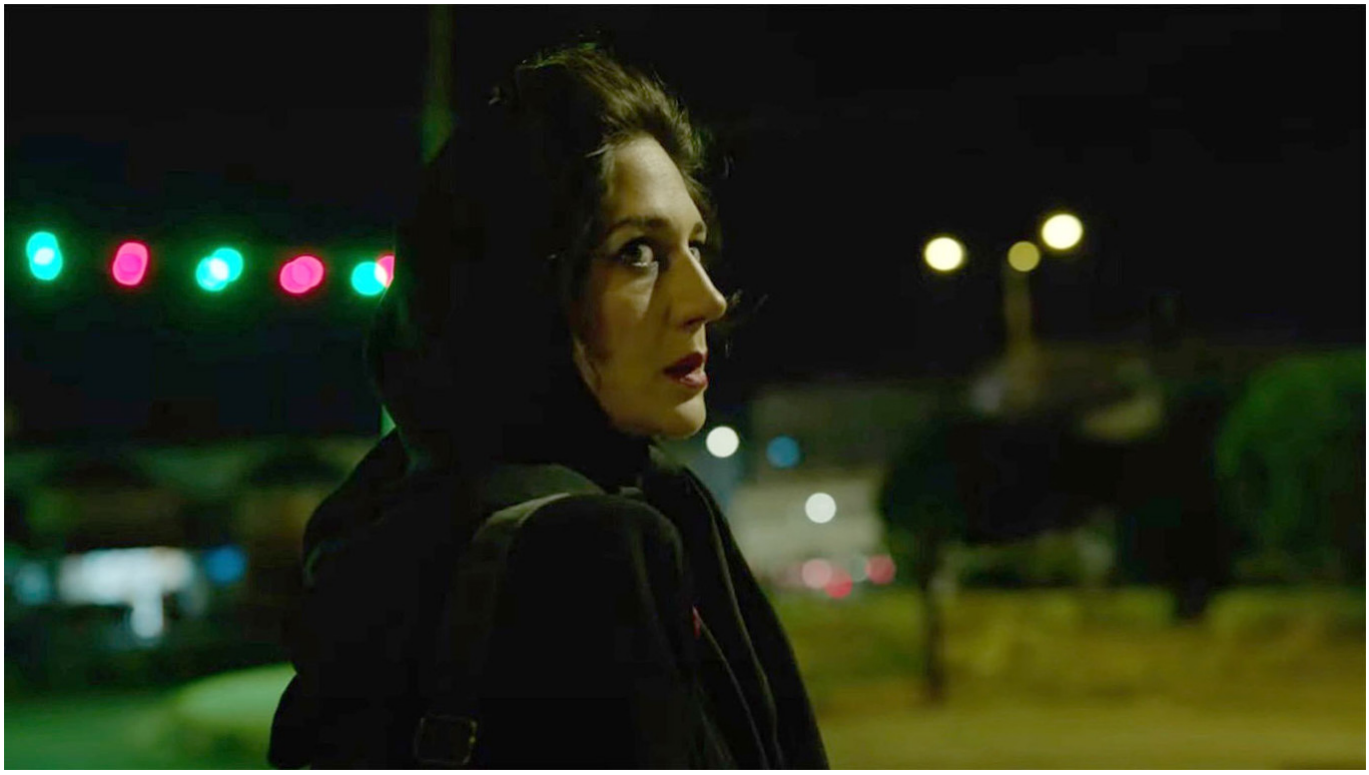
The Moscow Times
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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russia Halts Release of Iranian Film on Prostitution – Distributor

By AFP

May 17, 2023



A still from "Holy Spider." **Metropolitan FilmExport**

Russian authorities have suspended the release of an award-winning film about a serial killer who targets sex workers in Iran, a distributor said on Tuesday.

"Holy Spider," directed by Danish-Iranian Ali Abbasi, was inspired by a true story about a veteran of the Iran-Iraq war who killed 16 sex workers in the early 2000s in Mashhad, Iran's second-largest city and a main shrine city of Shiite Islam.

The move comes as Russia and Iran are seeking to tighten ties amid Moscow's growing isolation in the West over its offensive in Ukraine.

Russia has become increasingly conservative since President Vladimir Putin sent troops to Ukraine in February 2022.

The film hit big screens in Russia on May 11 but less than a week later the Culture Ministry

withdrew the film's distribution license.

"Unfortunately, that's true," Anastasiya Kruglyakova, a representative of Exponenta Film, told AFP in written comments.

The ministry said that the release was canceled "due to the presence in the specified film of materials, containing information whose dissemination is prohibited by the legislation of the Russian Federation."

Kruglyakova did not provide further details.

There was no immediate comment from the Culture Ministry.

Abbasi was denied permission to film in Iran and "Holy Spider" was eventually shot in Jordan.

Last year, Zar Amir Ebrahimi won the Best Actress Award at the Cannes Film Festival for her role in "Holy Spider" as a journalist who investigates the murders.

Iran protested to France after the Cannes film festival selected the film, slamming the move as "wrong and completely political."

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