

# Iran to stage book fair online as digital reach expands amid scaled-back foreign presence

## Arts & Culture Desk

Tehran's seventh Virtual Book Fair will open on May 16 with more than 2,200 publishers and a limited international section, as Iran shifts its flagship literary event online in response to wartime conditions while seeking to sustain public access to books and preserve momentum in the country's publishing industry. Speaking at a press conference in Tehran, Tehran International Book Fair deputy director Ebrahim Heydari said 2,296 publishers had registered for the nationwide digital event and around 80% of titles had already been uploaded to the platform ahead of the eight-day fair running under the slogan "Let's Read for Iran."

"This exhibition is not international," Heydari said, noting that authorities opted for a virtual-only format after consultations with publishers, writers and cultural figures. A full-scale international edition will be held "at another opportunity," he added. The annual Tehran book fair, one of the region's largest cultural gatherings, has been staged every spring for nearly four decades. Organizers said this year's online edition aims to maintain "social vitality," broaden nationwide access to books and demonstrate the continuity of cultural life despite mounting economic and wartime pressures. Although scaled back internationally, the event will still host 19 foreign publishers and literary agencies. Organizers said Arabic- and English-language titles would be available alongside domestic publications, while a new digital media section will debut for the first time. Books published since 2021 will qualify for sale on the platform, with newly released titles added throughout the

fair period. Domestic publications will be offered with combined discounts of up to 25% through publisher reductions and subsidies provided by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance. Heydari said books ordered through the platform would be delivered free of charge nationwide in cooperation with Iran's national postal service. Special provisions have also been introduced for children in the southern city of Minab in tribute to victims of what officials described as the "third imposed war." More than 30 cultural forums and literary discussions featuring domestic and foreign guests are scheduled alongside the virtual marketplace. "Reading and buying books help sustain the publishing industry," Heydari said, describing the fair's slogan as a reflection of "continuity and dynamism" in Iranian cultural life.



Tehran's seventh Virtual Book Fair deputy director Ebrahim Heydari (center right) speaks during a press conference in Tehran, Iran, May 13, 2026. ● MEHR

## Minister calls for wider cultural access for children

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Iran's Culture Minister Abbas Salehi called for wider access to children's books, arts programs and cultural services across poorer communities during a meeting with senior officials from the Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (IIDCYA) in Tehran on May 13, warning that many low-income families remain cut off from cultural opportunities despite advances in public education. Speaking at the gathering with IIDCYA executives and deputies, Salehi described the long-established institution as one of Iran's most reputable cultural networks, citing its nationwide reach, educational legacy and relative distance from short-term political currents. He said the organization remained well positioned to strengthen cultural diplomacy and preserve Iranian-Islamic identity among younger generations. "Educational justice has improved significantly compared to the pre-revolution period, but we still face a considerable gap in cultural justice," Salehi said. "Poor families may still manage to send their children



to school, but access to cultural and artistic resources, including children's books, is far more difficult." The minister said children and teenagers had become increasingly "vulnerable" in the digital age, arguing that the rapid spread of information had left many families struggling to guide younger generations through social and cultural pressures. He warned that weakening ties to the Persian language and classical literature could erode long-term cultural continuity. Salehi also urged stronger cooperation between state institutions and private-sector cultural actors, saying Iran's children's arts economy remained underdeveloped both financially and theoretically. He called for broader field research, practical studies and coordinated policymaking to address the sector's shortcomings.

Highlighting the international dimension of children's culture, Salehi said youth-oriented productions carried unique cross-border appeal because they were rooted in "human nature" rather than geography or ideology. He said this gave Iran significant capacity in cultural outreach and international engagement through literature, animation, publishing and educational programs for younger audiences. The minister also stressed the need to protect children during crises, referring to the pressures created by regional instability and recent conflict conditions. "Children affected by crises cannot become the future-builders of a country," he said. IIDCYA chief Hamed Allamati and senior officials outlined key challenges facing the organization and proposed measures aimed at expanding cultural access nationwide.

## Over 1,000 scientists urge protection for Iranian universities from US-Israeli strikes

Hundreds of members of the International Union of Scientists have written an open letter to the UN secretary general, director-general of UNESCO, and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, calling for the protection of scientific institutions in Iran, and for the US-Israeli aggressors to be held accountable. "We, the undersigned academics, researchers, students, and members of the global scholarly community, express our grave concern over at least 21 attacks that have damaged laboratories, universities, hospitals, and other scientific institutions during the ongoing unprovoked US-Israel's aggression on Iran," the letter begins, Press TV reported. The US-Israeli aggression targeted Isfahan University of Technology, Iran University of Science and Technology and Amirkabir University of Technology, the letter said. It added that in another strike on March 31, "one of Iran's largest pharmaceutical

R&D centers, Tofiq Daru, a major producer of anesthetics and treatments for MS and cancer, was targeted and severely damaged." Scientific and educational institutions are civilian spaces essential to public health, knowledge, and human survival, and their destruction endangers researchers, students, medical personnel, and the broader public, while causing lasting harm to science and society, the letter noted. The letter called on the UN, UNESCO, and relevant international bodies to document the damage caused to these institutions, protect affected scholars and students, and support independent investigations into violations of international humanitarian law. "We urge the international community to act now to protect scientific infrastructure, defend academic life, and uphold the principle that knowledge-serving institutions must never be treated as expendable in war," the letter concludes.

Among the signatories are two Nobel Prize laureates from Norway, a prominent British physicist, and a colleague of Dr. Masoud Ali-Mohammadi, an Iranian nuclear scientist who was assassinated by the Israeli regime back in early 2010. The criminal US-Israeli aggression against Iran began on February 28 with airstrikes that assassinated senior Iranian officials and commanders, including Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei. The aggression also caused damage to or destroyed civilian infrastructure, including hospitals and schools among other things. Iranian armed forces responded by launching daily missile and drone operations targeting locations in the Israeli-occupied territories as well as US military bases and assets across the region. Furthermore, Iran retaliated against the strikes by closing the Strait of Hormuz, which resulted in a significant increase in oil prices and its by-products.

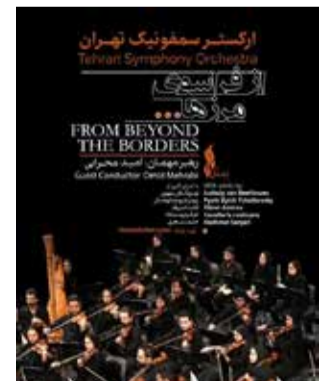
## Tehran Symphony Orchestra opens new season with cross-cultural repertoire

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The Tehran Symphony Orchestra will stage its first official performance of the new Persian year on May 21 at Tehran's Vahdat Hall, unveiling a globally themed concert titled 'From Beyond the Borders' under guest conductor Omid Mehri, the Rudaki Foundation announced. The performance marks the

latest cultural initiative by the orchestra's artistic council to spotlight emerging Iranian talent, this time by giving the podium to a younger generation of conductors after last year's focus on rising composers, IRNA reported. The program brings together works by celebrated global and Iranian composers, including Ludwig van Beethoven, Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, Azerbaijani

composer Fikret Amirov, Iranian maestro Heshmat Sanjari, and selections from Pietro Mascagni's renowned opera Cavalleria Rusticana. Organizers described the concert as an effort to foster cultural dialogue through music and to carry audiences "beyond geographical borders" into a shared musical journey spanning diverse traditions and styles.



## 'By the Way' paves way for Iranian animation at US experimental festival

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Iranian short animation 'By the Way' by directors Mahboobeh Kalaee and Ali Fotoohi won the "No Violence" award at the 64th Ann Arbor Film Festival in the United States, expanding the international footprint of Iran's independent

animation scene. The experimental animated film, produced by the Documentary, Experimental & Animation Film Center (DEFC) of Iran, was honored at the Michigan-based festival, one of the world's oldest showcases dedicated to experimental and artist-driven cinema, held from

March 24 to 29, ILNA reported. The Lauter/Gräf "No Violence" prize is awarded to films that engage audiences while adhering to a principle of avoiding violent imagery in storytelling. The jury recognized 'By the Way' for its restrained visual language and narrative impact.

The film has continued to build momentum on the international festival circuit. It previously screened at the 26th Monstra Lisbon Animation Festival in Portugal, an event known for blending animation with contemporary artistic forms and experimental visual expression.

'By the Way' is also slated to screen this summer at Slovakia's Fest Anča International Animation Festival, further broadening its overseas presence. The production earlier received the Best International Film award at China's 22nd China Animation Golden Dragon Awards.