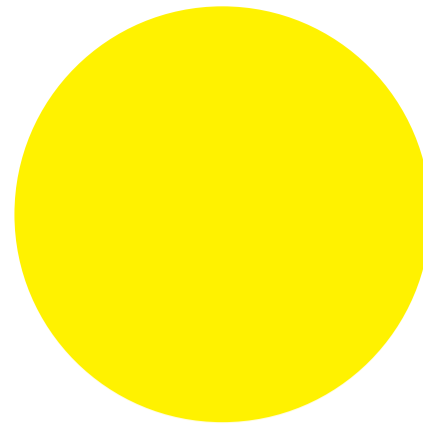




In Tehran Int'l Book Fair

Leader emphasizes value of books amid digital age challenges

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Vol. 7557 • Tuesday, May 14, 2024 • Ordibehesht 25, 1403 • Dhu al-Qadah 5, 1445 • 100,000 rials • 8 pages

Tehran, New Delhi ink 10-year pact on Chabahar

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### Strengthening India-Iran Ties Through the Chabahar Port Project

By Sarbananda Sonowal  
India's union minister of ports, shipping and waterways

OPINION EXCLUSIVE

I am very happy to have been present in the beautiful country of Iran on May 13, 2024, and witness the signing of the long-term Contract between In-

dia Ports Global Limited and the Ports and Maritime Organisation of Iran for the equipping and operation of the Shahid Beheshti port in Chabahar. At this historic moment, I remember the words of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who, on the day of the signing of the Chabahar Agreement in May 2016, called it a "corridor of peace and prosperity." Yesterday's landmark development is certainly a decisive step forward in the friendly

relations between our countries. India and Iran, two proud nations, are also custodians of ancient and great civilizations. Together, we have contributed to the cultural enrichment of humanity for thousands of years. Our peoples have enjoyed centuries of interaction, leaving an indelible mark on our language, literature, art, architecture, cuisine, and traditions. The centuries of contact and mutual respect between our nations have resulted

in a beautiful amalgamation of our cultures, which is evident in our poems, songs, and other art forms. This shared heritage is a testament to the enduring bond between our nations. Before the partition of India in 1947, India and Iran were physical neighbors. Our common land border facilitated the easy flow of people, goods, culture, and ideas. Unfortunately, this direct contact was lost. However, in our hearts, Indians and Iranians con-

tinued to look upon each other as neighbors. There is a yearning on both sides to maintain the centuries-old contact, exchange goods, learn from each other, and enjoy each other's cultural richness. However, for this, we need better connectivity between our territories. Since a land border no longer connects us, maritime connectivity between our countries is of great importance.

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## Tehran, Moscow to develop cooperation in gas technologies' field



Energy officials from Iran and Russia emphasized expanding and developing bilateral cooperation in the field of gas technologies. Director of the corporate planning of the National Iranian Gas Company Hossein Ali Mohammad Hosseini in a meeting with the energy officials of the Russian Federation stressed the need to enhance bilateral cooperation between the two countries in the gas industry, Tasnim News Agency reported.

He said the two sides should identify the capacities and opportunities for more cooperation and coordination in the field.

Mohammad Hosseini pointed to the willingness of Iran to expand relations with Russia in the energy sector and said the country welcomes the suggestion of Russia's Ministry of Energy on setting up a specialized panel discussion in the fields of digitization, monitoring and analyzing data in the Russia Energy Week and also in Energy Congress in St. Petersburg.

The NIGC director emphasized the need for sharing common experiences in areas such as reducing the amount of gas loss, and improving gas installations' safety against sabotages and terrorist attacks and added that Iran enjoys significant capacities for exporting, importing, refining and transmitting gas and is ready to enhance its cooperation with Russia in this field.

The representatives and authorities of the Russian Federation emphasized the need to identify capacities and opportunities for more coordination. Setting up a joint research center in the gas sector and also a gas hub in northern Iran as well as trading in gas and electricity sectors were among the other topics discussed by the two sides at the meeting.

## Iranian port to become regional transit hub

# Tehran, New Delhi ink 10-year pact on Chabahar

Iran and India on Monday signed a long-term deal to operate the Shahid-Beheshti Port Terminal in Chabahar in the presence of their ministers, a major step to make the southeastern city a regional trade transit and connectivity hub.

The Indian delegation to Iran was led by Union Minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal, while Minister for Roads and Urban Development Mehrdad Bazrpash was present from the Iranian side. During his visit to Tehran, Bazrpash and Sonowal oversaw the signing of a new 10-year contract between the Ports & Maritime Organization of Iran (PMO) and India Ports Global Ltd (IPGL).

Speaking on the sidelines of the signing ceremony, Bazrpash said Iran is a land of transit opportunities as the development of Chabahar port with access to rail and road routes can help India to access the market of Afghanistan, Central Asia, Turkey, Azerbaijan and even Russia.

Under the contract, IPGL will commit to further equipping and operating the port for the duration of the contract. At the end of the 10-year period, both sides would further extend their cooperation in Chabahar.

IPGL will invest approximately \$120 million in equipping the port. India has also offered an IN credit window equivalent to \$250 million, for mutually identified projects aimed at improving Chabahar-related infrastructure. Chabahar port is an Iran-India flagship project that serves as an important transit port for trade with Afghanistan and Central Asian countries, which are landlocked countries. India has been a key player in the development and operation of Chabahar port. The Indian government has invested in the port's infrastructure and has been involved in upgrading its facilities to make it a viable transit route for Indian goods bound for Afghanistan and Central Asia.

In August 2023, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi met with Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi in Johannesburg on the sidelines of the BRICS Summit. Both leaders discussed the pending long-term contract on Chabahar, and gave a clear political direction to finalize and



Iranian Minister of Roads and Urban Development Mehrdad Bazrpash (r) shakes hands with India's Union Minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal on the sidelines of ceremony to sign a contract on the development of Chabahar port in Tehran on May 13, 2024.

● IRNA

sign the deal.

Speaking at the meeting, Sonowal called this a "historic milestone" and stressed that it "symbolizes the enduring trust and deepening partnership between India and Iran."

"Today, India and Iran have reached a historic milestone in their longstanding relationship, driven by the visionary ideals of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" championed by India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Under PM Modi's leadership, the momentous agreement that began on 23rd May 2016 is culminating today in a long-term contract, symbolizing the enduring trust and deepening partnership

between India and Iran," Sonowal said during his meeting with Bazrpash.

"Chabahar port is an India-Iran flagship project. Today, as we witness the signing of the long-term contract for operating the Shahid-Beheshti Port Terminal, I am confident that a firm, sustainable, and long-term roadmap for developing the port has been established," he added.

In August 2022, Sonowal visited Chabahar port in Iran to review its work progress and handed over six mobile harbor cranes to Indian Ports Global Chabahar Free Trade Zone (IPGCTFZ) at the port then.

During his meeting, the Indian minister further underscored India's vision of making the port an international hub of connectivity and how it has continued its outreach with regional countries to expand trade and transit through Chabahar port.

"We have continued our outreach to promote Chabahar Port and

also facilitate transit. In 2022, India organized the "Chabahar Day" in Mumbai with a focus on fostering closer cooperation between our countries and the wider region to enhance inter-regional trade and economic connectivity," he said.

Sonowal went on to say how this port is serving an important transit port with Afghanistan and Central Asian countries and how India has helped landlocked Afghanistan.

"Chabahar port is serving as an important transit port for trade with Afghanistan and Central Asian countries, which are landlocked countries. Afghanistan is passing through a difficult phase. Over the past few years, we have supplied 85,000 metric tons of wheat and 200 metric tons of pulses as humanitarian food assistance. We also sent 40,000 liters of pesticide Malathion to Afghanistan through Chabahar port," said Sonowal.

Termining the recent visit of a high-level delegation from Afghanistan to Chabahar port as "positive," the Indian minister underlined the need to facilitate trade for Afghanistan and help Afghan people to stand on their own feet.

Chabahar port, located in south-east Iran, is a key component of India's connectivity initiatives, holds immense significance as it provides a viable and shorter route for trade between India, Iran, Afghanistan, and Central Asia. Chabahar is a deep-water port located in the Sistan and Baluchestan Province. It is the closest Iranian port to India, and is located in the open sea, providing easy and secure access for large cargo ships.

During the visit of Prime Minister Modi to Iran in May 2016, a trilateral agreement to establish the International Transport and Transit Corridor (Chabahar Agreement) was signed by India, Iran and Afghanistan.

## Strengthening India-Iran ...

India has always had strong maritime trade with countries of the Persian Gulf, including Iran. These strategic maritime corridors have also been the source of India's energy security in the modern age, and Iran has played a vital role. The partition of India disrupted our land-based trade with Iran and the landlocked countries of Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Afghanistan. Maritime connectivity between India and Iran is the only viable option for restoring these ancient trading linkages. Iran's strategic location also makes it ideally suited to facilitate India's trade with many European and Asian countries. All of this under-

scores the importance of the Chabahar port project.

With the signature of the long-term Chabahar Contract, we have laid the foundations for India's long-term involvement in the equipping and operation of the Chabahar port. The project, which is currently in its initial phase, aims to develop the port into a major regional transit hub. It includes the construction of new terminals, the installation of modern equipment, and the improvement of port infrastructure. We are confident that the long-term contract signed yesterday between India and Iran will have a multiplier effect on the viability and visibility of the Chabahar port. Over the coming

years, we hope to see a multi-fold increase in cargo traffic being routed through Chabahar, especially transit trade between India and landlocked countries like Afghanistan and Central Asia.

Chabahar is not only the closest Iranian port to India but is also an excellent port from a nautical point of view. It can host large cargo ships and is accessible from the open sea, thus free from the congestion of the busy waterway of the Hormuz Strait. It is also ideally located to connect India with Afghanistan and Central Asia. For all these reasons, India sees Chabahar as a vital connectivity hub. In addition to its economic potential, the Cha-

bahar port project also holds promise for catalyzing tourism and cultural exchange between our countries, further strengthening our historical and cultural ties.

The increased transit trade through Chabahar will also bring significant economic benefits to Iran. As the world's fastest-growing major economy, India's external trade is set to skyrocket in the coming decades. By becoming the primary hub for India's transit trade to Eurasia and Central Asia, Chabahar port can generate substantial revenues and create greater employment. This development will be particularly advantageous for the Sistan-Balochistan region of Iran, fostering economic growth and cultural exchange with India.

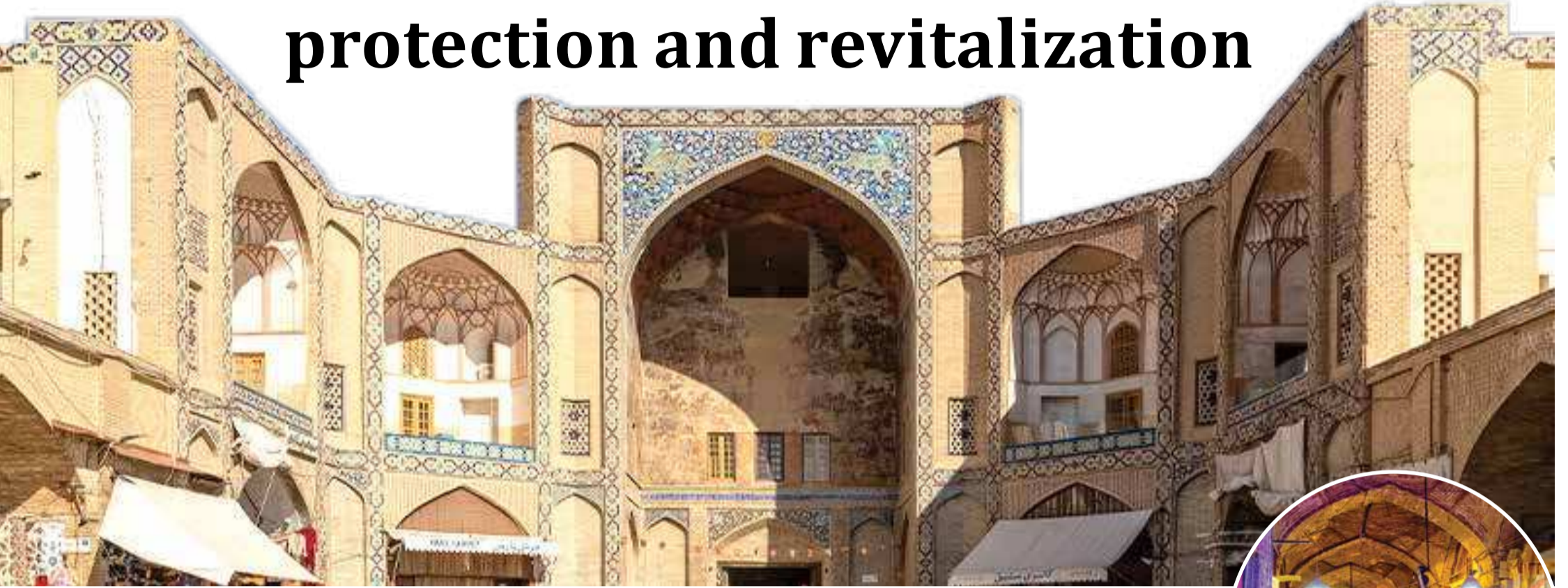
We recognize that fully realizing the potential of Chabahar port as a transit hub requires significant investment in connecting it to Iran's land neighbors. India would be happy to contribute to the construction of such connectivity infrastructure, further underscoring our commitment to the India-Iran partnership and our belief in its potential.

India and Iran have outlined an ambitious vision for regional connectivity through the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), a multimodal network that will connect the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf to the Caspian Sea via Iran. It would be very beneficial if the Chabahar port could be integrated into the INSTC vision, which would help create synergies between

the diverse segments of the INSTC. In this context, yesterday's historic event assumes even greater significance.

Recently Iran celebrated the ancient festival of Nowroz, which marks the beginning of the New Year and new beginnings. It is a festival that is well-known in India, too, due to our beloved Parsi community. It is very good that we are making a new beginning to our shared connectivity vision early in this auspicious new year. To all my Iranian brothers and sisters, I want to convey warm greetings from more than 1.4 billion Indians. I also want to express my deep gratitude to the Iranian government and people for their invaluable support and cooperation in the Chabahar port project. Motashakkaram!

# Isfahan Bazaar in need of protection and revitalization



## Iranica Desk

The Isfahan bazaar is considered one of the largest historical bazaars in Iran and the world, with a history dating back over a thousand years, especially in the northern part of the city around the ancient Jaame Mosque. Reports from travelers, especially in the travelogue of Naser Khosrow, have detailed the prosperity of this market in the fourth and fifth centuries AH.

Amir Karamzadeh, the director general of Isfahan Province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization, wrote in a note: During the Safavid period when Isfahan was chosen as the third capital, one of the main axes connecting the old city with the new one was the Isfahan bazaar. This grand historical bazaar gradually expanded, with its extent reaching over eight kilometers with the construction of thousands of commercial complexes including caravanserais, mosques, baths, religious schools, water reservoirs, wa-

tering places, market alleys, four-sided markets, inns, caravanserais, and even transportation hubs connecting to various neighborhoods.

Currently, more than 8,500 commercial units are active in this complex, making it one of the most important commercial centers with over a thousand years of history, serving as a hub for the old and new Isfahan, and a place of passage for thousands of people and tourists.

Currently, one of the primary concerns for both provincial authorities and market traders is the safeguarding and security of this grand and historic bazaar. Initial evaluations of the market highlight the urgent need for a comprehensive cleaning plan.

Furthermore, given the market's centuries-old existence, the safety of the market is a pressing issue due to the installation of non-standard facilities, particularly concerning electrical setups, necessitating careful attention and reassessment. This is exacerbated by the market's pre-

dominantly covered and winding structure, which hinders the passage of fire and emergency vehicles. Consequently, in the event of emergencies such as fires, the provision of services becomes practically unfeasible. It is imperative to address the outdated electrical system of the market, which, despite market traders' efforts in installing various high-voltage cooling and heating devices, compromises the aesthetic appeal of this historic market.

The subsequent action involves establishing secure and standardized channels within the market floor for the passage of water and gas facilities, ensuring optimal services for traders while enhancing the safety for their operations. However, the issue of car and motorcycle traffic remains a persistent challenge in this historic market, tarnishing its reputation and leading to numerous difficulties, especially during tourist movements. Market traders have proactively taken steps to protect and promote the

historical market of Isfahan by working closely with the government. Their awareness of the market's value has led them to participate effectively in preserving its heritage and supporting its activities.

Undoubtedly, one of the most important objectives of the Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization of Isfahan Province is to first create convergence with all relevant government entities responsible for managing this large historic market, such as the municipality, located in the heart of the historical fabric and central axis of the city of Isfahan. Subsequently, efforts are made to engage people, especially market traders, in promoting the protection of this historic market. If we accept that this grand market is a place of transit and business for thousands of active members of the province, it can be acknowledged that the government alone cannot bear the responsibility of protecting this vast complex. The participation of market traders in this matter is essential.



● [eligasht.com](http://eligasht.com)

## The father of Persian language

By Sahba Saffary  
Guest contributor

Abul-Qasem Ferdowsi Tusi (940-1020 CE) is one of the undisputed giants of Persian literature. He holds a unique place in Persian history due to his significant contributions to reviving and regenerating the Persian language and cultural traditions. His works are widely recognized as crucial in maintaining the integrity and codification of the Persian language, ensuring its continuity and preservation over time. In this regard, Ferdowsi surpasses Nizami, Khayyam, and other Persian literary figures in his influence on Persian culture and language. Many modern Iranians regard him as the father of the modern Persian language.

Ferdowsi was born into a family of Iranian landowners in Paj village, near the city of Tus in Khorasan, which is situated in present-day Khorasan Razavi Province in northeastern Iran.

Little is known about Ferdowsi's early life. The poet had a wife who was likely literate and belonged to the dehqan class. The dehqans were landowning Iranian aristocrats who thrived under the Sassanid dynasty and maintained their influence into the Islamic era.

The dehqans were devoted to the pre-Islamic literary heritage, viewing it as their duty to preserve the pre-Isl-



amic cultural traditions, including tales of legendary kings.

It is possible that Ferdowsi wrote some early poems that have not survived. He started working on the Shahnameh around 977 with the intention of continuing the work of his fellow poet Daqiqi, who had been assassinated by his slave.

Like Daqiqi, Ferdowsi used the prose Shahnameh of Abd al-Razzaq as a source. He received generous patron-

age from the Samanid Prince Mansur and completed the first version of the Shahnameh in 994.

When the Turkic Ghaznavids replaced the Samanids, Ferdowsi persisted in working on the poem and revising sections to extol the Ghaznavid Sultan Mahmud. However, Mahmud may have shown less interest in narratives from Iranian history compared to the Samanids.

Mahmud's attitude towards Ferdowsi

and how well he rewarded the poet are subjects that have long been debated and have given rise to legendary tales about the poet and his patron.

According to the legend, Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni offered Ferdowsi a gold piece for every couplet of the Shahnameh he wrote. The poet agreed to receive the money as a lump sum when he had completed the epic. After thirty years of work, Ferdowsi finished his masterpiece.

The Sultan prepared to give him 60,000 gold pieces as agreed. However, the courtier whom Mahmud had entrusted with the money despised Ferdowsi, considering him a heretic, and he replaced the gold coins with silver.

Ferdowsi was in the bathhouse when he received the reward, only to discover it was silver instead of gold. In response, he gave the money to the bathkeeper. When the courtier informed the Sultan of Ferdowsi's actions, the Sultan was furious and threatened to execute him.

Eventually, the Sultan sent him a new gift of 60,000 gold pieces. However, as the caravan carrying the money entered the gates of Tus, a funeral procession emerged from the opposite side: The poet had passed away from a heart attack. He was laid to rest in his own garden. The tomb was reconstructed between 1928 and 1934 by the Society for National Heritage of Iran and has since become a revered national shrine.

Ferdowsi's Shahnameh is the most popular and influential national epic in Iran and other Persian-speaking nations.

The Shahnameh is the only surviving work by Ferdowsi regarded as indisputably genuine.

May 15 is National Commemoration Day of Ferdowsi, whose masterpiece, Shahnameh, preserved Persian identity, language, and heritage.

## Two years into Ukraine war

# 'EU still depends on Russian gas,' says energy regulator



The Nikolay Urvantsev, a ship carrying Russian LNG, unloads in the port of Bilbao, Spain, in March 2022.  
● VINCENT WEST/REUTERS

By Paddy Belton  
Reporter

### PERSPECTIVE

**The European Union still cannot do without Russian liquefied natural gas (LNG), despite it being two years since the Kremlin's attack on Ukraine, the EU Agency for the Co-operation of Energy Regulators (ACER) claimed.**

**That came as Sweden, Finland, and the Baltic countries plan to lobby the European Commission to impose an immediate total ban on Russian LNG.**

**EU purchases of Russian LNG increased by 40 percent between 2021 and 2023, according to data provider Kpler on April 19.**

**It showed that while the EU has successfully shifted away from Russian pipeline gas since 2022, it has become increasingly reliant on LNG deliveries from the country.**

Last year, nine EU countries imported a total of 18 billion cubic metres (bcm) of Russian LNG, ACER said.

The EU is now the world's biggest importer of LNG, ahead of China, and its demand for LNG will reach a new peak in 2024, the energy agency added.

A more suitable source may eventually result from the rapid US expansion of its LNG production, Dohyoung Kim, head of corporate planning at Berlin-based QEnergy, told Brussels Signal.

"A massive expansion of global LNG export capacity is happen-

ing, led by the US. That means that the LNG from new capacities has to be sold to someone like the EU or the Far East big economies," Kim said.

In 2023, the US overtook Qatar to become the world's largest producer of LNG.

Still, the US does not yet seem to offer a cast-iron promise of dependable LNG; in January, the administration of US President Joe Biden halted the approval of new export licences.

The US will now review how the shipments impact climate change, according to the White

House.

The announcement caused consternation in Japan, which heavily relies on US LNG and where a lack of shallow waters complicates the development and installation of offshore wind farms.

In response to the US move, Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida flew to Washington on April 10 to discuss the moratorium with Biden.

Renewable power sources could offer a more reliable alternative for an EU that had recently been gripped by an un-

precedented energy crisis.

"In order to achieve energy resilience, Europe must speed up the adoption of renewables," energy journalist Jorn Madslie told Brussels Signal.

It seems the EU, though, is in significant danger of seeing its adoption of renewables slow further.

In 2023, the bloc's onshore wind deployment declined even as China doubled its wind-power construction, according to Brussels-based WindEurope, which promotes the development of wind power in Europe.

Likewise, while the EU installed 56 gigawatts of new solar panels in 2023 — compared to China's 216.9 GW — the rate of growth here is also likely to decline in 2024, said Brussels-based trade body SolarPower Europe.

At the most pessimistic end, the world could need a "reality check" on how quickly it can move from fossil fuels to renewable energy, according to Christyan Malek, head of global energy strategy at JP Morgan. It could take "generations" to hit net-zero targets, he said.

Investment in renewables offers "subpar returns" for private investors, while governments face significant debt and high interest rates, Malek said, adding a rapid rise in energy prices could also cause social unrest. More governments will instead follow Scotland's devolved Government, which on April 18 concluded that its plan to cut carbon emissions by 75 percent by 2030 was "unachievable", he predicted.

The article first appeared on Brussels Signal.

## Germany set to permanently pay for reliance on Russian gas



By Ryan Hogg  
Europe business reporter

### PERSPECTIVE

**German industry got rich, thanks partly to its close energy trading relationship with political and economic rival Russia. The past few years have shown just how misguided that relationship was, as Russia attacked Ukraine and cut off Germany's cheap, vital gas supply.**

**Now, one of Germany's leading renewable-power bosses has suggested it's a mistake the country could rue forever, as the fallout from the energy crisis is set to permanently damage its industry.**

Speaking to the Financial Times, RWE boss Markus Krebber said gas prices in Germany were structurally higher than elsewhere in Europe thanks to the country's reliance on liquefied natural gas imports.

Germany was importing 55% of its natural gas supply from Russia when the country attacked Ukraine in February 2022. Russia was also Germany's primary source of oil and coal imports.

The country has since managed to shed most of its reliance on

Russian gas. Germany cut its gas imports by 32.6% in 2023, the country's energy regulator said, mostly as a result of cutting out Russian supply.

However, Germany is still heavily dependent on other countries for its energy supply, creating pricing issues for the embattled economy. The effects on German industry have been pronounced and, according to the RWE chief, are likely to be long-lasting.

"You're going to see a bit of recovery, but I think we're going

to see a significant structural demand destruction in the energy-intensive industries," Krebber told the FT.

**German industry declines**  
Since Russia's assault on Ukraine, Germany has found itself in the unusual position of becoming the major laggard in Europe's stuttering economic engine.

The country is on the brink of a technical recession after its economy contracted 0.3% in

RWE boss Markus Krebber suggests Germany's days as an industrial powerhouse are over.  
● KRISZTIAN BOCSI/  
BLOOMBERG



2023. The outlook for this year is bleak, with the German government slashing its GDP growth forecast from 1.3% to 0.2% in 2024. The former driver of its economic powerhouse, energy-intensive industry has been sputtering since Russia's attack and has turned into a serious thorn in the country's side. Germany's purchasing managers' index (PMI) for its construction sector has been declining since early 2022. Manufactur-

ing, meanwhile, has been in decline since mid-2023. "Germany's manufacturing sector has been mired in recession since around the middle of last year, and the latest PMI readings signal another contraction in the first quarter of 2024," Cyrus de la Rubia, chief economist at Hamburg Commercial Bank, wrote. "To make things worse, the downturn is very broadly based, encompassing capital goods as well as intermediate and con-

sumer goods," he added. It has ignited debates around whether Germany can once again be considered the "sick man of Europe," having previously shaken off its post-Cold War title in the 1990s. Deutsche Bank CEO Christian Sewing warned in September that Germany could become the sick man of Europe, citing spiraling energy costs and a shortage of skilled workers as some of the obstacles facing the country's economy.

The boss of Germany's central bank, Bundesbank, was forced to hit back at this unfortunate moniker, arguing that Europe as a whole was at risk of "getting sick," rather than Germany, in particular.

#### German businesses taking flight

RWE is one of several German businesses that appear to have had enough of Germany's flatlining industry. Analysis by FDI Markets shows

German companies almost tripled their investments in the US in 2023 to \$15.7 billion. The downturn of German industry was as much to blame for the flight of capital to the States and Joe Biden's Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), which offered strong subsidies to incoming businesses. Major carmakers like Volkswagen and Mercedes-Benz upped their commitments in the US. RWE, meanwhile, announced a new US arm called RWE Clean

Energy, after closing an acquisition for Con Edison Clean Energy Businesses. The group has set aside \$15 billion to invest in its US business. "You have a coherent and comprehensive policy in the US to incentivize getting manufacturing back into the country," RWE's Krebber told the FT. "Europe has the same intention, but not yet the right measures."

The article first appeared on Fortune.

# France talks tough on Ukraine while gobbling up more Russian gas

By Victor Jack  
Reporter

## PERSPECTIVE

Put your money where your mouth is.

Such grumbling is percolating across Europe as new data reveals France quietly ramping up gas payments to Russia just as President Emmanuel Macron loudly positions himself as one of Ukraine's staunchest defenders.

In the first three months of this year, Russian liquefied natural gas deliveries to France grew more than to any other country in the EU compared to last year, according to data analyzed by the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA) think tank for POLITICO.

In all, Paris has paid over €600 million to the Kremlin for gas supplies since the start of the year, the data showed — leading to calls for France to clamp down on its rising purchases.

"It cannot be that France, on the one hand, says that we have to be harsh with Russia and on the other hand, is paying them off with big money," said a diplomat from one EU country, who like others for this story, was granted anonymity to speak candidly.

Paris' growing gas trade with Russia comes as Macron has sought to take a harder line in support of Kyiv two years after Moscow first launched its full-scale assault on its neighbor. Last month, the French leader refused to rule out sending troops to Ukraine and urged allies not to be "cowards" in defending Kyiv, marking a sharp turn from his previous calls not to "humiliate" Russian President Vladimir Putin.

France insists its gas buys are necessary to keep supplies flowing to households across Europe and that it's locked into a long-term agreement with Russia that is legally complex to escape. But critics said Paris could do more to reduce the bloc's purchases, arguing its inaction is partly down to resistance from France's national energy major TotalEnergies. In all cases, the imports expose the EU's flagging efforts to stamp out Russia's fossil fuel revenues — which account for almost half the Kremlin's budget — as Moscow finds increasingly creative ways to circumvent existing measures and EU sanctions stutter.

"This isn't an easy topic," a French energy ministry official conceded. "If we continue to pay for gas we do not import, there is no point," referring to long-term contracts that TotalEnergies has signed which force it to buy LNG from Russia.

#### French disconnection

Within months of Russia's full-scale assault on Ukraine in 2022, the EU presented a plan to end the bloc's reliance on Moscow's fossil imports by 2027.

So far, it's largely been successful. Though some in the EU continue to buy nuclear fuel and some pipeline oil and gas from Russia, the bloc has slashed its dependence on Moscow's gas by around two-thirds and imposed a blanket ban on coal and oil imports by sea.

But similar efforts to cut out



French President Emmanuel Macron (R) shakes hands with Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelenskyy during a news conference at the presidential Elysee Palace after signing a bilateral security agreement in Paris, France, on February 16, 2024.

THIBAUT CAMUS/AFP

liquid natural gas, or LNG, have floundered. Although the fuel accounted for just five percent of the EU's gas consumption last year, EU countries paid Moscow more than €8 billion for its exports, according to a new report from CREA out Thursday. France is far from the only culprit. At least nine EU countries continue to buy Russian LNG, the shipping data showed. But Paris led the bloc in both absolute volumes imported in 2024 — 1.5 million tons in total — and the increase in purchases compared to the same period last year.

#### EU's Russian LNG addiction

EU countries continued buying Russia's liquefied natural gas after Moscow attacked Ukraine.

Belgium, Spain, and the Netherlands — the three largest buyers of Moscow's LNG after France — have all indicated they would support steps to reduce these purchases but argue that everyone has to act together or it will be pointless. "The only way forward is ... a joint approach on how to reduce or how to ban imports," Spanish Energy Minister Teresa Ribera told reporters at an EU energy ministers' meeting last month. "We need it as soon as possible."

At the same gathering, Lithuania even proposed a total ban on Russian LNG, but Paris has

largely stayed mum on taking action.

In fact, French Economy Minister Bruno Le Maire has defended Paris' ongoing purchases. Ending France's reliance on Moscow's gas should be done "gradually to avoid a too-brutal impact on the market" and price spikes, he told lawmakers this month.

That muted reaction isn't convincing energy researchers, who are skeptical of claims that shunning Russian gas would roil the markets.

Instead, argued Phuc-Vinh Nguyen, an energy analyst at the Paris-based Jacques Delors Institute, the French government simply has "no interest in being vocal about that" since it "contradicts" Macron's renewed push to help Ukraine. "It's shameful for them."

A French Economy Ministry spokesperson told POLITICO the Russian gas increase was partly due to strikes that "strongly disrupted" normal flows last year.

Paris also "regularly discusses" efforts to reduce Russian fossil fuel imports with its EU allies, the spokesperson added, arguing a "high level" of gas travels through France and helps supply other countries like Italy.

The government is "studying the possibilities of alternative supplies ... without endangering European energy security," the spokesperson added, emphasizing Paris supports a full phaseout by 2027.

house" and one of France's largest firms, "Total is very, very attentively listened to" in government, said Nguyen. That reluctance can also be seen elsewhere.

In the Netherlands, where TotalEnergies is also bound by a long-term contract with Yamal LNG, the government has sent several requests asking the firm to voluntarily reduce its imports since 2022, according to one Dutch official.

But "they never responded to us," the official said.

A spokesperson for TotalEnergies declined to comment on its discussions with the Dutch government but told POLITICO the company complies with EU laws and "does not do any lobbying against sanctions."

The spokesperson also indicated the firm had not sold its

places like the US, said Aura Sabadus, a senior gas market analyst at the ICIS market intelligence firm, even if an "immediate" LNG ban "may lift prices."

#### No liquid luck

The debate comes as the European Commission, the EU's executive, begins preparations for yet another sanctions package against Russia, its 14th. But LNG is unlikely to feature in that package, despite repeated requests from the Baltic countries and Poland. Hungary has historically opposed measures on gas, and all 27 EU members must approve sanctions.

"I doubt we'd get unanimity on that one," conceded one senior European Commission official. Still, EU countries will soon be able to legally ban Russian firms from buying capacity in their LNG terminals, the official added.

But untangling long-term contracts with Russian firms is another knotty issue for the EU.

These agreements often force energy firms to pay for a fixed amount of gas even if they still stop buying physical cargoes from Russia, said Doug Wood, who chairs the gas committee at the European Federation of Energy Traders lobby.

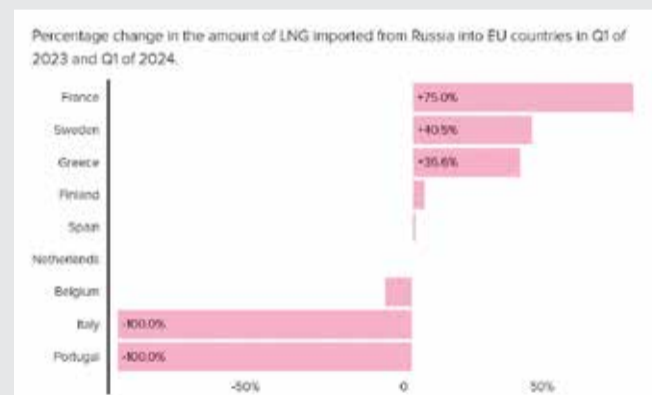
Still, Wood agreed energy firms could reduce Russian gas imports to this minimum limit. Alternatively, EU governments could impose a price cap on Russian LNG imports, CREA's report suggested. An EU price cap set at €17 per megawatt-hour could slash Moscow's LNG earnings by around a third based on last year's figures, the analysis found.

Fundamentally, however, any solution will require joint action — at least from the EU's largest importing nations — so that Russian gas flows aren't just re-routed, Wood said.

That would require France to step in and help.

"So, we're going to see now over time: is [France's increasingly strong support for Ukraine] a solid rhetoric or a hollow one?" said the EU diplomat. "It's very hard for me to see that France still keeps mum ... they have to come up with something."

The article first appeared on POLITICO.



Percentage change in the amount of LNG imported from Russia into EU countries in Q1 of 2023 and Q1 of 2024

KPLER

#### Total blockage?

But embarrassment isn't the only reason France is holding back from reducing its Russian gas imports.

French energy giant TotalEnergies holds a 20 percent stake in the Yamal LNG project, which operates a liquefaction plant in northwestern Siberia that's majority-owned by Russian private energy firm Novatek. Under a long-term contract, the French firm is forced to keep buying at least 4 million tons of LNG from the facility each year until 2032.

The firm's CEO Patrick Pouyanné has publicly called an EU ban on Russian LNG "unreasonable" before 2025 or 2026, when new LNG projects come online worldwide including in the US.

And as an "energy power-

Yamal LNG stake to help protect Europe's energy supply, arguing that "on the global LNG market, supplies remain tight." France's economy ministry said the Russian LNG "issue is neither about TotalEnergies' contract or activities, but about the opportunity and risks of imposing new sanctions for the entire European Union."

But experts aren't buying it. Nguyen, the analyst, laid out a multi-tiered argument. One, alternative imports do exist. Two, the French industry is now consistently using less gas since 2022. And three, national storage levels are higher than last year's. Taken together, that lowers the risks of supply shortages.

At the EU level, too, the bloc could replace its Russian imports with deliveries from

# Iranian girls out to repeat historic success in Asian taekwondo meet

## Sports Desk

Iranian women will be chasing a second successive team title at the Asian Taekwondo Championships when the event gets underway in Da Nang, Vietnam, on Thursday.

A historic campaign in 2022 saw the country collect six medals – including triple golds – for a maiden women's kyorugi trophy in the competitions in South Korea.

Reigning world champion Nahid Kiani will headline the Iranian six-woman squad in Da Nang, hoping to add a second Asian -53kg gold to her medal haul ahead of the Paris Olympics in August.

Mobina Ne'matzadeh will also be looking to flex muscles before heading to Paris when she competes in the -49kg contests.

The 18-year-old prodigy, who bagged the Asian silver in the previous edition, will step into the event on the back of an impressive run in recent months – during which she won the bronze at the Asian Games before punching her Paris ticket in the Asian qualification tournament in March.

Joining the two Iranian Olympians in Vietnam is Saeideh Nasri, who will represent the country in the -46kg weight class fresh from a bronze-winning campaign in April's Galeb Belgrade Trophy – Serbia Open.

Elham Haqiqi will hope to build on February's Fajr Open gold on home soil in the -62kg contests, while Yalda Valinejad will take part in the -67kg event with the WT President's Cup gold under her belt.

The heavyweight (-73kg) competi-

tion will see former Asian silver and bronze winner Melika Mirhosseini go after a second continental medal in less than 12 months, following her third-podium finish at the Asian Games.

The Iranian girls will be coached by Mino Moadah and her assistants Mahrouz Saei and Fatemeh Ne'mati at the Asian meet.

In the men's draw, the Iranian team will be eager to make amends for a forgettable Asian Games in Hangzhou, where the country failed to win a single gold under former coach Bijan Moghanlou across five weight categories.

The bad news for Iran head coach Majid Aflaki is the absence of team captain Mirhashem Hosseini, who suffered an untimely injury during a training session in Tehran days ago and will be replaced by President's Cup gold medalist Ali Khoshravesh in the -80kg class.

Meanwhile, Mahdi Haji Mousaei (-58kg) and Aryan Salimi (+87kg), who settled for a couple of silver medals in Hangzhou, will see the competition as a perfect preparation with less than 70 days until the Olympic Games.

Abolfazl Zandi (-54kg), Matin Rezaei (-63kg), Amir-Sina Bakhtiari (-74kg), and Mohammad-Hossein Yazdani (-87kg) complete the Iranian seven-man lineup at the 26th edition of the Asian Championships, which will be contested by more than 570 athletes from 36 countries across the kyorugi, poomsae, and para taekwondo competitions until Sunday.



taekwondo.ir

## Taremi on target in Dragao farewell



Porto striker Mahdi Taremi celebrates his goal in a 2-1 victory over Boavista in the Primeira Liga at the Estadio do Dragao, Porto, Portugal, on May 12, 2024.  
FC PORTO

## Sports Desk

Mahdi Taremi came off the bench to score a last-gasp winner against Boavista in his final home outing for Porto at the Estadio do Dragao. The Iranian striker is set to be unveiled as a new signing for Serie A champion Inter once his Porto contract runs out at the end of the season.

With the game tied at 1-1, the Iranian striker, introduced on the hour mark, was first to a Chico Conceicao's cross on the far post to head home in the eighth minute of the stoppage time. Bruno Lourenco gave Boavista a 60th-minute lead against the run of play but the visitors went down to

10 men four minutes later, courtesy of Pedro Malheiro's second booking for a reckless challenge on Taremi. Portuguese center-back Ze Pedro drew Porto level nine minutes from normal time before Taremi's header secured a vital three points for Sergio Conceicao's side in the race for a third-spot finish in the Portuguese top flight and a place in next season's UEFA Europa League.

Porto is one point clear of Braga in the table but will still have to avoid a defeat when visiting the fourth-place side in the final round of league fixtures next Sunday.

"This is an emotional moment for me right now as it was my final Porto appearance in this stadium. I'm so

thrilled to have found the net on this occasion and help the team win the game," said Taremi, who was reduced to tears at the final whistle while being surrounded by teammates and Porto officials on the pitch.

This was a 10th goal in 33 matches across all competitions for the 31-year-old Iranian this term, who missed several games due to international duty in January's Asian Cup before he fell down the pecking order at the club in the aftermath of his reported agreement with the Italian Nerazzurri in the mid-season.

"I've always had the utmost respect for Porto supporters but decided to join a new club at this stage of my career. I will remain a Porto fan for

the rest of my life," added the Dragons' third all-time top scorer behind retired Brazilian Mario Jardel and Jackson Martinez.

Having joined from Rio Ave in July 2020, Taremi has bagged 90 goals – including 22 strikes which saw him finish as the leading marksman in the league last campaign – and 55 assists in 180 appearances for Porto, inspiring the club to a domestic double in the 2022/23 campaign as well as last year's Taca de Portugal trophy.

"I am a striker and it is my job to score goals and provide my teammates with assists. It was an honor to deliver my best for this club," said a modest Taremi.

## Denver beat Minnesota to level play-off series

BBC – Reigning NBA champions Denver Nuggets secured a 115-107 win over the Minnesota Timberwolves to level their Western Conference play-off semi-final series at 2-2.

Nuggets centre Nikola Jokic scored 16 of his 35 points in the fourth quarter, with Aaron Gordon adding 27 points and Jamal Murray ending game four in Minneapolis on 19 points.

Anthony Edwards led the overall scoring on Sunday with 44 points in total for Minnesota. "Never underestimate the heart of a champion," Nuggets coach Michael Malone said of his team.

"They were quick to write us off, but these guys, we won a champi-

onship a year ago."

The Nuggets, who lost the opening two games of the semi-finals in Denver, were 64-49 ahead at half-time, but the Timberwolves rallied in the final quarter to pull within six points of the lead in the final minute.

"This team has been tested time and time again, and we've found a way to solve whatever has been thrown at us," Malone said.

The series goes back to Denver for game five tonight.

In Sunday's other game, the Indiana Pacers demolished the injury-hit New York Knicks 121-89 to level up their Eastern Conference play-off semi-final series after four games.



BRUCE KLUCKHOHN/USA TODAY SPORTS

# Iran's FM: Tehran, Manama mulling restoration of diplomatic ties



ation and Interaction”, in Tehran on Sunday. Back in 2016, Bahrain followed Saudi Arabia's decision by severing diplomatic relations with Iran, after Iranian protesters, enraged by the execution of prominent Shia cleric Sheikh Nimr Baqir al-Nimr by the Saudi government, stormed its diplomatic mission in Iran. The Iranian foreign minister said on Sunday that Iran has already started to enhance its relations with the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Oman and Kuwait and wel-

ed Iran's determination to deepen understanding and convergence among the regional countries, saying the restoration of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia is an indication of such a policy. Iran and Saudi Arabia enjoy ample capacities and capabilities which can be used to boost cooperation in the region and the Muslim world, he added. Last year, Iran and Saudi Arabia clinched a chinses-brokered deal to restore diplomatic relations and re-open their embassies and missions. Amir-Abdollahian noted that Iran seriously heeds the promotion of ties with other Persian Gulf littoral states. "We believe that today we have passed the phase of Iranian-Arab dialogue and have entered into regional dialogue...We are now in the stage of regional cooperation," Amir-Abdollahian said.

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian (L) addresses the third Iranian-Arab Dialogue Conference in Tehran on May 12, 2024. [mfa.gov.ir](http://mfa.gov.ir)

**International Desk**  
Iranian foreign minister said Iran and Bahrain are

mulling further steps to restore diplomatic relations between the two countries, stressing that cooperation

with the Persian Gulf Arab states is of great importance for Tehran. Hossein Amir-Abdollahian

made the remarks in an address to the third Iranian-Arab Dialogue Conference, dubbed "For Cooper-

comes Bahrain's move to release detainees on political charges. Amir-Abdollahian reiterat-

## First group of Iranian Hajj pilgrims fly to Saudi Arabia



**International Desk**

First group of Iranian pilgrims left Iran for Saudi Arabia on early hours of Monday for the annual Hajj pilgrimage. Iranian officials in charge of Hajj pilgrimage, Saudi Arabia's Ambassador to Iran Abdullah bin Saud al-Anzi and Iran's Minister of Roads and Urban Development Mehrdad Bazrpash participated in a ceremony to see off the pilgrims in Tehran's Imam Khomeini International Airport. This year's Hajj rituals come after a last year rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Both countries reached a China-mediated agreement in March 2023 to restore their diplomatic relations and re-open embassies and missions after seven years. Saudi Arabia severed ties with Iran in 2016 following an attack by protesters enraged by the execution of prominent Shia cleric Sheikh Nimr Baqir al-Nimr by the Saudi government, stormed its embassy in Tehran and consulate in Mashhad. In April, the first group of Iranian pilgrims in nine years made its way to Saudi Arabia for the umrah. Iran suspended all umrah pilgrimages to Saudi Arabia in April 2015. The decision came following reports that two Iranian youths were sexually assaulted at the airport in Jeddah by Saudi security officers while en route to the Islamic holy sites. The umrah can be performed at any time and is not deemed compulsory for Muslims. The Hajj pilgrimage is one of the pillars of Islam that Muslims who possess financial self-sufficiency are religiously obliged to perform at least once in their lifetime.

# Misery deepens in Gaza as Israel intensifies strikes

**International Desk**

The Health Ministry in Gaza said Monday that the besieged Palestinian territory's health system is "hours away" from collapse, after fighting has blocked fuel shipments through key crossings. "We are just hours away from the collapse of the health system in the Gaza Strip due to the lack of the necessary fuel to operate generators in hospitals, ambulances, and (for vehicles to) transport staff," the ministry said in a statement. The director of the Kuwait Hospital, one of the last functioning medical centers in Rafah, said medical staff and residents living near the facility have been told to evacuate. Sohaib al-Hams warned that any evacuation of the hospital itself would have "catastrophic consequences." Israel attacked several ar-

reas in Gaza on Monday, including Rafah, despite US warnings against a full-scale invasion of the crowded city and of the threat of post-war "anarchy" across the Palestinian territory. Clashes also raged in northern and central Gaza. AFP correspondents in Gaza reported helicopter strikes and heavy artillery shelling in the east of Rafah, as well as battles in northern Gaza's Jabalia refugee camp and Gaza City's Zeitun neighborhood. Israel last week defied a chorus of warnings, including from top ally Washington, and sent tanks and troops into the east of Rafah, the city on the Egyptian border where some 1.4 million Palestinians had sought shelter. This has sparked an exodus of nearly 360,000 people from Rafah so far, said the UN agency for Palestinian refugees UNRWA, which warned that "no place is

safe" in the largely devastated territory. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Sunday that Washington had not seen any credible Israeli plan to protect civilians in Rafah, and that "we also haven't seen a plan for what happens the day after this war in Gaza ends". Fighting has raged in northern Gaza where - months after Israel declared Hamas's command structure had been dismantled - an Israeli army spokesman said there were "attempts by Hamas to rebuild its military capabilities". "The army threw leaflets and sent a message on mobile phones warning everyone to leave Jabalia" refugee camp, said one displaced Palestinian, Umm Adi Nassar, after arriving in Gaza City. "This is not the first time we have been displaced," she said. "Every time we

try to return and settle, there is an invasion operation, and the army with its airplanes and tanks bombs the houses and kills people." Hamas's armed wing, the Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades, also said that its fighters were engaged in ground battles in Rafah and Jabalia. Rafah residents on Monday received more evacuation orders through phone calls and text messages, prompting yet more people to leave their homes, witnesses said. Amid the fighting, Egyptian, Qatari and US mediation efforts towards a truce appeared to have stalled. Israel's bombardment and offensive in Gaza have killed at least 35,091 people, mostly women and children, according to the health ministry in the Hamas-run territory. Israel's military says 272 soldiers have been killed



since the start of the ground offensive in Gaza on October 27. The war has displaced most Gazans, many multiple times. UNRWA chief Philippe Lazarini said on Sunday that Israel's latest evacuation orders were "forcing people in Rafah to flee anywhere and everywhere". Umm Mohamed Al-Mughayyir, who has had to move her family seven times to escape the fighting, said: "We have reached

Palestinians carry their belongings as they prepare to flee Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on May 13, 2024. [AFP](http://AFP)

a point where we wish for death." Residents were told to head to the Al-Mawasi "humanitarian zone" on the coast northwest of Rafah, though aid groups have warned it is not ready for an influx of people.

**Mohammad Ali Rajabi**  
Cartoonist



# Putin replaces Shoigu as Russia's defense minister

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Sunday replaced Sergei Shoigu as defense minister in a Cabinet shake-up that comes as he begins his fifth term in office. In line with Russian law, the entire Russian Cabinet resigned Tuesday following Putin's inauguration in the Kremlin, and most members have been widely expected to keep their jobs, while Shoigu's fate had appeared uncertain, AP reported. Putin signed a decree on Sunday appointing Shoigu as secretary of Russia's Security Council, the Kremlin said. The appointment was announced shortly after

Putin proposed Andrei Belousov to become the country's defense minister in place of Shoigu. The announcement of Shoigu's new role came as 13 people were reported dead and 20 more wounded in Russia's border city of Belgorod, where a 10-story apartment building partially collapsed after what Russian officials said was Ukrainian shelling. Ukraine hasn't commented on the incident. Belousov's candidacy will need to be approved by Russia's upper house in parliament, the Federation Council. It reported Sun-



day that Putin introduced proposals for other Cabinet positions as well but Shoigu is the only minister on that list who is being replaced. Several other new candidates for federal ministers were proposed Saturday by Prime Minister Mikhail

Mishustin, reappointed by Putin on Friday. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Sunday that Putin had decided to give the defense minister role to a civilian because the ministry should be "open to innovation and cutting-edge ideas."

## In Tehran Int'l Book Fair

# Leader emphasizes value of books amid digital age challenges

### Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Leader Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei toured the 35th Tehran International Book Fair (TIBF) on Monday morning, emphasizing the importance of reading and the role of books in society. He addressed the impact of the digital age on reading habits, cautioning against allowing virtual spaces to overshadow the importance of books. During his three-hour tour, Ayatollah Khamenei interacted with publishers, authors, and booth owners, gaining insights into the latest publications and the state of the book market. In an interview following his tour, he highlighted his personal interest in books as a primary motivation for his visit, stating that promoting reading was another significant reason for attending the fair, [khamenei.ir](http://khamenei.ir) reported. "I believe that people from all walks of life, across various age groups and educational backgrounds, need books," Ayatollah Khamenei said.

"Nothing can replace the value of books." Emphasizing the need for support from government agencies, such as the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, and cultural organizations in promoting book reading, he urged them to focus on producing suitable literature for young people. "Producing appropriate books for the young generation is essential," Ayatollah Khamenei stated. "Authorities must strive to provide both the opportunity and access to quality literature for youth." He underscored the need for books addressing significant historical and ideological topics, suggesting a lack of adequate literature in areas such as the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Sacred Defense and the lives of prominent figures like Imam Khomeini. Ayatollah Khamenei urged increased efforts in producing engaging and informative books for the youth. The Tehran International Book Fair, one of the largest cultural events in Iran, showcases a wide



array of publications and serves as a platform for literary exchange and discourse. The book fair began on

May 8 and will welcome book lovers until May 18. The first edition of the international

al cultural event was held in 1988 with 16 thousand titles of books on show. The cultural event has turned

into a landmark, momentous book fair in the Middle East and Asia after 34 editions in a row. [khamenei.ir](http://khamenei.ir)

## Iran's literary landscape enriched by international publishers



By Sadeq Dehqan  
Staff writer

The active participation of foreign publishers in the international section of the 35th Tehran International Book Fair (TIBF) has transformed this part into one of the most engaging and interesting sections of this year's event. The 35th edition of the book fair opens on May 8 and will run until May 18. Countries such as Tajikistan, Russia, Turkey, Yemen, Oman, Qatar, Venezuela, Vietnam, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Pakistan, and Lebanon are among those participating in the international section of the book fair. Yemen is the special guest of this year's international section. Abdurrahman Murad, the head of Yemen's Book Organization, at the Ministry of Culture and the representative of his country's booth at the fair, explained to [Iran Daily Reporter](http://IranDailyReporter), "Yemen was

supposed to participate with about 500 publishers at the book fair. However, due to the country's blockade, transportation difficulties slowed down our presence, and ultimately, we participated with only 15 representatives from the publishing sector and 200 book titles." "We've had some agreements in the past with Iranian counterparts regarding book publishing, but due to various reasons including sanctions on Yemen, these agreements have not been implemented. However, with the recent interactions between the cultural ministries of both countries, we hope to soon witness the translation and publication of books between the two nations," Murad added.

### TIBF a highly visited book fair in the world

TIBF a highly visited book fair in the world. Ramazan Siki, the representative of Turkey's Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the head of his country's booth at the fair, stated, "Turkey, accompanied by eight publishers and nearly a thousand

titles covering culture, history, and children's literature, is participating in this year's fair." Commenting on the Tehran Book Fair, Siki added, "I've participated in numerous book fairs, and in my opinion, the Tehran book fair is one of the largest in terms of public reception. It even attracts more audience compared to the London Book Fair in England and the Frankfurt Book Fair in Germany." Regarding Turkish people's familiarity with Persian literary figures, Siki explained, "Prominent classical poets such as Hafez, Saadi, and Rumi are well-known in Turkey, and contemporary poets like Forough Farrokhzad and Nima Youshij, whose works have been translated into Turkish, are also popular among the people." He said, "The 'Masnavi' by Rumi is very popular in Turkey, and it's almost impossible to enter a Turkish home and not find a part of this book or some of its poems." Siki also discussed the cooperation between the two

countries in book publishing, stating, "Turkey's Ministry of Culture and Tourism has a program to support Iranian publishers by providing grants for translating Turkish works into Persian. So far, 218 Turkish works have been translated into Persian. Iran also has a similar program for translating Persian works into Turkish and provides grants to Turkish publishers."

### Iranian poets recognized in Kazakhstan

Gaukhar Omarshanova, the head of Kazakhstan's booth at the book fair, highlighted the remarkable reception of people towards the international section of the TIBF, stating, "In the Kyrgyzstan booth, 85 book titles covering the introduction, history, culture, geography, literature, and notable figures of Kazakhstan are presented." She added, "One of the famous books in this section is 'Divine Wisdom' by Khawaja Ahmad Yasawi, the great poet and writer known as the 'Elder of Turkistan.' He was the first to widely promote Islam in Kazakhstan." Referring to the recognition of prominent Persian poets such as Ferdowsi, Hafez in Kazakhstan, Khanova said, "Since Iran and Kazakhstan

share a common cultural space and have historical connections through the Silk Road, they are familiar with each other's literature." In addition, the novel 'The Path of Abai' by Mukhtar Auezov, the most important literary work of Kazakhstan, has been translated into Persian and is available at the Kazakhstan booth." He added, "The Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance translated the book 'The Path of Abai' into two volumes in Persian to celebrate his 150th birthday, and this book is available at the Kazakhstan booth. Abai Qunanbaiuly, the national poet of Kazakhstan, was fluent in Persian and Arabic and read prominent Persian works, influencing him. A person named Shah Karim, a student of Abai, has sung some Persian poems twice in Kazakh."

### Pakistanis interested in Iranian culture

Melika Sanei, the representative of the Pakistani Student Union in Iran and the head of the Pakistan booth at the fair, explained, "This booth, under the supervision of the Al-Walayah Publications in Pakistan and in collaboration with the Pakistani Student Union and the Pakistan Cultural Center,

has become the most Iranian corner, showcasing books in Persian and Urdu languages." She said, "Al-Walayah Publications in Pakistan has translated and published books from Persian into Urdu due to the interest of the Pakistani people in Iranian culture and literature."

### Lebanon had strong presence at TIBF

Abdullah Mortaza, the head of Lebanon's booth, provided insights into their participation, stating, "Lebanon has participated in 27 out of 35 editions of the Tehran International Book Fair, making it the most actively participating country in this regard." He described Lebanon as one of the most important hubs for publishing in the Middle East and elaborated on their participation, "In this edition, Lebanon is presenting 240 book titles covering Islamic history, jurisprudence, beliefs, politics, and resistance." Mortaza emphasized the significance of the book fair, "TIBF is the second largest book fair in the world in terms of size and audience attraction. Many books related to Iranian and Lebanese culture have been translated into Persian and Arabic languages."

