



# First Iran-Tajikistan joint feature film unveiled

## Arts & Culture Desk

Iran and Tajikistan launched their first co-produced feature film 'Fish on the Hook' at a Sunday evening ceremony in Tehran, attended by senior cultural and political figures from both countries. The event at the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) International Conference Center brought together IRIB chief Peyman Jebelli, Persian Language Academy head Gholamali Haddad-Adel, Tajikistan's Ambassador Zohidi Nizomiddin Shamsiddinzoda, and the film's Tajik director Muhiddin Muzaffar. The unveiling of the family-oriented drama is a tangible step in Tehran's push for cultural partnerships with Persian-speaking nations, IRNA reported. Officials hailed the \$2m production, financed partly by Iran's private Sikaap Holding alongside broadcasters IRIB's iFilm channel and Tajikfilm, as

evidence of what one speaker called "brotherhood" and a shared cultural heritage that continues to drive artistic ventures across the region. Jebelli described the work as the "first joint output" of iFilm with Tajikistan and said such ventures would not be one-offs. "We promised when season seven of the popular TV series 'Paytakht' (Capital) aired that we would continue joint projects with nations bound to us by language and history," he told the gathering. He praised Muzaffar's storytelling, which he said shows a child who refuses to remain "caught on the hook" and instead moves forward with "courage and confidence". Haddad-Adel recalled his own presence in Dushanbe more than three decades ago, when Tehran and the newly independent Tajikistan re-established diplomatic relations. He likened the two nations' cultural proximity to "breathing the same air". He noted that



Tajikistan's Ambassador to Tehran Zohidi Nizomiddin Shamsiddinzoda speaks at the unveiling of the Iran-Tajik film 'Fish on the Hook' at the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) International Conference Center in Tehran on September 21, 2025. ● defapress.ir

Persian literary giants from Rudaki to Mir Sayyid Ali Hamadani remain touchstones in Tajik life. Tajik envoy echoed that view, citing Rudaki's lines as he called the premiere a "day of closeness and friendship". He urged that cultural common ground should serve as a "foundation" for political and economic cooperation. Behind the camera, Muzaffar credited "the affection of Iranian colleagues" for enabling a smooth shoot in Tajikistan's landscapes. Producer Amir Tajik said the cross-border project was proof that an "international film" could be made with a modest budget. "This was built on mutual trust," he said, adding that despite changes in management, the project was never



derailed. Industry executives presented the work as both an artistic milestone and an economic test case. Sikaap Holding chair-

man Hossein Hamedanizadeh said his group had "a decade of producing for families" and that the Tajik collaboration opened a "new window" after

audiences in Cannes and Busan responded positively. He voiced hopes that future co-productions would also "be monetized" at the box office.

## Iran aims to attract more Chinese tourists, eyes share of growing outbound market

### Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, And Handicrafts Reza Salehi-Amiri on Sunday said the country is seeking a larger share of the growing Chinese outbound tourism market, which is expected to reach 200 million travelers annually by 2030. Speaking at the 21st strategic council meeting in Tehran, Salehi-Amiri said attracting foreign visitors is crucial to safeguarding 1.6 million jobs linked to 22,000 hotels and guesthouses, 6,000 travel agencies, 15,000 licensed tour guides, and 3,000 eco-tourism sites. Iran received 6.2 million foreign

tourists in 2023 and nearly 7.4 million in 2024. Arrivals dipped in June and July, 2025, following a brief 12-day war, but the sector is "regaining ground," he said. The government's Seventh Development Plan sets a long-term target of 15 million foreign visitors, requiring an average annual growth of around 19.5%. While China is a priority, officials also highlighted Central Asia, the Caucasus, Persian Gulf neighbors including Iraq, and major Muslim nations such as Egypt and Indonesia as key markets. Salehi-Amiri said attracting these groups is "vital" for revitalizing an industry still recovering from

shocks. The minister also stressed the potential of Iranians living abroad, describing them as the nation's "greatest asset." Encouraging the diaspora to return could drive social, cultural, and economic development, he added. The foreign ministry has established a body to engage Iranians abroad, a move seen as central to long-term recovery. At the same session, Babak Negahdari, head of parliament's research center, said his office has partnered with a Chinese academy to broaden joint studies. He pledged practical policy "packages" to support the tourism ministry in navigating post-conflict challenges.

## Nine Iranian artists named winners at Belgrade illustration contest

### Arts & Culture Desk

Nine Iranian illustrators were among 83 winners announced on September at the 2025 Belgrade International Illustration Competition, staged alongside the 53rd Golden Pen and the 18th biennial showcase in the Serbian capital. The Belgrade contest, held every two years by the Association of Designers and Artists of Serbia, is regarded as one of the most prestigious gatherings for book and media illustration in eastern Europe, inn.ir reported. It draws submissions across publishing houses, maga-

zines, newspapers, animation and digital platforms, providing a springboard for emerging and established artists alike. The Iranian laureates were named as Raha Amini, Salimeh Babakhan, Mahshid Raghemi, Shideh Sekhavati, Ghazal Fat'hollahi, Maral Forouzesh, Hajar Moradi, Maryam Mahmoudi-Moghadam and Najla Mahdavi-Ashraf. Two entries that drew particular attention were Mahdavi-Ashraf's 'Sun in the Turkish Desert' and Raghemi's 'Tick-Tock,' both produced by Tehran's Institute for the Intellectual Development of

Children and Young Adults. The organizers said the 2025 selection represented a "crossroads" of global talent, underscoring how illustration continues to straddle art and publishing markets despite economic headwinds. For Iranian publishers, securing recognition in Belgrade is seen as a way to break into international circuits and ink new deals in children's and educational segments. The winning works will go on public display in Belgrade from early November, with collectors and editors expected to attend the opening to scout for fresh talent.

## DoE to establish four new biosphere reserves

### Social Desk

Iran will designate at least four new biosphere reserves to expand its protected network, Vice President China Ansari told the 5th World Congress of Biosphere Reserves in China on September 22, saying the current coverage of "less than 4%" of national territory was not enough. The pledge comes as Tehran faces mounting ecological pressures from climate change, water shortages and recent regional hostilities, IRNA reported. Ansari, who also heads Iran's Department of Environment (DoE), said the expansion would strengthen the country's 13 registered sites, which already include wetlands, mountain ranges, deserts and coastal areas. Since June 13, she said, Israeli strikes had hit Iranian civilian infrastructure, from hospitals and fuel depots to water distribution plants. These attacks, she warned, had worsened carbon emissions and "severely" damaged ecosystems. "The consequences extend beyond

national borders," Ansari told delegates, calling the raids both "unprovoked" and a threat to food security and public health across the wider Middle East. Iran's biosphere zones, she noted, are often tied to the ancestral lands of nomadic and rural communities, whose traditional livelihoods embody "unique strategies" for sustainable living. Long before the idea of sustainable development was globalized, she argued, these groups had devised ways to cope with droughts, heatwaves and other environmental hazards. Their knowledge, she said, is "a valuable and inspiring capital" for the world. Ansari confirmed Tehran was ready to align with the so-called Hangzhou Action Plan, a United Nations framework launched in 2023 to step up climate cooperation. She proposed "twinning" projects between Iranian reserves and foreign counterparts to foster joint research, technology exchange and specialist visits. Such peer-to-peer mechanisms, she added, could ripple outwards and "inspire" sur-

rounding landscapes. Yet many of Iran's existing reserves are already reeling from record temperatures and water stress. "More than ever," Ansari cautioned, "we need solidarity, experience-sharing and support from the global biosphere network to boost resilience." She argued that UNESCO members have the capacity to counter unilateralism and reinforce multilateralism in defending what she called the "common home" of humanity. The reserves, she said, are not only sanctuaries for biodiversity but symbols of peaceful coexistence between people and nature, and a bridge between modern science and indigenous wisdom. The Hangzhou Action Plan underscores urgent collective action to cut greenhouse gases, mobilize green finance and accelerate renewable technologies in line with the Paris Agreement. The four-day Beijing congress, which runs through September 26, seeks to align biosphere priorities with international accords such as the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

## UNGA chance for ...

Despite such limits, experience has shown that even at the height of tension, limited-scope, temporary, issue-specific agreements remain possible. Iran is clearly seeking to tap into this path, while making sure its willingness for such engagement is not taken advantage of by Western capitals.

### Does Iran have any legal or political instruments at its disposal to halt or at least soften this trajectory?

Legally, Iran can resort to dispute-settlement mechanisms within international bodies, including filing a lawsuit at the International Court of Justice over US and European violations of their commitments and making use of statutory mechanisms at the IAEA to formally register objections against breaches of agreements. While these measures may not yield immediate tangible results, they achieve three critical goals: Officially documenting Western breaches in international records; raising political and reputational costs for violators within the international system; and creating a legal basis for demanding compensation for Iran's

economic and human losses. Politically, several levers remain at Tehran's disposal: suspending or redefining its level of cooperation with the IAEA to enhance bargaining power; leveraging regional partnerships, particularly with Russia, China, and neighboring states, to deepen political, security, and economic ties; and tracking and capitalizing on emerging regional and international processes as bargaining chips when the timing is right.

### In light of recent Western positions, what reaction should be expected toward Iran's diplomatic efforts? Could scenarios such as invoking Chapter VII of the UN Charter be on the table?

The most likely scenario is a continuation of the current situation, coupled with political pressure and the possible activation of snapback or even referral [of Iran's nuclear dossier] to the Security Council. Although implementing such a course would be costly for all parties, given its security implications and Tehran's potential response, the West continues to keep this option as a stick on the table. Therefore, the possibility of a gradual return to diplomacy can-

not be completely written off. Shifts on the ground or changes in political calculations may yet open new windows for talks.

### Could regional states such as Qatar or Oman play a role in mediating or facilitating dialogue? And would Iran be willing to rely on these regional capacities?

Countries like Qatar and Oman have effectively become official channels between Iran and the West. They have already mediated in sensitive matters such as prisoner exchanges and the release of Iranian frozen funds. Thanks to their relative neutrality and balanced relations with Washington, Tehran, and Europe, these states have significant potential to facilitate dialogue. Iran has already shown practical willingness to make use of these channels—as seen in the recent talks mediated by Oman. But these capacities, too, have been partly constrained. Of particular note is the Israeli strike on Doha carried out with US backing, which has also dented Qatar's and Oman's trust in Washington. This development could weaken, or at least redirect, their mediating role moving forward.