

Iranian Director Jafar Panahi of 'No Bears' Fame Walks Out of Prison After Going on Hunger Strike

By: [Gautaman Bhaskaran](#)

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Iran



Jafar Panahi was jailed in July 2022 and had to serve a six-year prison term, which incidentally was first ordered in 2010 for being critical of the Tehran regime.

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Jafar Panahi granted bail after going on a hunger strike

Iranian director Jafar Panahi is out of jail. The release came three days after he began a hunger strike demanding that he be freed. According to his wife Tahereh Saeidi, this is a temporary relief; he could be back in prison again, anytime. She said in a statement, "Today, Friday, February 3rd, and on the third day of Jafar Panahi's dry strike; with the efforts of his family, respected lawyers, representatives of the cinema house and the cinema organisation, Mr. Panahi was temporarily released from Evin prison."

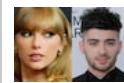
The auteur was jailed in July 2022 and had to serve a six-year prison term, which incidentally was first ordered in 2010 for being critical of the Tehran regime.

In a statement, Panahi quipped, "According to the law... after more than 10 years of non-execution, the sentence is subject to the passage of time and becomes unenforceable. Therefore, this arrest was more like banditry and hostage-taking than the execution of a judicial sentence."

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He added, "While we have seen that it takes less than 30 days from the time of arrest to the hanging of the innocent youth of our country, it took more than a hundred days to transfer my case to the branch with the intervention of security forces."

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"What is certain is that the behaviour of the bully and extra-legal security institution and the unquestioning surrender of the judicial authorities once again show the implementation of selective and tasteful laws. It is only an excuse for repression."

Panahi's latest work, No Bears, was screened at Venice 2022. Interestingly, No Bears came at a time when Iranian women were rising in revolt against misogynists. The protests began after a young woman died in police lockup after she was taken in for wearing her hijab incorrectly.

No Bears is set in a village, where the people live in mortal fear of imaginary bears, and they are pushed into believing that the animals are roaming about. They are not, and Panahi makes a veiled comment here about how Iranians are fed fear – about their morality police. The movie underlines the anguish in the country and people's frustration at being prevented to lead lives of freedom and joy. Invariably, women suffer most.

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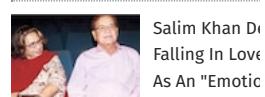


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Panahi himself plays "Jafar Panahi" who is banned from making films or leaving his country. So, he moves close to the Turkish border into a village, where an Iranian couple, Bakhtiar (Bakhtiar Panjei) and Zara (Mina Khosravani), are trying to run away from Iran in search of a better life. Pretending to photograph local customs, including a coming wedding, he secures the consent of the villagers.

But a misunderstanding escalates, and village elders confront Panahi and demand he hand over all that he had photographed, especially that which they feel is scandalous. He is absolutely sure he had committed no such offence.



No Bears is a powerful reflection of how he and other fellow moviemakers have been evading unhealthy censorship laws to make political cinema. No Bears says no to rigid laws which vitiate the social atmosphere, curbing the freedom of the man on the street. It says no to misogynist tendencies, to theocratic tyranny, and Panahi seems to have seen what is coming in Iran. He appears to have forecast the current political upheaval.

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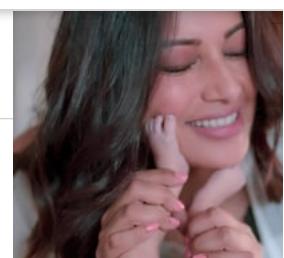
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