

Tehran Celebrates Armenian Community's Enduring Cultural Legacy



TEHRAN -- On an autumn evening in Tehran—soft light glinting off polished parquet floors, the faint scent of varnish and old paper in the air—the Iranology Foundation hosted a gathering that was, on its surface, a ceremonial event: the unveiling of a book, a retrospective of Armenian watercolorists, and a gesture of recognition for the Armenian community in Iran.

But beneath the formalities of speeches and flower arrangements, something more resonant unfolded: a celebration not only of artistic heritage but of an invisible architecture—centuries of cultural cohabitation.

Armenians in Iran are not, as Ali Akbar Salehi, head of the Iranology Foundation, reminded the audience, “guests” of the nation. “They are of the house,” he said—a poetic turn of phrase, but also a recognition of fact.

For over two millennia, from the days of the Achaemenids through the silk-weaving guilds of New Julfa and the early printing presses of the Qajar era, Armenians have worked, taught, built, played music, died in wars, and painted—quietly, industriously—alongside their fellow Iranians.

The evening’s ceremonies, held on Tuesday, were orchestrated in the name of “coexistence”—a word that has become both overused and under-defended in much of the world. Yet here, in a formal hall warmed by intellectual and spiritual presence, it did not feel like a slogan. It felt like an affirmation.

The ambassador of Armenia, Grigor Hakopian, praised Iran’s respectful embrace of its Armenian population. He spoke of churches that dot the Iranian landscape, some of which—like the Saint Thaddeus Monastery—are inscribed on UNESCO’s World Heritage list.

He mentioned the quiet endurance of the Armenian script, born in the 5th century by the hand of Mesrop Mashtots, and surviving not only in parchment and gospel but in graffiti on school desks, in the letters home to Yerevan from Tehran, in margin notes on scientific papers by Armenian academics in Iranian universities.

In another speech—at once poetic and anatomical—Professor Mir Jalal al-Din Kazzazi made a linguist’s case for the Armenians’ deep cultural kinship with Iran.

With that particular blend of scholarly certainty and mythological flourish familiar to readers of Persian literary criticism, he traced names, suffixes, and stories across time: Vartan, he noted, is no foreign name, but one with Iranian roots.

He compared the epic of David of Sassoun to Shahnameh’s Rustom and Sohrab. In his telling, Iran and Armenia are not neighbors but siblings separated by the slow tectonics of empire and map-making.

One by one, voices from the Armenian-Iranian community rose—not to demand recognition, but to reflect it back.

Aras Shaoardian, the sole Armenian representative in Iran’s Parliament, recounted his people’s history in education, industry, and the press.

Painter and musician Simon Ayvazian remembered his mother, her sketches, and the scent of turpentine in their family home. Professor Ara Tumanian of Tehran University gestured toward geography—both literal and intellectual—to remind us that maps of the past can’t be easily overlaid onto our present realities.

At the center of the evening—both thematically and physically—stood the book *The Armenian Watercolorists of Iran*, compiled by Amir Muhammad Davoudipour, the fruit of two decades of curation.

Contained within its pages: 114 works from 20 artists, stretching from the deft touch of Markar Qarabekian to the exacting delicacy of Ayvazian himself.

These were not flamboyant canvases; there was no grand nationalist gesture in them. Only quiet landscapes, old courtyards, half-seen figures. The kind of painting one might miss at a loud exhibition. The kind that asks to be sat with.

Davoudipour spoke with the enthusiasm of a man who knows the fragility of memory. He proposed—perhaps hopefully, perhaps defiantly—a joint Iran-Armenia watercolor festival on the banks of the Aras River, the border that has both separated and sustained these two worlds. One imagines this future scene: a few tents, the sound of brushes on paper, shared tea. An answer to centuries of geopolitics through pigment and patience.

As the evening drew to a close, the paintings were unveiled. The hall grew quieter. Viewers leaned in—not for the detail, but for the atmosphere each brushstroke evoked. In a world increasingly distracted by noise and novelty, it felt quietly radical to stand before work that asked nothing of us but to see.

Shiraz Gears Up as Cultural Capital for Hafez Week

TEHRAN -- The rich, evocative voice of Hafez of Shiraz—the beloved Persian lyric poet whose words have transcended centuries and borders—will once again echo through the halls of culture and academia as Iran launches the annual Hafez Memorial Day.

From October 10 to 17, this week-long cultural festival will unfold across Shiraz, the poet’s birthplace, and resonate nationwide as well as in Iranian cultural centers abroad.

The announcement was made with grandeur at a ceremony in Tehran, where Mahmoud Shalouei, president of the Iranian Association of Cultural Heritage and Eminent Figures, emphasized Hafez’s exalted position in Persian and global literary history.

“Hafez is not merely the embodiment of Persian poetic beauty and philosophy,” Shalouei proclaimed, “he is a spiritual heritage shared by all humanity.”

His ghazals, steeped in themes of love, truth, and divine knowledge, continue to inspire diverse audiences, weaving a universal tapestry of meaning across cultures.

This year marks the continuation of a significant cultural shift, from a single “Day of Hafez” to a full week dedicated to honoring his legacy—allowing deeper engagement with his enduring work.

The festival’s program is rich and varied: theatrical performances including an operatic puppet show directed by renowned artist Behrouz Gharibpour, live renditions of Lesan al-Ghayb (*The Tongue of the Unseen*) at Hafez’s mausoleum, scientific workshops hosted by leading scholars of Persian literature, and exhibitions of calligraphy and miniature painting inspired by the poet’s verses.

Governor Hussein Ali Amiri of Fars Province, where Shiraz stands as a cultural crossroads of ancient Persian empires, underscored the vital role of Iran’s great cultural figures as role models for contemporary and future generations.

“The lives of our eminent figures, from Hafez to



Saadi and Khajoo, offer a wellspring of wisdom and inspiration,” Amiri said. “This festival not only celebrates history but fosters a renewed cultural identity rooted in both Iranian heritage and Islamic tradition.”

The week’s celebrations will also extend beyond Iran’s borders through activities at Iranian cultural centers worldwide, strengthening global appreciation for Hafez’s profound poetic vision.

National Payvar Santur Award Invites Emerging Talents

TEHRAN -- In a heartfelt tribute to one of Iran’s most iconic santur virtuosos, the First National Payvar Santur Playing Award has officially opened its call for entries.

Scheduled for December 2025, this landmark event celebrates the life and legacy of Maestro Farhang Payvar—a pioneering musician, composer, and educator who shaped modern Iranian traditional music.

Organized in collaboration with the Arasbaran Cultural Center and supported by the quarterly journal *Studies in Art and Aesthetics*, the award aims to nurture and promote the art of santur playing across generations.

Emerging talents and seasoned performers alike are invited to compete in four distinct age categories (A to D), progressing through two competitive phases:



video submissions followed by live performances. A special category dedicated to improvisation will also spotlight spontaneous musical creativity.

The deadline for video submissions is November 16, 2025, with the final round taking place on December 12 and the grand closing ceremony held on December 20—coinciding with the anniversaries of both Farhang Payvar and legendary master Abolhasan Saba. The events will be hosted at the prestigious Arasbaran Cultural Center in Tehran.

The distinguished jury panel features luminaries of Iranian music, including Alireza Bashardoust, Vesal Salehian, Alireza

Geranfar, Pegah Zohdi, Shadi Rahmani, and Mehdi Mortezaei in the preliminary round. The final adjudication will be led by celebrated musicians Nader Sinaki, Mina Oftadeh, Kourosh Matin, Pouya Saraei, and Asghar Mohammadi. Pouya Mohammadi serves as the artistic director, while Muhammad Reza Azizi oversees executive coordination.

Winners will be honored with an array of prestigious prizes, including a handcrafted santur, cash awards, scholarships for advanced masterclasses, and the invaluable opportunity to perform on renowned stages. Official certificates from the festival will further recognize their artistic achievements.

For registration and detailed information, interested participants can visit the official website at www.payvaraward.ir.

Qataris Embrace Persian Calligraphy After 10-Year Pause



TEHRAN -- After a decade-long hiatus, the cultural diplomacy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Qatar has rekindled the luminous tradition of Nasta’liq script through a meticulously organized calligraphy course.

The endeavor, facilitated by the Iranian Cultural Consulate in Doha, offers a rare and exquisite window into one of Iran’s most revered artistic legacies, bringing it directly to the eager hands of Qatar’s art enthusiasts.

Taught by Abdullah Abbasi, an accomplished Iranian calligrapher residing in Qatar, the course unfolds over twelve intensive three-month sessions.

Participants are guided through the intricate “secrets of the bride of Islamic scripts,” from mastering the delicate balance of reed pen techniques, ink preparation, and paper selection,

to the subtle compositions and sinuous curves that define Nasta’liq—an aesthetic vessel that for centuries has carried Persian poetry, wisdom, and mysticism.

Early sessions reveal Nasta’liq’s profound role as a “shared language of hearts.” Notably, while only a handful of the attendees are Iranian expatriates, the class is predominantly composed of Qatari women, signaling a fertile intersection where Persian artistic refinement harmonizes with the Arab world’s sensibilities.

This resurgence of calligraphic practice in Qatar is no passing trend. In 2024, Doha inaugurated the first International Arabic Calligraphy Competition, *Al-Raqīm*, which notably awarded the top three prizes in the Nasta’liq category to Iranian artists.

Subsequently, a curated selection from the competition was exhibited at the Museum of Islamic Art, underscoring Qatar’s growing commitment to nurturing and showcasing the calligraphic arts

Picture of the Day



In recent years, the development of new educational facilities in underprivileged areas of Lorestan province has transformed many villages, providing safe and modern schools where motivated students continue their studies despite limited resources.
Photo by ISNA