts, and previous features, I've consistently pre-



ferred working with first-time directors. They tend to bring compressed energy and bold conceptual instincts to the table. Their relative inexperience can be offset by surrounding them with seasoned department heads, particularly in makeup, production design, and the assistant directing team. I had previously collaborated with Mr. Esfandiari on 'At Thirteen,' so there was already creative synergy. We also made a strategic decision to channel the budget into production value, set construction, makeup, costume design, and technical departments, rather than into marquee actors. That investment paid off, as evidenced by our Crystal Simorgh wins in Makeup and Costume Design. Regarding the screenplay, we remained faithful to the source material. Although we were not initially shortlisted in the screenplay category, the festival secretariat chose to recognize us with an Honorary Diploma, both to encourage adaptation and because we were the only adapted work in the competition. Why did you choose to focus on Soleimani's childhood and adolescence? What made that period cinematically compelling? Had we chosen to dramatize the final chapter of the general's life, there were undoubtedly filmmakers better positioned to mount a large-scale war epic. Such productions require considerable resources, and with a debut director, our team represented a risk for the commissioning body.

endured, the friendships formed, the economic conditions navigated. A person acquainted with hardship can better empathize with the suffering of others. From an early age, general Qassem Soleimani was in a state of striving and discovery. As the title 'Migration' suggests, he was perpetually in motion, migrating for livelihood, for deeper understanding, and ultimately for transformation. The concept of migration in the film operates on both literal and philosophical planes. He moved from village to city to work and repay his father's debts; later, he returned to uplift his village; then he migrated to defend his country, and eventually to confront Daesh terrorist group and the United States. Nearly every chapter of his life is marked by a form of exodus, physical, moral, or ideological.

How did you ensure the character remained believable and avoid hagiographic exaggeration? That principle was embedded both in the narrative structure and in the ethos of the School of General Qassem Soleimani foundation. We foregrounded the realist dimensions of his personality in the screenplay. The source text, 'The Rain Has Set In,' did not portray an invulnerable hero, and we maintained that tonal register. Our objective was to demonstrate that if General Soleimani rose to such prominence, he emerged from an entirely ordinary family with

modest economic means. The underlying message is one of accessibility and hope, that anyone, even from the most remote corners of Iran, can ascend to positions of responsibility and serve their people.

As the film's producer, how did you approach location scouting and the reconstruction of his birthplace and migratory lifestyle? Much of Soleimani's childhood and adolescence unfolded in rural settings shaped by seasonal migration. The film spans roughly 15 to 16 years of his early life, requiring us to reconstruct multiple timeframes across the 1960s and 1970s. The most significant challenge was recreating his birthplace, Qanat-e Malek, which no longer retains its original architectural markers. After extensive research and consultations with eyewitnesses, we scouted for approximately one to one and a half months across regions near Tehran, Isfahan, and northern Lorestan. Eventually, we identified the village of Hiv, near Savojbolagh, whose texture resembled that of Qanat-e Malek. However, the original structures were absent. Consequently, over a two-month period, we built extensive sets and effectively constructed an entire cinematic village, functioning much like a dedicated backlot. In essence, we erected a bespoke film village from the ground up to authentically stage that chapter of his life.



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Hereby Golgohar Mining & Industrial Co. announces selling and export 70,000 metric tons of Iron Ore Concentrate (%Fe:68 ave) on basis of F.O.B at Rajaei Jetty Bandar Abbas - Iran. Interested bidders should find tender documents at Golgohar website: www.gog.ir. All bids on conformity to tender instructions must be submitted no later than 09:00 A.M. on 24. Feb.2026 to Golgohar complex in sirjan (50 km in shiraz road). Bidders are invited to the transactions commission department of the seller with an introduction letter of interested buyer and personal identification of the representative. Tender results shall be announced at 09:00 A.M. on 24.Feb.2026 at the office of the Seller.

Analysis %	
%Fe Ave	68.00
%FeO	Min 24 Max 28
%P Max	0.035
%S Ave	0.5
%SiO2 Max	2.2
%Al2O3 Max	0.6
%CaO Max	0.7
%MgO Max	2.2
%Moisture Max	7.0
Blaine (cm2/gr) Ave	1100
Size ave	80%<0.15 mm

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