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Iranian director and photographer Asghar Besharati
IRNA

Qeshm filmmaker wins joint jury award at French festival

Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian filmmaker Asghar Besharati's 'Thirst' (Soif) has won a joint jury award at the second Un Brin de Court International Very Short Film Festival in Vichy, France.

The film shared the honor with Argentine film 'Fierté', directed by Camila Scaglia. The award came in the festival's Resistance category, which highlights films exploring resilience, perseverance and the human experience of overcoming hardship.

'Thirst' portrays the act of giving water to birds as an expression of gratitude to nature, reflecting a local tradition on Qeshm Island in the Persian Gulf off southern Iran, through which people give thanks for the gifts of the natural world.

The festival ran from November 15 to 22 in Vichy and other locations across Allier, a department in central France. It featured two competitive categories, open theme and resistance, for films lasting between one and three minutes.

The award adds to Besharati's international festival record. His film won the Grand Prix and the Extra Court award at the 17th French Mobile Film Festival in 2021m which focuses on one-minute films made with mobile phones.

Besharati has also earned recognition for other works. His film 'The Painter of Fish' won two audience awards at the 2022 edition of Filminute, the international one-minute film festival.

Besharati, who is based on Qeshm Island, began working in photography and filmmaking in 2007. The Vichy award is the latest international recognition reported for 'Thirst'.

Iran's solar plan targets jobs for people with disabilities

By Sadeq Dehqan
Staff writer

INTERVIEW

Iran's Welfare Organization plans to create income opportunities for more than 25,000 people with disabilities through a 105-megawatt solar power project, part of a broader push to shift from welfare payments toward sustainable employment, its head said on Saturday.

Javad Hosseini said the organization had created 136,000 jobs for its target groups over the past two years, 65% more than the total number generated throughout its previous years of operation.

He announced the plans at a news conference marking Disability Week in Iran, observed from November 30 to December 6.

The International Day of Persons with Disabilities falls on December 3. The United Nations General Assembly established the annual observance in 1992.

The organization serves more than seven million people, including people with disabilities, older adults, street children, children in residential care, vulnerable women and other groups needing social support.



Iran plans to create income opportunities for people with disabilities through a 105-megawatt solar power project.



Javad Hosseini

Hosseini said the organization was moving away from reliance on regular financial assistance and focusing instead on economic empowerment and independence.

"Its approach includes identifying people's abilities, providing education and vocational training, creating jobs, helping businesses reach markets and offering continued support," he added.

He said individual businesses were less likely to survive without sustained assistance. The organization is therefore seeking to expand cooperative, corporate and collective business models.

Under the solar initiative, each five megawatts of installed capacity could involve about 1,000 people. The full 105-megawatt project is expected to benefit more than 25,000 people with disabilities through income-generating opportunities.

Hosseini said the organization was also negotiating with major e-commerce companies to expand online employment. Digital, green and care-related jobs are among its priorities, reflecting changing preferences among younger generations and shifts in the labor market.

The organization has allocated 13 trillion rials) $4.3 million (, this year to its Employment Support and Guarantee Fund. The fund will provide loans and bank guarantees, support technology-based businesses and develop platforms connecting employers with job seekers.

"Welfare payments and allowances for beneficiaries had risen by 158% under the current administration," Hosseini said.

About 275,000 people with severe or very severe disabilities are currently covered by Article 27 of Iran's Law on the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Hosseini said that number was expected to reach 300,000 by the end of the year.

On housing, he said 25,000 homes had been provided to beneficiaries last year in cooperation with the Islamic Revolution Housing Foundation.

The organization is also working to secure housing for about 44 families with more than five members with disabilities and special circumstances.

"Insurance coverage for rehabilitation services has expanded from 11 to about 60 services," he said.

More than 21,000 school students receive free educational services through the organization, while 19,000 university students receive its support. Hosseini said more than 50 of the school students had achieved one-, two- or three-digit rankings in this year's nationwide university entrance examinations.

"The organization has also designated 19 cities as age-friendly and enrolled 51,000 older women living alone in an empowerment program. It has established 900 gathering places and centers for older people to meet and socialize," Hosseini added.

Tehran to expand libraries for mothers, children

Arts & Culture Desk

Tehran plans to expand libraries serving mothers and children across the Iranian capital, with several districts under consideration as the city seeks to widen access to cultural services.

Mohammad-Baqer Alami, head of the Tehran Municipality's Cultural and Artistic Organization, said Tehran currently has three specialized libraries for children and teenagers.

Aftabgardan Children's Library serves areas 10 and 11 in western and southwestern Tehran. Parto Library is located in Area 22 in the west and northwest of the capital and was damaged during 40-day war that began in late February 2026, Alami said.

A third specialized library operates in Area 8 in northeastern Tehran.

The organization is planning to expand libraries dedicated to mothers and children, with areas 17 and 18 in southwestern Tehran and Area 20 in the south among the districts being considered, Alami said.

He stressed that the initiative would not be confined to southern Tehran, saying cultural services should be accessible to residents across the city.

The announcement comes



ahead of with the birth anniversary of Lady Fatima (PBUH), the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), which marks Iran's National Mother's Day that falls on November 30 this year.

The occasion highlights the importance of cultural spaces where mothers and children can read and take part in activities together, although Alami did not directly link the plan to the holiday.

Dedicated libraries can provide children with access to age-appropriate reading and cultural activities while giving mothers opportunities to share these experiences with them.

Alami gave no details on the number of libraries planned, the timeline for expansion or the budget.

The proposal concerns mother-and-child libraries and is separate from the three specialized children's and teenagers' libraries already operating in Tehran.

Shared heritage drives push for closer Central Asian ties

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran is seeking to expand cultural and tourism cooperation with Central Asian countries through joint travel initiatives, direct flights and stronger people-to-people ties, Heritage Minister Seyed Reza Salehi-Amiri said.

In an article reflecting on his recent visit to Uzbekistan and participation in the International Conference on Sustainable and Resilient Tourism in Tashkent, Salehi-Amiri called for a shift in Iran's regional policy toward greater emphasis on shared history and cultural heritage.

He said Iran's relations with Central Asian and Caucasus countries over the past four decades had focused largely on political and economic ties, leaving significant cultural opportunities underused.

Disputes between governments had sometimes overshadowed prospects for cooperation, he added, identifying cultural diplomacy and people-to-people exchanges as missing elements in regional relations.

Salehi-Amiri highlighted the historical links between Iran and Uzbekistan, pointing to Bukhara in southwestern Uzbekistan, Samarkand in the country's central-east and Khiva in the west as important centers of shared heritage.

He said modern political borders did not necessarily reflect historical cultural boundaries.

He described tourism as a means of building trust, connecting societies and promoting regional understanding, beyond its role in generating jobs and foreign currency.

During talks with Uzbek and Tajik tourism officials, Iran discussed linking travel agencies, developing joint tour packages, increasing direct flights and setting measurable targets for tourist exchanges.

The discussions also included reciprocal visits by 20 media figures and influencers from each country to promote their cultural and tourism attractions.

Another proposal would create a tourism corridor linking Samarkand and Bukhara in Uzbekistan with Merv in eastern Turkmenistan, Sarakhs and Mashhad in northeastern Iran, following the historic Silk Road.

Reflecting on the Tashkent summit and talks with regional officials and the UN World Tourism Organization secretary-general, Salehi-Amiri said Iran's experience in tourism infrastructure, continued investment and industry resilience could provide a basis for regional cooperation.

He argued that the future of regional ties should be measured not only by political and economic indicators but also by cultural exchanges, mutual understanding and the ability to turn shared heritage into lasting social and economic opportunities.