



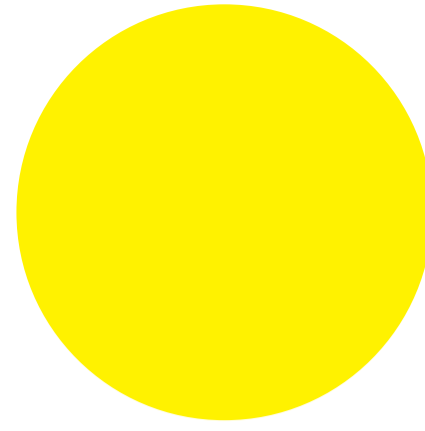
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Iran Daily



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A joint project for long-term cooperation



By Hasan Beheshtipour
International affairs expert

OPINION EXCLUSIVE

shared by both neighbors on the Aras River. The Qiz Qalehsi dam stands as a fruit of long-term cooperation, now all set for its grand opening which will undoubtedly give a shot in the arm to the friendship between Tehran and Baku.

In the world of international relations, putting heads together for joint projects goes a long way in fostering stability and long-term cooperation among neighbors. When nations come together to flesh out collaborative endeavors, it speaks volumes about their mutual interest in reaping the rewards of cooperation. Unlike one-sided partnerships, where a single country holds all the cards, joint projects level the playing field and prevent unilateral disruptions.

Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan already boast a track record of successful team-ups, with the Turkmenistan gas swap project brokered by Iran serving as a shining example. This three-way collaboration has proven immensely advantageous for Turkmenistan, Iran, and Azerbaijan. Within just one year of implementation, the volume of swapped gas doubled – a clear indicator of the win-win potential these partnerships hold. With that in mind, the joint Tehran-Baku dam project is shaping up to be yet another feather in the cap for the current Iranian administration.

Economic and political ties go hand in hand – the more secure the economic connections, the stronger the political bond grows, and vice versa. From this perspective, the joint project has huge potential for smoothing over political relations between Tehran and Baku.

Despite sharing deep cultural and historical roots and a wealth of untapped economic opportunities, political relations between Iran and Azerbaijan have occasionally hit rough patches. Israel's recent encroachment into the region, near Iran's borders, has ruffled feathers and soured Tehran-Baku friendly relations. With an agenda to exert pressure on Iran, Israel might not shy away from sowing discord in Tehran-Baku ties. That said, both nations must remain on guard against external agitators seeking to rock the boat.

As neighboring countries begin to see eye to eye with Iran on the benefits of cooperation, Israel's recent actions in the Gaza Strip have cast a shadow of doubt on its reliability as an ally for no country. The Gaza escalation and Israel's vulnerability against Iran's missile and drone attack have revealed Israel's nature more than ever.

The upcoming meeting between the presidents of Iran and Azerbaijan and the inauguration of this joint economic project signal a turning point for bilateral relations. The event heralds a new chapter in the Tehran-Baku political saga, paving the way for the next big thing in their collaborative journey.

Today's meeting between the presidents of Iran and Azerbaijan, coupled with the inauguration of a joint economic project, is a stepping stone towards fostering more stable economic cooperation and safeguarding shared interests. Such collaboration is bound to spill over positively into the political arena, nurturing stronger Tehran-Baku relations. Moreover, with the Azerbaijani Embassy soon resuming operations in Tehran, both nations will have the opportunity to build upon this momentum and forge an even closer partnership.

Presidents of the Republic of Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan are set to jointly inaugurate a dam



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Iran Beats South Korea to Men's Crown

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SPECIAL ISSUE

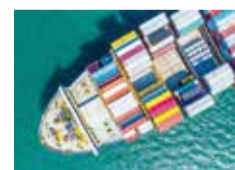
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Railexpo 2024 opens in Tehran



The 11th International Exhibition of Rail Transportations & Related Industries Equipment dubbed "Iran Railexpo 2024" was inaugurated at the Tehran Permanent International Fairgrounds on Saturday.

The inaugural ceremony was attended by Iran's Minister of Roads and Urban Development Mehرداد Bazrpash and CEO of Railways of the Islamic Republic of Iran Miad Salehi, reported Tasnim News Agency.

More than 100 domestic companies and five foreign companies from China, Russia, India, and the Republic of Azerbaijan have participated in this exhibition to showcase their latest achievements and technologies in the railway industry.

Concurrent with organizing this exhibition, the 15th Meeting of the Heads of Railway Authorities of the ECO Member States and the 9th Rail Committee Meeting of the ECO Transit Transport Coordinating Council will be held with the participation of Iran, Turkey, the Republic of Azerbaijan, Pakistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.

The domestically-manufactured GM locomotive engine, Model GT26, and Locomotive Microprocessor Control System (LCS) will also be unveiled in the exhibition, the report added.

Speaking in the inaugural ceremony of the event, Bazrpash noted that the road transit of the country showed a more than 58 percent growth in the previous year (ended March 19, 2024).

In this period, the country also witnessed considerable growth in the rail sector, the roads minister added.

The minister also noted that the country's rail and road transits registered a 55-percent growth in the first two months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 19 - April 22, 2024), compared to the same period last year.

Transit via Iran also increased by 47 percent in the first month of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-April 19)), compared to the preceding year, according to the data released by the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA).

Based on the IRICA data, 1.6 million tons of goods were transited via the country in the mentioned month.

As previously announced by IRICA, 17.79 million tons of commodities were transited through the country in the past Iranian year of 1402.

Iran's exports to Kuwait could hit \$10m: Senior businessman



By Sadeq Dehqan & Reza Abesh Ahmadlou
Staff writers

Iran's commercial ties with Kuwait have significant potential for growth, according to the Vice President of the Iran-Kuwait Chamber of Commerce.

Currently, Iran's annual exports to Kuwait stand at approximately \$300,000, a modest but promising starting point. However, the Chamber's leader believes that with the removal of barriers and sanctions, Iran's exports to Kuwait could surge to a staggering \$10 million per year. This would not only be a boon for businesses in both countries but also a testament to the strength of their economic partnership. Arash Nikpey told Iran Daily that due to the problems faced by our merchants in

terms of sanctions and money transfer, part of our exports to Kuwait are made indirectly through third countries, and for example, Iranian goods are re-exported to Kuwait from Oman or the UAE. Considering these re-exports, Iran's total export to Kuwait stands at over \$1 million.

Kuwait's export potential is modest, according to the senior businessman, who notes that the country's production and natural reserves are not well-suited to meet the demands of Iran. In fact, most of Kuwait's products are already in surplus in Iran, making it unlikely that the country will be able to meet a considerable part of the needs of its neighboring market.

"Iran's industrial and mineral sectors boast products with high added value, generating significant profits from our exports. However, we face challenges in the trade arena, particularly with regards to monetary and banking transactions. By fostering collaboration between the government and private sec-

tor, I believe that we can overcome these hurdles and find creative solutions to unlock the potential of our exports," he noted.

Nikpey went on to say that Iran's export portfolio is bolstered by a strong presence in the food and construction materials sectors, with cement being a particularly notable standout. Furthermore, Iran's granite and decorative stones are also in high demand globally, although they are often imported indirectly through other countries.

"Despite the challenges posed by sanctions, Iran has a significant potential for exports to Kuwait. However, the current constraints have hindered our ability to fully capitalize on this opportunity, particularly in light of the complex financial and monetary arrangements that Iranian businessmen must navigate with their Kuwaiti counterparts. These transactions, which involve exchange-based transactions, create additional hurdles that hinder our ability to increase exports to Kuwait."

"Kuwait, with its significant economic resources, presents a vast opportunity for Iran to

establish a strong trade partnership. By addressing the challenges posed by sanctions, we can unlock the full potential of this relationship and meet Kuwait's diverse needs across various sectors. With the right solutions in place, Iran's economy can thrive by providing goods and services that cater to Kuwait's requirements, strengthening the bond between our nations." By resolving the outstanding political differences between Iran and Kuwait, we can unlock a new era of cooperation and prosperity between our nations. A harmonious resolution of these issues will pave the way for a stronger and more fruitful partnership, fostering economic growth and development that benefits both countries. As our relations normalize, we can expect to see a surge in trade, investment, and cultural exchange, ultimately cementing a long-term bond between our nations," he noted.

Nikpey went on to explain that a critical obstacle to strengthened ties between Iran and Kuwait lies in the exploitation rights in the Arash gas field. This dispute has long hindered the potential for mutual benefit and cooperation between the two

nations. However, through open and constructive dialogue, we can overcome this hurdle and find a mutually acceptable solution that addresses the concerns of both parties.

In a rich tapestry of cultural exchange, he shed light on the storied history of Iranian settlement in Kuwait. "For centuries, Iranians have made Kuwait their home, with many families having established roots in the country as far back as two or three generations. This enduring presence has woven a vibrant thread of Iranian culture into the very fabric of Kuwaiti society, resulting in a unique blend of traditions and customs that continue to flourish to this day."

"For many Iranian expatriates living in Kuwait, their cultural heritage is a source of comfort and nostalgia. With their roots firmly planted in Iranian soil, they have a deep appreciation for the authentic flavors and aromas of their homeland. As a result, they enthusiastically welcome Iranian goods, particularly in the culinary sphere. For these Iranians, the familiarity of Iranian food is a tangible connection to their cultural identity, and a taste of the comfort and warmth they left behind."

Iran crude output tops 3.3 mbd in April: IEA

The International Energy Agency (IEA) declared a 50,000 barrel per day jump in Iran's daily oil production in the fourth month of the current year, reaching 3.3 million barrels per day.

In its latest monthly report on the global oil market, the IEA announced that Iran's oil production increased by 50,000 bpd in April 2024 compared to the previous month, when the country produced 3.25 million bpd, IRNA reported.

This figure is the

highest level of Iran's crude oil production in the past 5 years following the US withdrawal from the internationally endorsed Iran nuclear deal, also known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), and the re-imposition of sanctions.

The current oil production of the country is only 300,000 bpd less than the figures recorded before the unilateral sanctions. The IEA also reported that

Iran's oil production in 2018 stood at 3.6 million bpd, while its production in April 2024 stood at 3.3 million barrels per day.

The IEA report also shows that the total OPEC oil production stood at 26.97 million bpd in April.

The total oil production of the 13 member states of OPEC increased by 120,000 bpd in April compared to the previous month. OPEC members had produced 26 million and 850,000 bpd in March.

Iran rolls out 15m tons of building stones annually

Iran is a major player in the global stone industry, boasting an impressive

annual production of up to 15 million tons of building stones, according to Bah-



ram Shakouri, the head of the Iran Stone Association. "Notably, a staggering 90% of this output is earmarked for domestic use, underscoring the country's self-sufficiency and demand for these essential materials," he added, IRNA reported.

"Our strategic objective is to significantly boost Iran's stone production capabilities, leveraging the country's inherent strengths and untapped potential. By doing so, we aim to not only increase domestic supply, but also expand our reach into new and lucrative export markets, further solidifying Iran's position as a major player in the global stone industry."

As Iran's construction sector continues to thrive, it is likely that this production capacity will remain a vital component of the country's economic landscape.

Museums, guardians of education and legacy



Iranica Desk

May 18 marks International Museum Day and the commencement of Cultural Heritage Week in Iran. The International Council of Museums (ICOM) has designated this year's theme as "Museums for Education and Research," a strategic slogan that distinctly outlines the direction and significance of museums for the upcoming months. The emphasis on the educational and research functions of museums stems from their pivotal role as educational hubs. Museums serve as immersive classrooms where history, culture,

art, and even sociology come to life. Acting as societal educators, museums provide insights into our ancestors' ways of life, their interactions with nature and society, and the transformation of art into craftsmanship and industry. Essentially, museums function as silent, enduring universities housing a diverse array of sciences and arts, offering a deeper understanding of their significance and the pivotal role they play in preserving our collective heritage, IRNA wrote. Museums are inherently designed to serve educational and research purposes. Fully comprehending the intricacies of a

museum's works or artifacts often requires a visitor to dedicate a substantial amount of time to their exploration. It is a privilege to be born and reside in a land where tangible and intangible elements, remnants of our rich history and culture, are present in every corner, serving as a legacy for us. This realization should inspire us all to embrace the role of heritage guardians, ensuring the preservation and appreciation of our cultural treasures for generations to come. The Cultural Heritage Week, observed from May 18-24, presents a unique and invaluable chance each year to explore historical

treasures, visit museums, delve into lesser-known works, and reacquaint ourselves with the rich tapestry of history and culture. Our cultural and heritage assets serve as the cornerstone of our identity, both in the present and for generations to come. In the past three years, the government has focused its cultural heritage and museum efforts on enhancing public understanding and appreciation of heritage, strengthening national identity and social cohesion, encouraging community involvement in the preservation and protection of cultural heritage, and empowering local communities to

take ownership of their cultural assets, while also emphasizing the importance of social responsibility in this regard. Museums serve as invaluable repositories of cultural heritage. While preserving and protecting this legacy is a national imperative, with the Ministry of Cultural Heritage playing a pivotal role, a country boasting an abundance of tangible artifacts and vibrant intangible traditions that permeate the social and cultural fabric of its people, recognized globally, requires every individual to assume the role of a heritage custodian. Iran stands as a nation with a pro-

found historical legacy, ranking among the top 10 most culturally advanced countries worldwide. Its heritage traces back over 7,000 years, with a history of human settlement spanning beyond one million years. This country is ranked among the top 10 globally with 27 tangible and natural heritage sites out of 107 worldwide, and in terms of intangible heritage, having registered 24 elements, it previously held the 7th position. In the current government, with a surge in the number of registrations, it has climbed two spots to now hold the 5th position worldwide.

Semnan Province with stunning ecosystems and landscapes attractive for rural tourists

Iranica Desk

Rural tourism means travelling to non-urbanized places with low population. An incredible chance to connect with local communities, support them and immerse yourself in their local culture. Rural tourism development has been identified as a significant source of income and a key factor in improving the economy of rural areas. In many countries, revenues from the rural tourism industry have grown more rapidly than revenues from the production, sale, and export of various goods and services. The rural tourism industry leads to the expansion of services, creation of job opportunities, and development of infrastructure in the most remote parts of villages, ultimately contributing to human development. It is crucial to assess the current and potential facilities for rural tourism in Iran and provide solutions for their optimal utilization. The diverse climate found in the villages of Semnan Province has resulted in the creation of stunning ecosystems and landscapes, hosting a wide variety of plant and animal communities. Villages in the northern regions of the province are characterized by lush green lands covered with dense forests that stretch to the Alborz Mountains, while in the south of these mountains, dry lands, deserts, dry rivers, and sparsely vegetated mountains can be observed. These distinct climatic landscapes have fostered a range of plant and animal habitats, setting Semnan apart from many neighboring provinces. This climatic diversity and biodiversity of animal and plant life have the potential to attract recreational and scientific travelers to the province if appropriate measures are

taken. However, despite these great potentials, many of these attractions remain unknown to tourists, both domestic and foreign, and are not effectively utilized. Therefore, the issue of underdevelopment in rural communities remains a primary concern. In Semnan Province, 40 villages have been designated as tourist destinations based on criteria such as climatic diversity, historical significance, natural and cultural attractions, housing quality, environmental features, and geographical distribution. These villages encompass a variety of characteristics that make them appealing to visitors. Over 23% of the province's land area is allocated as protected areas and wildlife sanctuaries, constituting approximately 25% of Iran's total protected areas. The inhabitants of Semnan Province's villages have unique cultural and physical ties with neighboring regions, influencing their way of life and traditions. The customs and rituals observed in the province's villages are shaped by cultural and religious interactions, reflecting a blend of influences. The lifestyle of the villagers in Semnan Province is influenced by their livelihood practices, encompassing both settled and nomadic patterns. Traditional and indigenous architectural styles are prevalent in the selected villages, adding to their charm and authenticity. These villages boast a rich tapestry of customs and traditions that can be leveraged to enhance tourism, including ceremonies like marriage proposals, engagements, weddings, mourning rituals, and more. *Taziye*, a religious ceremony with deep historical roots, local dialect nuances, and symbolic elements, including wom-

en's *taziye* ceremonies unique to the region, can be a draw for tourists during special events. Additionally, showcasing the preparation of traditional bread and sweets in the villages can be a compelling attraction for visitors and a source of employment opportunities within the community. Local games, enjoyed by both men and women of all ages, are cultural treasures that contribute significantly to the tourism potential of the villages. The way these games are played is influenced by the climatic and social conditions of the communities. Developing a comprehensive plan to showcase these traditional games would not only attract tourists but also create job opportunities in the region. Additionally, approximately 50 percent of the villages are situated within protected areas, making them natural attractions that require careful planning to preserve their beauty and biodiversity while also catering to tourists. Many of these villages are home to nomadic populations with distinct lifestyles, livelihoods, cultures, rituals, and traditions that appeal to a wide range of travelers, including culture enthusiasts and social tourists. These unique aspects of village life can be leveraged to enhance the tourism experience and promote sustainable development in the region. One of the major characteristics of tribes that can serve as a general indicator for the development of tourism is their settlements. Considering the changes that have taken place throughout the year in the field of life and livelihood, the nomadic and semi-nomadic settlements have a special focus on the functional differentiation of living spaces.



Padeh village
eligasht.com



Chashm village
IRNA

Why Chabahar port is a big deal for India, Iran



By DP Srivastava
Former Indian
ambassador to Iran

OPINION

The borders of undivided India touched Afghanistan and Central Asia. This contiguity was lost with Partition. While it is difficult to redraw the map, Chabahar port could provide access to our hinterland.

On Monday, the minister for shipping and inland waterways Sarbananda Sonowal was in Chabahar to witness the signing of a 10-year long-term contract, which renewed India's commitment to developing the port in Iran. It may be recalled that the first 10-year contract was signed during Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi's visit to Iran in 2016.

Chabahar port has a chequered history. During the Shah's time, Iran had offered this port to the Americans. The Shah also planned to build a submarine base in Chabahar. The port is outside the Hormuz Strait and could provide a safe alternative in case of a conflagration in the Gulf. This is a major advantage from Iran's perspective. From India's point of view, Chabahar is an attractive proposition as it is closer to home than Bandar Abbas.

Chabahar has two ports — Shahid Kalandari and Shahid Beheshti. The Indian project scope involves the development of the latter. During my first visit to Chabahar, I was struck to see how developed the city was. The Iranian government had lavished expenditure on infrastructure in and around Chabahar. The port town is linked by road to Zahedan and Mashad in the north as well as Bandar Abbas in the west. It lacks rail connectivity, though reportedly the Iranian side has made progress in doing the groundwork. Chabahar port was offered to the Indian side during former Iranian president Mohammad Khatami's visit to India in 2002. The project, however, remained on the back burner for almost a decade. I had the privilege of starting negotiations with Tehran in 2012 as then-Indian ambassador to Iran. This culminated in an MoU signed during the visit of then-minister for shipping Nitin Gadkari in May 2015. This was followed by the contract signed in the presence of PM Modi the next year. As that agreement could not be operationalised for various reasons, the project was so far being run on the basis of an annually renewed interim contract. This will now be replaced by a new 10-year agreement.

The geopolitical situation in the region has changed from what it was in 2015. The United States (US) has exited Afghanistan. Kabul has a Taliban regime. Islamabad has had four governments since 2021 — Imran Khan, Shahbaz Sharif, interim government, and now, Shahbaz Sharif again. Does this change the relevance of Chabahar for India? Regardless of change in governments, geography remains an immutable factor. Pakistan extracted a rent for allowing transit to Afghanistan through Karachi



Iran's Minister of Roads and Urban Development Mehrdad Bazrpash (4th-R) and India's Minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal shake hands after signing a deal for equipping and operating the Shahid Beheshti port in the southeastern Iranian city of Chabahar, in Tehran, Iran, on May 13, 2024.

port. In the case of America, this was in the form of a coalition support fund and various aid packages. Afghanistan suffered long delays and pilferage of goods during transit. India was allowed transit sporadically. If Pakistan did not allow transit rights in the past, it is unlikely to do it now when it has a deeply fractured polity and a sinking economy. There will be no appetite for making a major political gesture to India by allowing transit rights. India needs Chabahar regardless of changes in regimes in the neighbour-

hood. India's engagement with the Central Asian republics has increased. Trade with Central Asia also requires a transit route. While Chabahar is important for India, it also broadens the options of Afghanistan and the Central Asian republics. At present, Afghanistan trade depends on Karachi or Bandar Abbas port. The former option does not exist with strained relations between the Taliban and Islamabad. The situation has worsened especially after Pakistani strikes on

targets within Afghanistan. Bandar Abbas, Iran's main port, is congested. The Chabahar port will need a railway link to connect it to Zahedan and Sarakhs in the north. Sarakhs in the northeast corner of Iran is located at the tri-junction of Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, and Iran. It is connected by rail to Turkmenistan, which has connectivity with other Central Asian republics. Once a railway line is built to Sarakhs, Chabahar will be connected to Central Asia. Chabahar port could also be a hub for

trans-shipment to Africa. At present, Indian exports are trans-shipped via Jebel Ali. But this will require improving the port infrastructure. An immediate requirement would be establishing a direct shipping line between Indian ports and Chabahar. Without a regular shipping service, it is difficult to attract traffic to the port. Chabahar is often compared with Gwadar. There is a fundamental difference between the two. Gwadar has been developed by China as a naval base. The Indian project in Chabahar is a civilian project. The port will be open for business with third countries also. There are already Chinese companies present in the Chabahar Free Trade Zone. Pakistan and China do not look kindly at India's Chabahar presence.

A new factor in the equation is tensions in West Asia, though the scope of Chabahar is limited to connectivity with Afghanistan. After the recent exchanges between Iran and Israel, US sanctions against Iran have deepened. There was a sharp warning by the US State Department following President Ebrahim Raisi's visit to Pakistan in April. The US spokesman said that anybody doing business with Iran will be sanctioned following the decision by Tehran and Islamabad to increase bilateral trade to \$10 billion and resume work on the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline. The State Department spokesperson reiterated the same line on Monday when asked about the Chabahar agreement. He added there was no exemption from sanctions for Chabahar. External affairs minister S Jaishankar described it as a bilateral matter between India and Iran.

The article first appeared on Hindustan Times.

India defies threats of US sanctions



By Girish Linganna
Political analyst

PERSPECTIVE

India has appealed to the United States to avoid taking a narrow view of its port development agreement with Iran. This came in response to a warning from the US, issued on Monday, May 13, that nations engaging in business with Tehran could face sanctions. But, despite these warnings, India has proceeded to finalize a 10-year contract to develop the strategically significant Chabahar port in Iran.

Union Minister for Shipping, Ports, and Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal was present in Tehran for the signing of the contract between India Ports Global Ltd (IPGL), a government-supported entity, and the Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) of Iran. Defending its decision, New Delhi emphasized that the agreement would be beneficial for the broader region.



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi (R) talks with US President Joe Biden at Mahatma Gandhi's memorial Rajghat on the final day of the G20 Summit in September 2023.

India's Foreign Minister S Jaishankar emphasised the importance of communication and persuasion in helping people see the broader benefits of this decision. Speaking to reporters the next day (May 14), he responded to a question on Washington's comments on the deal, stating, "I think we need to explain to everyone and convince them that this is beneficial for all. Taking a narrow view isn't helpful." Jaishankar also noted that the US had, earlier, recognized the broader significance of Chabahar and acknowledged the necessity of a long-term agreement with Iran to en-

hance the port's functionality. "We believe that operating the port will benefit the entire region," he stressed. IPGL plans to invest around \$120 million in equipment and operations at the port for the duration of the contract, with the potential for extended cooperation in Chabahar beyond this period. Additionally, India has proposed a rupee-equivalent credit line of \$250 million for specific projects aimed at enhancing the port's infrastructure.

Initial delays, the breakthrough

Although the idea for the project originated in 2003, it did not

gain momentum until 2015. This acceleration happened after Iran and the P5+1 countries — the UK, China, France, Germany, Russia, and the US — agreed on restricting Iran's nuclear programme in return for lifting economic sanctions. In May 2016, the project gained significant momentum when India, Iran, and Afghanistan signed a tripartite agreement in Tehran. This agreement aimed at establishing a transport-and-trade corridor via Chabahar Port. During this event, Narendra Modi, marking the first visit by an Indian Prime Minister to Iran in 15 years, announced India's commitment to invest-

\$500 million (approximately INR 4,000 crore) in the project. A year after the agreement, the US withdrew from the nuclear deal with Iran. Despite this, India achieved a diplomatic victory when the Donald Trump Administration granted India an exemption from sanctions. This exemption was based on the strategic importance of Chabahar Port, which provides convenient access to Afghanistan. In 2018, following a short-term contract between India and Iran, IPGL began managing smaller-scale operations at Chabahar Port, including handling the container traffic and cargo.



Iranian flags flutter during an inauguration ceremony for new equipment and infrastructure on February 25, 2019, at the Shahid Beheshti Port in the southeastern Iranian coastal city of Chabahar.
● AFP

Over the past six years, Chabahar Port has seen significant activity, managing over 90,000 vessels transporting more than 8.4 million tons of cargo. Additionally, India has utilized this port to deliver 2.5 million tons of wheat and 2,000 tons of pulses to Afghanistan.

Chabahar access: geopolitical dynamics

Chabahar is a deep-water port located in Iran's Sistan and Baluchistan province. It is the Iranian port nearest to India and is situated directly on the open sea, allowing large cargo ships to access it easily and securely. The Chabahar project includes two separate ports — Shahid Beheshti and Shahid Kalantari. India's investment is focused specifically on the Shahid Beheshti Port.



A truck transporting cargo from Afghanistan to be exported to India is seen at Shahid Beheshti Port in the southeastern Iranian coastal city of Chabahar, on the Gulf of Oman, on February 25, 2019.
● ATTA KENARE/AFP

Chabahar's strategic position, situated west of Iran's border with Pakistan and near the rival Gwadar port, enhances its appeal to India. Chabahar Port is significantly close to Gujarat on India's west coast and is only 768 nautical miles from Mumbai.

During the 2016 agreement signing in Tehran, Union Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari highlighted, "The distance from Kandla, in Gujarat, to Chabahar Port is even shorter than the distance from New Delhi to Mumbai."

Additionally, Gwadar Port, in Pakistan, which has seen significant Chinese investment, is located just 170 kilometres east of Chabahar. This port also serves as the starting point for the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

The significance of Chabahar Port increased after China began developing Pakistan's Gwadar

Port in 2002 as part of its 'Belt and Road Initiative', further cementing a partnership between both countries to establish a deep-sea port at Gwadar.

Chabahar Port offers India a direct sea-to-land route to Afghanistan and Central Asia, avoiding Pakistan. This route facilitates India's ability to participate in trade and development initiatives in these areas, boosting regional connectivity and extending its influence. India depends heavily on the Strait of Hormuz for its trade with Central Asia and Afghanistan. However, tensions in that region could disrupt this route. Chabahar Port offers India an alternative trade pathway, ensuring that, even if issues arise in the Strait of Hormuz, India can continue its trade activities safely. Thus, Chabahar Port

enhances India's trade security by providing additional options.

Chabahar is included in the planned International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), a diverse transport route that connects the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf to the Caspian Sea through Iran. From there, it extends to northern Europe via Saint Petersburg, in Russia.

Consequently, Chabahar Port is viewed as a key access point that could enhance India's trade opportunities with Europe by offering a quicker route. According to industry estimates, shipping via the INSTC route could reduce transit time by 15 days compared to the traditional Suez Canal route.

The article first appeared on DNA India.



Workers watch a ship as it sails during an inauguration ceremony of new equipment and infrastructure at Shahid Beheshti Port, Chabahar, Iran, on February 25, 2019.
● ATTA KENARE/AFP

Does India risk US sanctions over Iran's Chabahar port deal?



By Shola Lawal
Reporter, independent filmmaker

PERSPECTIVE

India has signed a 10-year agreement to develop and operate Iran's strategic Chabahar Port as New Delhi aims to boost trade ties with landlocked Afghanistan and Central Asian countries, bypassing ports in its western neighbour and arch-foe Pakistan. "It [the port] serves as a vital trade artery connecting India with Afghanistan and Central Asian Countries," India's Shipping Minister Sarbananda Sonowal said, as New Delhi attempts to strengthen ties with an important Middle Eastern nation. But the deal has prompted a thinly veiled threat of sanctions from the United States, with whom India has developed close economic and military ties in recent decades.

"Any entity, anyone considering business deals with Iran, they need to be aware of the potential risk that they are opening themselves up to and the potential risk of sanctions," US State Department spokesman Vedant Patel told reporters.

Indian authorities, however, have downplayed the tensions, with Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar telling reporters on Wednesday that New Delhi would "communicate the benefits" of the deal to the US and urge countries not to "take a narrow view of it".

Here's why the port deal matters, what the sanctions threat is all about, and what we should expect:

What's Chabahar port deal about?

India Port Global Limited (IPGL) and the Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) of Iran signed the long-term deal, which will allow New Delhi to upgrade and operate one terminal at Chabahar port over 10 years.

Located in southeastern Sistan and Baluchestan Province and perched on the Gulf of Oman, Chabahar Port consists of two separate ports — Shahid Kalantari and Shahid Beheshti. India will operate a terminal in Shahid Beheshti, and as per Monday's agreement, invest \$120m into equipping it. An additional \$250m loan credit facility for related projects in the port brings the contract's value to \$370m.

The two countries first started talks on the project back in 2003 but a barrage of US sanctions targeting Iran prevented any real developments. Tehran and New Delhi revived the talks again after Washington eased sanctions under the 2015 Iran nuclear deal.

The two countries, along with Afghanistan, which was seeking alternative routes away from Pakistan, signed a tripartite agreement to develop the port during Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 2016 Iran visit.

Back then, New Delhi pledged to invest \$500m to reconstruct a 600-metre (1969-feet) long container handling facility as part of its efforts to develop the deep-sea port as a transit hub. Chabahar is located about 140km (87 miles) west of Pakistan's Gwadar Port, which has been developed as part of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

In December 2017, the first shipment of Indian wheat to Afghanistan passed through Chabahar providing an alternative to land route passing through Pakistan.

In 2018, former US President Donald Trump withdrew from the nuclear deal and reintroduced "maximum pressure" sanctions on Tehran, which limited operations at the Chabahar Port.

Why is Chabahar significant?

India, with its booming \$600bn manufacturing industry, has ambitions to trade more closely with its inland neighbours to the west, but hostile relations with Pakistan mean a land route for exports is a difficult proposition.

With the Chabahar Port, India avoids dealings with Pakistan and can transport goods first to Iran, and then onwards via rail or road networks to Afghanistan and resource-rich landlocked countries like Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. One Indian official has even mentioned reaching as far inland as Russia.



Harbor security stands guard during an inauguration ceremony of new equipment and infrastructure at Shahid Beheshti Port in the southeastern Iranian coastal city of Chabahar, on February 25, 2019.
● ATTA KENARE/AFP

For India, Chabahar is "one of the centrepieces of its neighbourhood policies" — a sort of golden gate to more investment opportunities in West and Central Asia — said Kabir Taneja, a fellow at the New Delhi-based Observer Research Foundation think tank.

"The port already forms a key part of the region's ongoing International North-South Trade Corridor (INSTC) project that aims to connect big cities like the Indian financial hub of Mumbai and Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, via Iran over a patchwork of ship, road, and rail routes," Taneja added. The INSTC, which offers India a cheaper and faster route to trade with Central Asia, has also been impacted by US sanctions on Russia and Iran.

Some analysts say the Chabahar deal is additionally a bulwark against rival China's dealings with Pakistan. Just four hours east of the Chabahar Port is Pakistan's Gwadar Port which is partly controlled by Chinese developers who have pumped some \$1.62bn into upgrading it since 2015.

India and China have troubled relations and, in recent years, have had a series of border clashes.

Can US sanction India over the deal?

The US has imposed limited sanctions on India's science establishment twice in the past — in 1974 and 1998 — after New Delhi carried out nuclear tests.

But since the end of the Cold War, India and the US have strengthened relations significantly, and today count each other as among the closest of strategic partners. Even though India officially does not recognise any sanctions imposed on nations unless they have been approved by the United Nations, it has played along, for the most part, with US-led sanctions against Iran.

Until a few years ago, India counted Iran among its top oil suppliers. However, since 2018, when then-US President Donald Trump pulled out of the Iran nuclear deal and reimposed tough sanctions on Tehran, India has voided buying any Iranian oil.

Yet, back in 2018, New Delhi successfully lobbied Washington to secure specific exemptions to the sanctions related to Chabahar because of the promise that the transit route could help Afghanistan, a key security interest for the US at the time. An under-construction railway link connecting the Chabahar Port to Afghan-

istan was also exempt from the sanctions. But India's friendship with Iran now, when Tehran's backing of Palestinian armed group Hamas in Gaza has invited even more US sanctions, puts New Delhi in a tight spot. Afghanistan has also ceased to be a key interest for the US since it pulled out of the country in 2021, some analysts point out.

Still, experts do not anticipate sweeping sanctions against India.

"Sanctioning the Indian economy on such a minor issue is highly unlikely," said Gulshan Sachdeva of New Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University. "In the worst-case scenario, only entities involved in the Chabahar Port deal may come under some sanctions," he told Al Jazeera.

What would US sanctions on India mean?

India is one of the world's fastest-growing economies, but any US sanctions on the country will likely be contained and will not affect global trade, analysts say.

US sanctions on Iran have already hit India hard before. The Chabahar Port exemptions under Trump did not extend to infrastructure initiatives that would have allowed India to connect up with Central Asian nations located further inland, for instance, hampering India's ambitions. India's decision to avoid buying Iranian oil to avoid the risk of US sanctions has also left it more vulnerable to price pressures from other suppliers.

But if the US does try to play tough over Chabahar, some analysts believe that India will push back harder than it has in the past.

"Chabahar is more important, and New Delhi is willing to work to keep it alive for the long run," said analyst Taneja.

If India pushes ahead despite a real threat of US sanctions, that would be a signal to Washington, said Sarang Shidore, director of the Global South Program at the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, a Washington-based think tank.

"Global South states will continue to pursue their own interests despite Washington's preferences to make them align with its strategic objectives," he said.

"Washington ought to re-evaluate its policies that force choices on the Global South that can alienate them and limit US opportunities in this vast, largely unaligned space."

The article first appeared on Al Jazeera.

Asian Taekwondo Championships: Salimi captures decisive gold as Iran beats South Korea to men's crown

Sports Desk

A remarkable seven medals, including triple golds, saw Iran win the men's title at the Asian Taekwondo Championships in Da Nang, Vietnam. South Korea finished on the second podium thanks to double golds and silvers apiece, as well as a bronze with Uzbekistan and Saudi Arabia in the following spots. There were further achievements for the Iranians as Majid Aflaki was named the best coach of the tournament, with young prodigy Mahdi Hajimousaei claiming the best male athlete prize after winning the -58kg gold. Aflaki's men and South Korea went toe-to-toe in the team title race before Arian Salimi's straight-round victory over Park Woo-hyeok in a thrilling +87kg final secured a fifth continental crown for Iran, ending the country's eight-year drought in the competitions. This was a third international medal for the Iranian over the past 12 months – following last year's world bronze in Baku and the silver at the Asian Games – and a morale-boosting triumph ahead of the Paris Olympics in July. Earlier on Saturday, Ali Khoshravesh, who was only named in the squad after Iranian captain Mirhashem Hosseini was injured days before the tournament, had an impressive run towards the men's -80kg final but had to settle for a runner-up finish

after a defeat against Jasurbek Jaysunov of Uzbekistan. Yalda Valinejad was the Iranian girl in action on Saturday but was unfortunate to see her campaign come to a finish after a first-round loss to South Korea's Kwak Min-ju. Hajimousaei and Mohammad-Hossein Yazdani had grabbed a couple of gold medals for Iran on Day 2 of the kyorugi competitions. Hajimousaei, 19, came out on top against fellow-Iranian Abolfazl Zandi in the semifinals before defeating South Korean Park Tae-joon 2-1 for the ultimate prize – a second continental medal for the Iranian following his silver-winning campaign in the Asian Games. Zandi shared the third podium of the weight class with two-time world champion Bae Jun-seo of South Korea. A second all-Iranian encounter on Friday saw Yazdani beat Mehran Barkhordari – a 2022 world bronze medalist – in the men's -87kg final. Both athletes enjoyed an emphatic campaign en route to the final showdown, with Yazdani overcoming former world champion Kang Sang-hyun of South Korea in the quarterfinals, while Barkhordari, who will be part of the -80kg class at the Paris Olympics, defeated his high-profile Uzbekistani opponent Nikita Rafalovich – the defending champion and a winner of three world medals – 2-1 in a last-eight clash.

Melika Mirhosseini was the only Iranian female medalist on Friday, taking the silver in the -73kg class. Mirhosseini beat opponents from the host country and Uzbekistan but fell short against South Korea's Myeong Mi-na in the final. Elsewhere in the women's draw, Mobina Ne'matzadeh was the second Iranian Olympian girl to finish the tournament empty-handed after reigning world champion Nahid Kiani had lost her first bout in the -53kg contests on the preceding night. Ne'matzadeh, Iran's -49kg representative in Paris, opened her campaign with a win against Tachiana Mangin of the Philippines but fell to a second-round setback against Vietnam's Thi Kim Tuyen Truong. Elham Haqiqi also suffered a second-round blow in Da Nang as she was beaten by back-to-back world bronze medalist Feruza Sadikova of Uzbekistan in the women's -62kg contests, while Amir-Sina Bakhtiari was knocked out of the men's -74kg event after a loss to Najmiddin Kosimkhoejiev – also from Uzbekistan. Saeideh Nasri (women's -46kg) and Matin Rezaei (men's -63kg) had won double bronze medals for the country on the first day of the kyorugi competitions. The 26th edition of the Asian Championships finishes with the para taekwondo event today.

”

Majid Aflaki's men won seven medals, including triple golds, to end the country's eight-year title drought in the Asian event.



Iranian Arian Salimi (blue) won the +87kg gold to secure the men's team title for the country at the Asian Championships.
● taekwondo.ir

Ex-Iran international Dejagah announces retirement at 38



● INTAIKU PHOTOGRAPHY

Sports Desk

Former Iranian international midfielder Ashkan Dejagah announced his retirement from professional football on Friday, calling time on his career at the age of 38. An ex-player of German clubs Hertha BSC and VfL Wolfsburg as well as Premier League outfit Fulham and Al Arabi in Qatar had been without a team since making his last appearance for Foolad Khuzestan against Iralco on the final day of previous Persian Gulf Pro League season back in May. "After years of unforgettable moments on the pitch, it is time to say goodbye to football as a player," Dejagah wrote in an Instagram post. "Since the very first days that I played football on the streets, till representing my country on the biggest stages, football, more than being a game, was a love, a journey, and a path in life for me. "I'm so grateful to have had the opportunity to wear the shirt of some

admirable clubs and my dear national team. Every game, every goal, and every victory will have a special place in my heart forever. "I want to thank all my teammates, coaches, and fans, who gave me their support through this unbelievable journey, from the deep bottom of my heart. Merci football." Dejagah, who moved to Germany with his family as an infant, came through the ranks at Hertha before joining Wolfsburg in 2007, where he bagged 20 goals in 160 games, lifting the Bundesliga trophy two years later. "A master player, a hooligan, and a Wolfsburg legend... Thank you for everything Asche!" the German club wrote on X later on Friday. Dejagah reunited with his Wolfsburg manager Felix Magath in Fulham in 2012 and netted six goals in 49 matches for the Cottagers. His first appearance in the Iranian top flight came for the start of the

2018/19 season, when he signed for Tractor – along with international teammates Masoud Shojaei and Ehsan Hajsafi – and went on to win the Hazfi Cup title the following season. A European under-21 champion with Germany in 2019, Dejagah made his senior international debut for Iran under Portuguese Carlos Queiroz in a World Cup qualifier against Qatar in 2012, scoring twice in a 2-2 draw in Tehran's Azadi Stadium. He scored 11 goals in 59 international caps and played an essential role for the country in the 2014 World Cup in Brazil and was again part of the squad in the 2018 showpiece, though he sat on the bench during all of the three games in Russia. Dejagah also represented the national team at the 2015 and 2019 Asian Cups and was named in the team of the tournament in the second occasion in Qatar, where Iran fell to a last-four defeat against Japan.

Foden named Premier League Player of the Season

BBC – Manchester City's Phil Foden has been named the Premier League's Player of the Season. Earlier this month the England midfielder, 23, was voted the Football Writers' Association Footballer of the Year. Foden has claimed a career-best 17 goals

and eight assists in the Premier League this season, before City's final game today. "To win this award is an achievement that I am extremely proud of," said Foden. "The Premier League is acknowledged as the greatest league in the world, and it is a pleasure to have been nominated with

so many other great players who have all enjoyed special seasons for their clubs." Only Erling Haaland (27) has scored more league goals than Foden for City, who will secure a record fourth straight English title if they win at home to West Ham on Sunday.

"Overall, I've been very happy with the way I have played this season and really pleased that I have been able to contribute with the goals and assists throughout the season," Foden added. "I'd like to thank all of the City staff, coaches and especially my team-mates

because without them this wouldn't be possible. And I would also like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who voted for me as the award means a lot." Chelsea midfielder Cole Palmer was named the English top flight's Young Player of the Season.

Raisi sounds alarm about 'high' abortion rate

National Desk

President Ebrahim Raisi on Saturday expressed concern about "high" and "alarming" rate of abortion in Iran, calling for measures to prevent "illegal abortion". "Iran's young girls and boys should know that illegal abortion is voluntary manslaughter under the Sharia law," Raisi told a major event on rejuvenating the population, ISNA reported. According to unofficial figures, each year between 300,000 to 500,000 abortions, most of them illegal, are carried out in Iran. Raisi called for more incentives to be granted to families and young

couples as part of national efforts to boost the birth rate. "Family is a key part of any society, which needs to be empowered partly through giving birth to children," Raisi said, adding that economic concerns, including housing, should be addressed as they discourage young people from getting married. He also said offering free of charge medical services to treat infertility as well as free healthcare for children under seven could also contribute to improving the birth rate. In recent years, Iran has launched various plans to increase the birth rate to slow down population ageing.

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi speaks during a major event on rejuvenating the population in Tehran on May 18, 2024.

● president.ir



Palestinians prepared for 'long war of attrition' in Gaza



The military wing of Hamas said Palestinians are ready for a long war of attrition, pledging to stand up to Israel's ground invasion of Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip and elsewhere. "Despite our full desire to stop the aggression against our people, we are prepared for a long battle of attrition against the enemy, dragging them into a swamp where they will gain nothing but the death of their soldiers and the capture of their officers," Qassam Brigades spokesman Abu Obeida said in a video message, Press TV reported.

"This is because we are the people of this land and are its rightful owners," he added.

His remarks come as fighting is raging in Gaza as Israel intensifies its ground invasion of Rafah despite international concerns for the hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinians in the southern city.

In the past 10 days, Palestinian fighters have targeted 100 Israeli military vehicles, including tanks, armored personnel carriers as well as bulldozers, Abu Obeida said. They have inflicted heavy casualties on Israeli soldiers by blowing up tunnels, launching rockets and mortars, and through sniping and close-quarters combat.

The Israeli military, he said, does not announce the exact figure of its losses in Gaza.

"The Al-Qassam Brigades fighters inflicted severe blows on the Zionist enemy in the eastern flank of Rafah city," Abu Obeida said.

He said the Israeli military had made a big mistake by deciding to launch a ground invasion of Rafah, the Zaitoun neighborhood, and Jabalia refugee camp, rendering its troops easy targets for Palestinian fighters.

The Israelis, he said, thought that if they spent seven months burning everything to the ground, they would face little resistance, "but they were surprised to find that they were once again in hell, facing fiercer resistance than before".

On Thursday, major general in the Israeli Reserve Army Yitzhak Brik said the current war unfolding in Gaza is a "war of attrition". He warned that its prolongation "will lead to the collapse of the army and economy in Israel".

IRGC naval flotilla accomplishes 39-day mission in high seas



● IRNA

National Desk

A flotilla of military vessels belonging to the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps' Navy returned home on Saturday after accomplishing its 39-day mission in the high seas. The commander of the IRGC's Navy Rear Admiral Alireza Tangsiri welcomed the flotilla which has been named after the Lieutenant General Qasem Soleimani - Iran's top anti-terror commander who was assassinated by the United States in Iraq in 2020. Tangsiri hailed the country's naval forces, especially the IRGC's Navy, saying that this is the first time that the IRGC Navy has managed to cross the equator and enter the southern hemisphere. He said that the country's naval forces using their advanced capabilities have become a nightmare for the enemies.

Earlier this month, the Iranian Navy also said it will deploy a team of researchers to the Antarctic. Navy Commander Rear Admiral Shahram Irani unveiled plans for the Iranian Navy to dispatch a scientific and research delegation to the Antarctic with 100 percent preparedness to conduct scientific research.

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Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



Zelensky: West 'afraid' of both Russian, Ukrainian defeat

International Desk

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky criticized the West for imposing a ban on using Western-donated arms to strike targets inside Russia, saying the West is "afraid" of both Russian and Ukrainian defeat. Zelensky told AFP in an exclusive interview that Ukraine's Western backers have left his country in a "nonsense situation" where it gets enough support to avoid total defeat, but not enough to achieve victory.

"The Russians can attack us on our territory, which is their biggest advantage, but we can't use Western weapons against their systems located in Russia. We have no right," the Ukrainian president said. "We want the war to end with a fair peace for us," while "the West wants the war to end. Period. As soon as possible. And for them, this is a fair peace," Zelensky added.

"They are helping Ukraine to keep going but not to win the war," Phillips O'Brien, a professor of strategic studies at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland, told NBC News. "And they don't seem to actually want to give Ukraine what it needs to win the war." US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who visited Kiev earlier this week, said Washington has "not encouraged or enabled strikes outside of Ukraine, but ultimately Ukraine has to make decisions for itself about how it's going to conduct this war."



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky speaks during an interview with AFP at the Presidential Office in Kiev on May 17, 2024.
● ROMAN PILIPEY/AFP

However, Pentagon spokeswoman Sabrina Singh on Thursday clarified that Washington's position that Kiev should not target Russia with US-supplied weapons remains unchanged. Such arms can only be used to "take back Ukrainian sovereign territory," Singh stressed.

Zelensky has repeatedly asked the West, particularly the US, for long-range missiles and advanced fighter jets to challenge Russia's air superiority and compensate for failure on the ground. Zelensky said he expects Russia to step up its offensive in the northeast and warned Kiev only has a quarter of the air defenses it needs to hold the front line.

Russian forces, which had made only moderate advances in recent months, launched a surprise assault in Kharkiv region on May 10 that has resulted in their biggest territorial gains in a year-and-a-half. Zelensky said Russian troops managed to advance between five to 10 kilometers (3-6 miles)

along the northeastern border before being stopped by Ukrainian forces, but added that the region could be the "first wave" in a wider offensive.

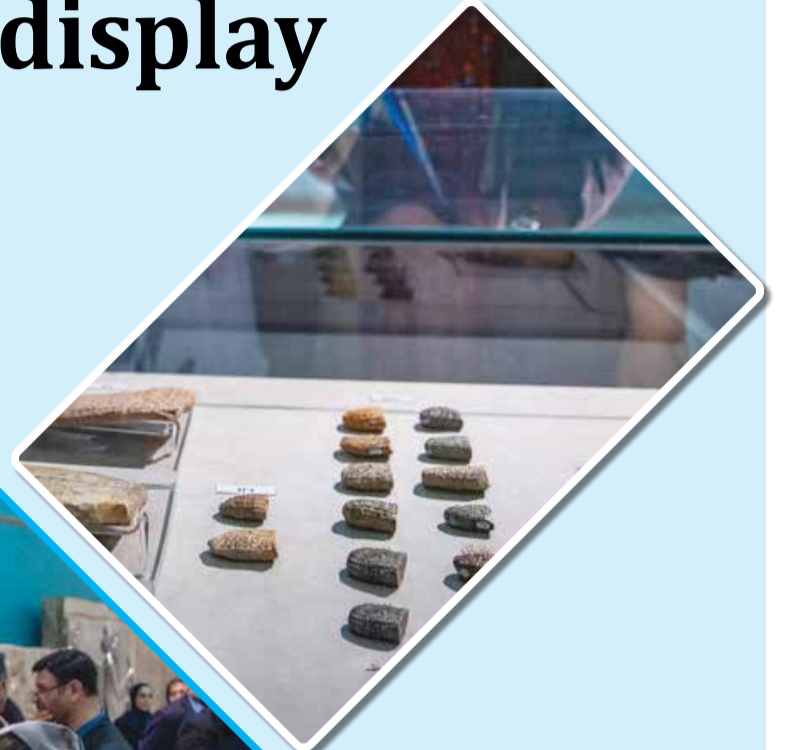
"I won't say it's a great success (for Russia) but we have to be sober and understand that they are going deeper into our territory," he said.

He doubled down on pleas to allies to send more air defense and fighter jets to combat Russia's air superiority as the war grinds through its third year.

"Today, we have about 25 percent of what we need to defend Ukraine. I'm talking about air defense," he said.

Ukraine needs "120 to 130" F-16 fighter jets or other advanced aircraft to achieve air "parity" with Russia, Zelensky said.

Nat'l Museum of Iran puts on display 163 Achaemenid tablets



Arts & Culture Desk

The National Museum of Iran unveiled 163 Achaemenid tablets that were returned to the country from the US last year. The showcase took place on Saturday, with the attendance of the deputy minister of the Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, and Tourism Organization, and several foreign ambassadors, IRNA reported. The return of these ancient

artifacts follows the repatriation of 3,506 Achaemenid tablets to Iran in September 2023. This significant event occurred during Iranian President Ebrahim Raeisi's visit to New York, marking the end of more than 85 years since the tablets had left Iran. According to the director of the National Museum of Iran Jebrael Nokandeh, this recent exhibition represents the fifth shipment of tablets returned to the country. In addition to the showcase of the Achaemenid tablets, over 120 lesser-seen museum

and archaeological artifacts were unveiled in 11 provinces of Iran. This unveiling coincided with the International Museum Day (May 18) celebrations. The ceremony at the

National Museum of Iran featured representatives from foreign embassies in Iran, UNESCO office members, archaeologists, and museum man-

agers from both private and public institutions. Seyyed Ahmad Mohit Tabatabai, the head of the National Committee of Museums (ICOM Iran), emphasized the crucial role of museums in the development of a country, adding that the presence and maintenance of museums are key indicators of a nation's advancement. During the event, Iran's Deputy Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, Ali Darabi, announced the opening of 14 online exhibitions across 11 provinc-

es. These exhibitions feature significant artifacts, including the millennia-old Gold Bowl of Hasanlu, a significant archaeological find named after the location where it was excavated some 66 years ago from West Azarbaijan and historical coins from East Azarbaijan. Darabi also highlighted the contributions of the media in raising public awareness and interest in cultural heritage. Darabi mentioned that several priority projects for the current Persian year include the completion of the Jiroft Museum and ongoing restoration efforts nationwide.

● ISNA

UK faces child poverty crisis



More than four million children in the United Kingdom are currently living in poverty, marking the highest number in twenty years. Among them, one million children are described as being in extreme poverty or destitution, struggling to stay fed, clean, dry, and warm. Currently, nearly all state primary school children in London, Scotland, and Wales are offered free school meals. However, in the rest of England, only children up to the age of seven receive this benefit, and it is not universally available in Northern Ireland, itv.com reported. Will Baker from Bristol University found that schools are now the largest source of charitable food and household aid for fam-

ilies. "About 20% of all primary and secondary schools now run a food bank. That equates to over 4,000 school-based food banks, disproportionately located in disadvantaged areas and schools with low-income populations," Baker stated. Charities argue that the two-child cap, which limits Universal or Child Tax Credit to the first two children in a family, is a significant policy driver of child poverty, affecting nearly two million children. The government is expected to save £2.5 billion from this benefit cap this financial year. However, a recent study found that the 'two-child limit' did not incentivize parents to have fewer children.

Iran presents extensive services to refugees: UN official

Social Desk

The head of the United Nations International Organization for Migration (IOM) office in Iran has praised the country's extensive services to refugees, calling them unparalleled worldwide. On Saturday, Lalini Veerassamy, Chief of Mission of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Iran, met with Behrang Qorbani, the director-general of Foreign Nationals and Immigrants Affairs in Fars Province, IRNA wrote. "I and my colleagues have worked in many countries and observed the range of services provided to refugees. However, the attention and services offered by the Iranian government to refugees

are truly exceptional. Nowhere else have we seen such extensive support, considering the existing limitations," Veerassamy said. Qorbani emphasized the need for international organizations to fulfill their duties and promises during their visits to the provinces, based on defined needs and priorities until results are achieved. "Refugees in Iran benefit from the same healthcare, education, and other services that Iranian citizens receive. There is no distinction in service delivery," Qorbani stated. He highlighted that significant expenses are incurred by healthcare and educational centers to provide adequate services to refugees. While some aid comes from the UN, it does not meet the full



needs of the refugee community in the province. He called for a special focus and increased budget allocations for refugee education and health services. Qorbani also urged international organizations in Iran to support

the voluntary and sustainable repatriation of foreign nationals. "While providing appropriate services to refugees during their stay in Iran, we must also work on empowering them for their eventual return to their home countries," he said.

Russian firms invited to invest in Iran's tourism

Iranian Ambassador to Russia Kazem Jalali invited Russian firms to invest in developing Iran's tourism infrastructure as part of efforts to boost cooperation between the two countries in the tourism sector. Jalali was speaking at a specialized meeting on Iran-Russia relations, which was attended by

Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Ali Baqeri and Russian federal and provincial officials, IRNA wrote. Tourism is one of the potential fields of cooperation between Tehran and Moscow, Jalali said. In order to boost bilateral cooperation in that sector, Russian firms are invited to make invest-

ments and help develop tourism infrastructure and build hotels in Iran, the envoy said. As another way to boost tourism cooperation, the two countries can establish direct flights between their cities, he said, adding that Iran's southern islands can receive Russian tourists during the cold season

when the islands have moderate weather. The specialized meeting on Iran-Russia relations was held on the sidelines of the Russia-Islamic World Kazan Forum 2024, an annual event aimed at strengthening Russia's ties with Islamic countries. This year's forum was held on May 15-18.