



Iran, Russia plan joint investment in films, animation, video games



Arts & Culture Desk

Iran and Russia plan to expand film cooperation and begin joint investment in films, animation and video games, Iranian Culture Minister Abbas Salehi said, as Tehran and Moscow seek to cement cultural ties. Salehi said the two sides would sign a “strong and solid document” during his visit to Russia to strengthen cooperation in cinema, including animation and video games, IRNA reported on Saturday. “The first step would be joint investment, followed by faster production of joint

projects,” he said. “The cooperation could cover feature films, animation and short and feature-length documentaries aimed at demonstrating the cultural capacities of Iran and Russia to each other and to audiences in other countries,” the minister said. Cinema for children and young people would also be included, Salehi added. According to the minister, cultural cooperation between Tehran, central Iran, and Moscow, western Russia, already covers books and publishing, cinema, music, visual arts and performing arts. In coming years, however, greater emphasis is expected on cinema, animation and computer and video games. Iranian Culture Days in Russia will also formally open on Monday in Moscow with the participation of the two

countries’ culture ministers. After Moscow, programs will be held in Kazan, western Russia, and Astrakhan, southwestern Russia. Salehi made the comments on the sidelines of the 12th St. Petersburg International United Cultures Forum underway in northwestern Russia. The forum is an international cultural event focused on dialogue and cooperation among countries and cultures, covering culture, arts, cultural heritage, creative industries and international cultural cooperation. Government officials, artists, experts and representatives of cultural institutions from various countries take part in the event. The forum’s official website describes it as a platform for intercultural dialogue and the development of international cultural cooperation.

Iranian Culture Minister Abbas Salehi takes questions from reporters on sidelines of an international event in St. Petersburg, Russia on September 25, 2026.
● IRNA

Iranian singer Bijan Mortazavi releases song for Minab schoolkids

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Iranian-American singer and composer Bijan Mortazavi has published excerpts of a new song dedicated to children killed in the February 28 airstrike carried by the United States on the Shajareh Tayyebah elementary school in Minab, southern Iran. Mortazavi said on social media that he had been heavily criticized in re-

cent days but had chosen to remain silent, adding: “My heart is with the people who suffered, my heart is with those whose voices can no longer be heard.” “I made this with a wounded heart that still beats for its people and homeland,” he said, adding that the song was written by Iranian lyricist Babak Sahraei. He said the work was still being com-

pleted but that he wanted to share part of it “for Minab, for Dey (the 10th month in the Persian calendar year) and for all those who lost their lives for the homeland”. The attack killed 156 civilians, most of them schoolchildren. Mortazavi, born on Nov. 16, 1957, began learning violin at three. He moved to the US in 1979, settling in California in 1985.

He became known for Iranian pop as a composer, arranger and violinist. His first album was released in 1990. Mortazavi began international tours that year and performed at Los Angeles’ Greek Theatre in 1994, where he was described as the first Iranian artist to appear there. His work combines Iranian traditional music with pop, particularly in his instrumental recordings.



US sanctions on ...

At the same time, no mechanical link should be drawn between economic pressure and military conflict. Aviation sanctions, in and of themselves, do not amount to a definitive decision to launch military action. However, at a time when economic, security, and military pressures are converging, they may form part of a broader strategy aimed at raising the costs for Iran while strengthening Washington’s bargaining position. Rather than a stand-alone operation, this measure should be analyzed as part of a wider architecture of pressure directed at Iran.

Given that China has explicitly described these sanctions as illegal and pledged to continue cooperation, can Washington realistically achieve its stated goal of a “complete shutdown” of Iran’s flights? How does a split within the sanctions coalition affect the effectiveness of this policy?

The notion that Iran’s aviation sector can be completely shut down by a decree from Washington reflects less an image of absolute American power than an inflated assessment of how far financial leverage can be translated into total control over the behavior of sovereign states. Washington can raise the cost of cooperating with Iran, but it cannot necessarily dictate the political will of every actor across the interna-

tional system. China’s position is particularly significant in this regard. Beijing has explicitly described unilateral US sanctions as illegal and lacking a basis in international law, while also opposing Washington’s “extraterritorial jurisdiction.” Still, a distinction must be made between the stance of the Chinese government and the conduct of individual Chinese companies and financial institutions. Even firms based in countries opposed to sanctions may still exercise a degree of caution in order to preserve access to the US market and financial system. Nevertheless, this very fracture within the sanctions coalition creates a structural constraint on American policy. Sanctions are most effective when a large number of influential actors are willing to bear the costs of enforcing them. If China, Russia, and a number of regional players continue to maintain channels of cooperation, Washington may be able to shrink Iran’s network of external connections and make it more costly, but turning that into “complete isolation” would be extremely difficult. Recent developments have likewise shown that, despite restrictions on certain routes, Iran’s air links with some countries remain intact.

To what extent are neighboring countries likely to cooperate with the United States? Given their eco-

nomic ties with Iran and the possibility of reciprocal pressure?

Iran’s neighboring countries are not merely passive followers of US policy. They each possess their own economic, security, and geopolitical interests. Their behavior will therefore be shaped by a balancing act between the costs of cooperating with Iran, the costs of confronting the United States, and their own direct national interests. The reality is that US secondary pressure may influence the decisions of some regional governments and companies in the short term. Recent reports indicate the cancellation or restriction of a portion of Iranian flights in several countries across the region. These developments, however, should not be mistaken for the emergence of a regional consensus against Iran. Indeed, one of the weaknesses in Washington’s strategy stems from precisely this issue. The more the United States expands pressure from Iran to third countries, the more the matter shifts from being a question of “sanctioning Iran” to one of imposing American preferences on others. This could encourage governments that are sensitive to US unilateralism to move forward with independent financial, transportation, and trade mechanisms. For this reason, the likelihood of Iran facing total aviation isolation appears lower than official US statements might suggest. A more plausible outcome

would be the emergence of a smaller, costlier, and more complex aviation network for Iran, in which some routes are suspended, some are restricted, and others are preserved through non-Western partners.

Iranian officials have warned that if regional countries cooperate with Washington, their airports may also become “unable to operate.” What practical tools does Iran have at its disposal to enforce such a threat?

Such statements by Iranian officials can be analyzed within the framework of deterrence theory. The core message is that Iran does not intend to allow neighboring countries to pass the costs of sanctioning Iran entirely onto Tehran without bearing any consequences of their own decisions. Iran possesses a range of geopolitical, economic, transit, diplomatic, and security levers that may influence the calculations of regional states. However, a distinction must be drawn between the capacity to impose costs and the decision to take direct action against infrastructure. Translating such threats into direct military action against airports in neighboring countries would fundamentally alter the level of crisis and impose significant costs on all parties involved.

From a strategic standpoint, the most effective form of deterrence is not necessarily one grounded in military ac-

tion. Rather, it is a form of deterrence that leads the other side to conclude that implementing Washington’s preferred policy would carry costs exceeding its potential benefits. In this sense, Iran’s message can be viewed as an attempt to transfer part of the burden of the US sanctions strategy into the calculations of regional governments. Ultimately, the central issue extends far beyond a handful of canceled flights or restricted airports. Washington is effectively testing whether its financial and sanctions dominance can be used to constrain Iran’s external connections even without the backing of an international consensus against Tehran. On the other side, Iran and its non-Western partners are testing the capacity of the non-Western world to preserve independent channels of communication.

For that reason, aviation sanctions should be understood as part of a broader contest over the limits of American power and the independence of state decision-making in the international system. If Washington succeeds in compelling airports in other countries to comply through the threat of sanctions, it will not merely have targeted Iran’s aviation sector. It will have set in motion a new model of extraterritorial power projection. That is precisely why the geopolitical significance of these sanctions extends far beyond Iran’s aviation industry itself.