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## Allow director to attend film fest: Benegal to Iran

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Purva Mehra, Hindustan Times

Email Author

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Making a case for artistic freedom, Shyam Benegal, chairman of the Mumbai Academy of Moving Images (MAMI), has written to the Iranian embassy to let acclaimed filmmaker Jafar Panahi (49) come to the city for the 11th Mumbai Film Festival.

Panahi was banned from leaving Iran on October 15.

The filmmaker is slated to be one of the international jurors of the festival's First Feature Film of Directors competition. The festival will be held from October 29 to November 5.

"I have indeed sent a letter to the Iranian Embassy in Delhi but the outcome is still unknown," Benegal told Hindustan Times from London, where his film Well Done Abba was screened as part of the London Film Festival.

Iranian authorities confiscated Panahi's passport last Thursday as he was leaving for France.

Critical of the recent presidential elections in Iran, Panahi was arrested in Tehran in July for participating in the memorial service for the victims of the post-election unrest.

The filmmaker is a key contributor to the Iranian New Wave movement — a type of art cinema with extreme political and philosophical undertones. His films like *The White Balloon*, *The Mirror*, *Crimson Gold* and *Offside* have swept seminal awards at the Venice, Berlin and Cannes film festivals.

"As of now Panahi's attendance is unlikely," said Mirian Ali, press secretary at the Iranian embassy.

American screenwriter Paul Schrader is also expected to attend the festival.

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