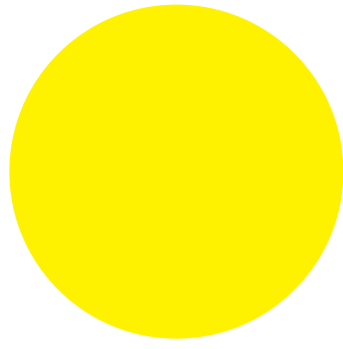


Iran notifies EU of 'limited' opportunity for nuclear diplomacy

7 >



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# 100 Days in Office Pezeshkian's Success Story

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*In such a challenging environment, the incumbent government utilized all available diplomatic and political tools to navigate the crises. The current situation demonstrates its success in reducing tensions and redirecting them toward diplomatic processes, underscoring the effectiveness of its strategic approach.*



# 100 days in office Pezeshkian's success story



By Rezvaneh Rezaei pour  
Staff writer

## 100 days of active, effective, and comprehensive diplomacy



By Esmail Baghaei  
Spokesperson for Iran's  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

### OPINION

The 100-day mark of the incumbent government offers a valuable opportunity to reflect on the efforts and achievements of Iran's diplomatic apparatus in safeguarding national interests, sovereignty, and the dignity of the nation.

The government assumed office under challenging circumstances. Domestically, the country had lost both its president and foreign minister unexpectedly before the end of the regular four-year term. Regionally, West Asia was in turmoil due to ongoing genocide in Palestine, escalating Israeli aggressions in Lebanon, and persistent threats against Iran. This volatile situation has since only grown more complex.

### Crisis response, diplomatic endeavors

In the wake of a terrorist attack on a high-ranking guest shortly after the presidential inauguration — an attack that violated Iran's territorial integrity and sovereignty — the government's diplomatic strategy required

precision and unwavering effort. This assault by the Israeli regime aimed at eliminating a prominent Resistance figure but also a provocative attempt to undermine the government's stated goal of strengthening regional and international relations.

Navigating such challenges demanded multilayered strategies, meticulous planning, and optimal use of opportunities. The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) presented the administration with its first major diplomatic stage, where it could leverage the extensive media coverage and the presence of world leaders to advance an active, comprehensive, and impactful diplomatic agenda.

Discussions at the UNGA spanned all five continents, highlighting Iran's commitment to global engagement. Notable milestones included initiating talks with three European nations after a two-year hiatus to address sanctions relief, the JCPOA, and other mutual concerns, such as Ukraine and regional developments in West Asia. While Iran's responsible approach could have opened a new chapter in Iran-Europe relations, some European actors, influenced by the destruc-

tive policies of the Israeli regime, failed to seize the opportunity.

### Regional diplomacy, cooperation

Building on past initiatives, such as the late president Raisi's neighborhood policy, the incumbent government prioritized its regional neighbors during diplomatic engagements at the UNGA. These efforts laid the groundwork for subsequent visits by the foreign minister to regional capitals amid heightened tensions following the defensive Operation True Promise 2.

High-level engagements with Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members, Turkey, Pakistan, Egypt, and Jordan underscored Iran's enduring commitment to fostering regional harmony and collective security. These initiatives sought to mobilize regional solidarity against destabilizing plots in West Asia, such

as the elimination of Palestine. Starting the regional tour in Lebanon — a resistance hub against Israeli expansionism — and Syria — a key pillar of the Resistance Axis — was a significant gesture. The timing, just days after the assassination of Hezbollah's secretary-general and Iran's Operation True Promise 2, demonstrated unparalleled coordination between diplomacy and operational realities.

### Leveraging media for diplomacy

The foreign minister's strategic use of media during visits to Lebanon and Syria was a testament to Iran's commitment to transparent diplomacy. Despite the inherent risks and brief visits, every opportunity was utilized for inter-

views and media engagements, emphasizing Iran's principled stance and steadfast support for the legitimate resistance of Palestinians and

Lebanese against occupation. Notably, an interview with Italy's state broadcaster (RAI 3) from Lebanon further underscored the role of media in amplifying Iran's diplomatic message globally.

### Expanding diplomatic horizons

Iran's active diplomacy extended beyond the region. Meetings with counterparts from Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America during the UNGA highlighted the administration's foreign policy vision. Phone calls with world leaders and participation in international summits, such as the BRICS summit in Kazan, Russia, played a crucial role in advancing Iran's national interests and security.

Joining BRICS as a full member marked a significant achievement within these 100 days. The government's determination to leverage BRICS' vast political, security, economic, and financial potential underscores its commitment to strengthening Iran's regional and global standing and forging ties with emerg-

### Upholding sovereignty, national security

In an era of escalating threats, with Israel waging an unjust war supported by the US and some Western allies against the region, Iran's diplomatic apparatus has prioritized safeguarding national sovereignty and security. Ending the genocide in Gaza, halting aggressions against Lebanon and Syria, and countering regional destabilization remain paramount. Iran has also maintained focus on longstanding issues like its nuclear program, border security, counterterrorism, and consular services for expatriates, while engaging international organizations, to advance its foreign policy goals. In these 100 days, Iran's diplomacy has shown vigilance and pragmatism, addressing complex challenges while identifying opportunities to protect national interests and security. Guided by Iran's material and spiritual strengths, its proven resilience against threats, and its commitment to justice and sovereignty, this diplomatic path will continue steadfastly. National cohesion and unity remain essential for achieving these goals.

## Iran's message of friendship relayed to region



By Alireza Enayati  
Iran's ambassador to  
Saudi Arabia

### OPINION

The continuation of Iran's regional and neighbor-focused policies has become a top priority under the incumbent government. Over the past 100 days, intensive diplomatic meetings and consultations, especially given the current regional context, have been conducted by the president, the first vice president, and the foreign minister with their counterparts. These interactions represent key aspects of Iran's foreign relations and emphasize the expansion and deepening of ties within the framework of neighborhood policy.

A qualitative leap is evident in the government's agenda. The leap in question is a shift in Iran's focus from bilateral relations to multilateralism and regional cooperation. The aim is to integrate bilateral interactions into broader regional frameworks. In this context, for the first time in decades, the foreign ministers of Iran and the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries convened a meeting in Doha. Beyond bilateral discussions, the attendees addressed supra-bilateral issues, marking a significant step toward regional collaboration.

The Persian Gulf countries, both northern and southern, possess the capabilities, capac-

ities, and resources to engage in dialogue and cooperation in political, economic, cultural, social, and other domains. This bilateral and regional collaboration also includes a third dimension: the Islamic world. Iran, Saudi Arabia, and other regional countries can form significant partnerships within this sphere.

In the past year, we have witnessed the Israeli regime's aggressive assaults on Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, and even Iraq, along with its violations of Iranian sovereignty. These actions have been met with appropriate responses. In response, Iran has held regular and structured dialogues with Saudi Arabia. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) convened four times at various levels, with some sessions initiated directly at Iran's request. At the recent OIC meeting, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman called for Israel to refrain from attacking Iran, signaling a positive development in Tehran-Riyadh relations. Iranian first vice president's meeting with the Saudi crown prince sent a constructive message about the two nations' evolving ties and emphasized that their strained relationship is reversible. We hope that regional countries will continue to engage in systematic and sustainable cooperation across bilateral, regional, and Islamic domains, as well as in condemning the aggressions of the Israeli regime.



## Special diplomatic moves during decisive 100 days



By Seyed Abbas Mousavi  
Former diplomat

### OPINION

The incumbent Iranian government began its tenure during a critical period, necessitating swift and impactful diplomatic actions to address escalating crises. The terrorist operation carried out by the Israeli regime at the start of Masoud Pezeshkian's administration created conditions that significantly shaped its foreign policy direction and required

immediate measures. West Asia, already strained following Operation Al-Aqsa Storm, placed Iran on a direct trajectory toward military tensions, making the region a central focus of the current government's strategic agenda.

The assassination of Ismail Haniyeh, Hamas' political leader, prompted rapid, simultaneous actions on both the military and diplomatic fronts. The government's diplomatic measures aimed to neutralize Tel Aviv's objective of extending the war's scope to Iran and leading Tehran into a strategic miscalculation.

This goal was pursued through a comprehensive diplomatic strategy, spearheaded by the foreign minister's consultations in Arab capitals. These efforts not only kept Arab states away from the conflict but also redirected their diplomatic stance towards alignment with Iran.

While the administration initially planned a broad agenda focused on lifting sanctions, resuming stalled regional and Western dialogues, and revitalizing its role in major regional and international organizations, it was forced to shift course. Under the pressures

of Israel's deliberate escalation, the government had to allocate significant resources, especially in foreign policy, to mitigate the tensions strategically engineered against Iran.

In such a challenging environment, the incumbent government utilized all available diplomatic and political tools to navigate the crises. The current situation demonstrates its success in reducing tensions and redirecting them toward diplomatic processes, underscoring the effectiveness of its strategic approach.

## Pezeshkian, his gov't: Two separate brands



By Mohammad Mohajeri  
Conservative political  
activist

### OPINION

When Masoud Pezeshkian served as a member of the parliament or a presidential candidate, he communicated in one way, but once he assumed the presidency, his actions adapted to the demands of time

and circumstance. By nature, Pezeshkian is what one might call a justice-seeker. Morally, he is unlike many conventional politicians — he avoids lies, lacks deceitfulness, and has no hidden agendas. His principles are deeply rooted in his study and practice of Nahj al-Balagha — a collection of writings and sayings attributed to Imam Ali (PBUH). When entering politics and

governance, Pezeshkian strived to remain true to his ideals, but the reality of political life often clashes with his foundational beliefs. This creates a paradox — sometimes even contradictions — in his approach. For instance, the failure of his "unity" theory to gain traction in the political arena is not entirely his fault. The problem stems from the nature of politics itself and, more importantly, from politi-

cians who see politics as a practice devoid of ethics and justice. It could be said that during the first 100 days of his presidency, Pezeshkian has lived faithfully to his ideals and, in this regard, has achieved success. However, his administration has not fully implemented his vision. In other words, the "Pezeshkian brand" is not entirely aligned with the "Pezeshkian government's brand".

# 100 days in office Pezeshkian's success story

## Balanced approach adopted in all sectors



By Ali Motahhari  
Former MP

### OPINION

Given the regional and international circumstances, the government of Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian has begun its journey along the predetermined path and continued successfully. However, in certain areas, its actions are constrained and must align with the current critical juncture. Thus, in evaluating the government's performance over its first 100 days, it would be unreasonable to expect more than what it has already accomplished. The key factor is whether the chosen path appears correct, and based on the government's conduct over the past three months, this seems to be the case. Nevertheless, expectations from the government remain high.

The public rightfully expects inflation to be controlled, foreign relations to expand, regional issues to be managed effectively, and a balanced approach to be adopted — one that avoids neglecting certain sectors while overemphasizing others. These are the legitimate demands of Iranians from the incumbent government. The government has succeeded in creating such a balance. In various fields, including healthcare and addressing nurses' issues, significant progress has been made. Positive steps have also been taken in matters concerning retirees. In foreign policy, particularly in relations with Saudi Arabia, considerable advancements have been achieved. In agri-

culture, remarkable initiatives have been implemented, and wheat farmers' demands have been met promptly.

In terms of freedom of expression, the government has displayed commendable conduct, combating certain forms of extremism and showing goodwill in addressing its critics. Overall, I have observed a successful first 100 days of this administration and hope for even greater achievements in the future.

## Diplomacy in service of preventing widespread war



By Ali Shakouri Rad  
Reformist political activist

### OPINION

Recently, as part of the leadership of the Reformist Front, we met with President Pezeshkian. The meeting last-

ed over two hours, and I can confidently say that not only myself but all members present left with a very positive impression of the Iranian government's progress. The report presented by Pezeshkian, along with his responses to questions about his administration's performance, created a sense of reassurance among the Reformist leadership. We are now confident that the government is well aware of its actions and their ultimate outcomes and it is diligently pursuing them. Of course,

there are many challenges and issues, which we are all fully aware of. However, despite these challenges, the administration has taken significant steps toward fulfilling its promises. Although the intended final results have yet to be achieved, substantial progress has been made, and future actions will likely align with the people's expectations. The president himself is committed to delivering on his promises, and concerns about the government's progress have largely been allevi-

ated. Nonetheless, numerous crises persist, particularly the looming threat of war, which casts a shadow over the nation. Despite this, it appears that the Iranian government is managing the situation effectively. In the first 100 days, the administration has pursued active diplomacy and has successfully leveraged it to prevent the outbreak of a widespread war.

*The full articles originally appeared on Iran Newspaper.*



## Pros, cons of 100 days of governance



By Mohammad Fazeli  
Sociologist

### OPINION

A hundred days have passed since Masoud Pezeshkian's government took office, offering an opportunity to evaluate its strengths and weaknesses. I'll begin with the shortcomings, considering both the perspective of citizens who voted with high hopes and that of a social and political activist seeking reforms that serve the collective good.

#### Weaknesses

1. Unresolved censorship of the Internet: The inability to lift the censorship of the Internet after nearly 100 days is not just a failure in itself but also reflects the government's unclear approach and lack of transparency in addressing opposition and challenges.

2. Absence of baseline report: The government has not provided a report detailing the state of affairs it inherited.

Such a report is essential not only for addressing critics but also for self-assessment and measuring progress.

3. Lack of clear economic vision: The administration has not demonstrated a cohesive economic perspective addressing the macroeconomic situation and sectoral challenges. The tendency of some economic officials to act like celebrities instead of making tough decisions undermines public confidence.

4. Weak communication: The government's fragmented and inconsistent communication strategy has failed to effectively explain critical decisions, such as the ban on mazut burning, leaving the public uninformed and dissatisfied. A single spokesperson cannot suffice; communication requires greater coordination and clarity, especially in a low-trust society.

5. Opaque managerial appointments: While I oppose sweeping changes in managerial positions, the administration owes explanations for retaining or appointing

certain individuals facing criticism. Similarly, controversial appointments in universities have gone unexplained, fueling skepticism.

#### Strengths

1. Avoiding escalation of conflicts: Despite heightened tensions in the region, the government has made commendable efforts to prevent Iran from being drawn into a full-scale war. Its diplomatic approach has influenced higher-level decision-making positively.

2. Inclusive appointments: By appointing Sunnis, women, ethnic minorities, and other marginalized groups to significant positions, the Iranian administration has broken long-standing taboos, paving the way for broader inclusivity.

3. Refusal to blame predecessors: The government has largely refrained from blaming its predecessors, avoiding the political immorality that often hampers Iranian governance. Instead, it has focused on accountability and moving forward.

4. Positive initiatives in governance: Efforts such as open calls for managerial elections in the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor, and Social Welfare, as well as some promising appointments in environmental protection, are steps that could lead to significant long-term improvements.

5. Reinstatement of academics and students: The return of dismissed professors and students to universities signals a hopeful shift, even though deeper reforms in academic hiring and evaluation remain necessary. Despite ambiguities and shortcomings, Masoud Pezeshkian's government has delivered a defensible performance in its first 100 days. While challenges remain, a sense of optimism persists. The government must fuel this hope through small but meaningful achievements as these are crucial for navigating the difficult path ahead. The key lies in maintaining a clear vision of its goals and strategies to fulfill its promises and rebuild public trust.

## Hope revived by gov't



By Ahmad Khorram  
Reformist political activist

### OPINION

Evaluating the performance of the government after just 100 days may not be entirely fair. A government typically requires at least six months to begin delivering on its promises. For instance, no economic relief plans have yet reached fruition, primarily due to the limited time the administration has had. However, despite the short duration, we cannot overlook the hope Iran's incumbent government has revived in the hearts of Iranians.

It is evident that the administration is determined to resolve economic challenges. It is also our duty to assist it as much as possible, rather than staying on the sidelines while expecting perfection. To support the government effectively, we must first identify the challenges

ahead. Only with sufficient understanding of these challenges can we work towards solutions.

Currently, the most pressing issue in our society is economic difficulties. The incumbent government is well aware of these issues and has prioritized them systematically. For example, addressing wages for workers, the situation of retirees, sanctions, and the soaring inflation rate — ten times the global average — are among the initiatives the government of Pezeshkian has begun tackling. However, achieving results will require time.

The change in administration alone has sparked hope among the people, and now, as the administration takes steps toward fulfilling its promises, this hope continues to grow. It is hoped that the incumbent government, with its dedication, will soon achieve the desired outcomes, freeing the nation from its current struggles.

# What are Russia, Iran cooking up?

## Exploring recent flurry of high-level meetings



By Simon Watkins  
Former senior FX trader, journalist

### OPINION

*A flurry of high-level meetings between very senior Russian and Iranian figures occurred over a four-week period from the end of September to the middle of October. These included Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin, and Secretary of the Russian Federation Security Council Sergei Shoigu, a senior energy source who works closely with Iran's Petroleum Ministry exclusively told OilPrice.com. President Vladimir Putin himself met with Iran's new President Masoud Pezeshkian on October 11 in Turkmenistan, and again at the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) Summit that ran from 22–24 October.*

*The focus of these meetings was to ratify key elements of the 20-year deal — 'The Treaty on the Basis of Mutual Relations and Principles of Cooperation between Iran and Russia' — approved by Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Seyyed Ali Khamenei on January 18, following the death of Iran's previous president, Ebrahim Raisi. In several key respects, this Treaty develops key policies of enhanced cooperation laid down in the 'Iran-China 25-Year Comprehensive Cooperation Agreement'. All these deals are aimed at further broadening and deepening the already close cooperation between Iran and Russia, and Iran and China, on energy, trade, finance and banking, and defence matters, among others.*



As part of this, several new agreements have been made to closer coordinate the two gas giants' efforts on exploration, development, production, and marketing of the energy source as delivered through regional pipelines and in LNG form. Russia will continue to split the first right of refusal on all Iran's key gas (and oil) sites with China according to each country's broader strategic interests in the region in which each site is located.

But there are three bigger imperatives in play in the gas work to be done between Iran and Russia. One of these was highlighted by the newly-appointed Deputy Oil Minister and Head of National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) Saeed Tavakoli, who said that a successful example of the sort of collaboration Iran and Russia are envisioning is the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF). Long-touted as a potential 'Gas OPEC', the GECF officially moved on December 23, 2008, from being a loose alliance of several leading gas-producing countries into a formal organisation headquartered in Doha, Qatar. Aside from the core members of Russia, Iran, and Qatar, the GECF's 11 other members comprise Algeria, Bolivia, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Libya, Nigeria, Trinidad and Tobago, and Venezuela.

Together, Russia, Iran, and Qatar account for just under 60 percent of the world's gas reserves, with Russia occupying the number one spot globally — with around 1,688 trillion cubic feet (tcf) of gas — and Iran the number two position (with about 1,200 tcf). Overall, the GECF controls about 71 percent of global gas supplies, 44 percent of its marketed production, 53 percent of its gas pipelines, and 57 percent of its liquefied natural gas (LNG) exports.

The intention of the enhanced cooperation between Russia and Iran in this field is to expedite a series of \$40 billion worth of gas exploration, development, production, and marketing deals signed between Gazprom and the NIGC. These deals, built upon a broad 2022 memorandum of understanding (MoU) between Russia and Iran, aimed at controlling as much of the two key elements in the global supply matrix — gas supplied over land via pipelines and gas supplied via ships in LNG form — as possible. According to a statement from Hamid Hosseini, chairman of Iran's Oil, Gas, and Petrochemical Products Exporters' Union, in Tehran, just after the 2022 MoU with Gazprom had been signed: "Now, the Russians have come to the conclusion that the consumption of gas in the world will increase and the tendency towards consumption of LNG has increased and they alone are not able to meet the world's demand, so there is no room left for gas competition between Russia and

Iran."

Another of the larger imperatives at play in this enhanced cooperation between Russia and Iran will be the continued shift towards using their local currencies in dealings between each other and relevant cooperation partners around the world, and also with their joint biggest energy customer and superpower sponsor, China. This was a particular matter of interest of Russian Prime Minister Mishustin during a meeting with Iranian First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref, with the former highlighting that during his visit, 13 cooperation documents relating to strengthening and developing financial and banking cooperation — including expanded use of local currencies — were ratified both each side.

Russia and Iran are acutely aware that a key lever in the US's global power in general, and over each of them — and their major backer, China — derives from the primary use of the US dollar in international trade, including in the energy markets. This view of the US dollar as a weapon was reiterated by the former executive vice-president of the Bank of China Zhang Yanling in a speech in April 2022, saying that the latest sanctions against Russia would "cause the US to lose its credibility and undermine the [US] dollar's hegemony in the long run". She further suggested that China should help the world "get rid of the dollar hegemony sooner rather than later".

For the same reasons, the replacement of the US dollar as the favoured medium of exchange has long been a focus of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), dominated by China and Russia but with

a membership comprising several countries of the same view about the US dollar. The move away from the US currency could gain traction in the SCO if pushed sufficiently, as it is the world's biggest regional political, economic, and defence organisation both in terms of geographic scope and population. It covers 60 percent of the Eurasian continent (by far the biggest single landmass on Earth), 40 percent of the world's population, and more than 20 percent of global GDP. Aside from its vast scale and scope, the SCO believes in the idea and practice of the 'multi-polar world,' which China anticipates will be dominated by it by 2030. Veteran Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has since stated that: "The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation is working to establish a rational and just world order and [...] it provides us with a unique opportunity to take part in the process of forming a fundamentally new model of geopolitical integration."

A final one of the broad imperatives at play in this enhanced cooperation between Russia and Iran is the enormous geopolitically strategic advantages available in building out routes across vast areas of land across the Middle East and beyond through which to transport gas (and oil). At the most recent series of high-level meetings, all the senior Russian figures wanted assurances from their new Iranian counterparts under new President Pezeshkian that these key routes agreed in the 20-year deal in January would still go ahead. They were assured that they would, according to the Iran source.

With broader links into the International North-South Transport Corridor aimed at

developing a network of links across Eurasia, the Russia-Iran Energy Corridor will provide a direct link from Russia to Iran for gas in the first instance. That said, it is also intended as the first part of the 'Land Bridge' that Iran has desperately been trying to create since its 1979 Revolution brought it into being as a global Islamic power. The Land Bridge would run from Iran across Iraq and onto the Mediterranean Sea coast of Syria.

This would enable Iran and Russia to exponentially increase weapons delivery into southern Lebanon and the Golan Heights area of Syria to be used in attacks on Israel as part of a wider rolling plan. With Russia having an extensive military presence along the coast, both with the naval base at Tartus and with the Hmeimim Air Base and nearby listening station at Latakia, the various oil and gas exploration and development contracts shared by Russian, Chinese, and Iranian companies operating in Iraq provide the link from Iran to Syria. Under international law, oil and gas firms are entitled to station as many 'security personnel' as they wish in and around these high-value sites, including around the transport system that connects them.

Additional support for these hubs along much of the Land Bridge route is likely to come from plans agreed upon between Iraq and China to construct the \$17 billion Strategic Development Road that will create its own transport corridor from Basra to southern Turkey (close to the Syrian border), and link in with China's 'Belt and Road Initiative'.

The full article first appeared on OilPrice.



Iran's top-ranking delegation (R) meets with its Russian counterpart to discuss a range of issues including bilateral ties on the sidelines of the 16th BRICS Summit in Kazan, Russia, on October 23, 2024.

● [PHOTO](#)



The intention of the enhanced cooperation between Russia and Iran in this field is to expedite a series of \$40 billion worth of gas exploration, development, production, and marketing deals signed between Gazprom and the NIGC. These deals, built upon a broad 2022 MoU between Russia and Iran, aimed at controlling as much of the two key elements in the global supply matrix — gas supplied over land via pipelines and gas supplied via ships in LNG form — as possible.



The map suggests the clear attractiveness of the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) route compared to its alternative, the traditional route that goes through the Suez Canal.

● [GEOPOLITICAL MONITOR](#)

# Iran, Russia seek to reshape global hegemony

## New bilateral agreement sets stage



By Emil Avdaliani  
Scholar

### OPINION

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian met in Kazan, Russia, during the latest BRICS (a loose political economic grouping originally consisting of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) summit, held on October 22–24. This follows an earlier meeting between the two leaders on bilateral ties in Ashgabat on October 11. Given that Iran has recently inaugurated a new president who seeks to improve foreign relations, the bilateral agenda was quite expansive, accounting for both countries' interest in developing closer ties in light of their respective conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East. Both sides have found themselves in a similar position — isolated by the West, targeted by sanctions, and eager for new allies — and look to establish closer political and military cooperation. Moscow and Tehran are motivated to introduce an agreement that would reflect their changing preferences and underline their shared opposition to the collective West.

Cooperation between the two countries has seen incremental improvement across various fronts since 2022. This trend is expected to culminate in the signing of a comprehensive agreement that promises to redefine the scope of their strategic partnership. Although an exact date for such a signing has not yet been established, both Moscow and Tehran will likely look to ratify some sort of treaty by the end of the year, as both sides are eager to quickly sign an agreement, demonstrated by their ambitious designs in bilateral ties.

While Iran and Russia have been historical adversaries more often than not — having vied for influence in the Caucasus and Middle East throughout the imperial era — their cooperation does have historical roots. In the late 16th century, Safavid Iran and the Russian Tsardom joined forces to counter Ottoman expansion. Similarly, in today's context, Russia and Iran's warming relationship is driven by shared grievances against the West and their common desire to challenge the world order. Tehran's support for backed regimes throughout the Middle East and



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian (l) and Russian President Vladimir Putin extend hands to shake during their meeting on the sidelines of the BRICS summit in Kazan, Russia, on October 23, 2024.  
● MAXIM SHEMETOV/AP

The exact contents of what would be in this agreement are unknown. Compared with a previous treaty signed by the two countries more than 20 years ago, the expected agreements will likely involve much more extensive political, economic, and cultural ties. A heavy emphasis will likely be placed on military and security cooperation as this is the cornerstone of their expanding relationship. More precisely, drone and missile production is sure to top Moscow and Tehran's agendas, given that their respective conflicts with Ukraine and Israel have proven to both the importance of such weapon systems. The two sides are also likely to double down on greater training assistance and Iran's purchase of Russian Su-35 fighter jets and potentially S-400 missile systems.

Outside of defense, the new agreement is also set to extend collaboration into areas such as trade, media, education, space exploration, cultural exchange, and a common payment system. Moscow and Tehran will also be eager to resolve disagreements impeding the construction of major gas pipelines in Iran, implementing liquefied natural gas projects, and undertaking swap operations involving natural gas and oil products.

Infrastructure will be a critical topic of discussion. Moscow and Tehran have tried to improve and expand the vital International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC). Running along the Caspian Sea, connecting Russia with Iran's southern ports, and creating access to the Indian Ocean and South Asian markets, this corridor has been a historic trading route between Russia and Iran since the 16th century, used by both to bypass Ottoman influence and access distant markets across the region.

Moscow's support for the Syrian regime have both been viewed as examples of their efforts to counter Western influence in the region.

For Iran, Russia's attack on Ukraine in 2022 and its subsequent isolation from Western diplomatic institutions acted as a defining moment that pushed Russia into closer relations with the Islamic Republic. Isolated from Western trade and facing heavy sanctions, Russia's pivot to the Middle East and Asia has made Iran an indispensable partner. Iran has supported Russia with advanced weaponry, and these budding ties even extended to proxy conflicts, such as Moscow's alleged support for the Houthis in Yemen, even at the risk of damaging Russia's relationships with other regional powers such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, which have traditionally opposed the Houthis.

Moscow's shift to a more pro-Iran stance has become much more pronounced in recent years. Even so, direct military support in Iran's conflicts, particularly with Israel — which harbors a large Russian population — remains unlikely. Nevertheless, leaders in Iran and Russia envision a multipolar world premised on challenging Western geopolitical and economic hegemony. This fits into a more comprehensive continuum of countries, China being the principal actor, looking to create alternative alliance networks and key geopolitical leaders globally. The rise of transnational organizations such as BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization marks a new era in global geopolitics, with Russia and Iran positioning themselves as ascending powers.

The full article first appeared on Eurasia Daily Monitor.

# BRICS summit boost to India-Iran ties



By Rajeev Agarwal  
Former director at India's Ministry of External Affairs

### OPINION

At the 16th BRICS Summit hosted by Russia in Kazan (October 22–24, 2024), there were a few meetings on the sidelines which created a buzz. One such meeting was between India and Iran, both close civilisational friends and looking to strengthen a stagnating partnership. Iran, which is now embroiled in the war in Gaza, is looking for Indian support in de-escalating the crisis. India, too, has supported having a cease-fire and de-escalation at the earliest. Globally, India is being widely sought after to facilitate a peaceful resolution to the conflict as it enjoys trust and goodwill across both ends of the conflict, with Israel and Iran.



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian (l) meets with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the sidelines of the BRICS Summit in Kazan, Russia, on October 22, 2024.  
● X

### Much potential

The bilateral meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President of the Islamic Republic of Iran Masoud Pezeshkian was the first time that the leaders have met. During the meeting, they acknowledged the strong and untapped potential in the bilateral relationship. Mr. Pezeshkian appreciated India's growing role in the world and underlined its potential role in de-escalating the Gaza conflict. He also acknowledged the key role played by India in 2023 in Iran's entry into key multilateral organisations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and BRICS. Both sides also discussed the possibilities of strengthening cooperation in key areas such as the Chabahar Port and the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC).

Iran's importance for India, however, goes well beyond the Chabahar Port and the connectivity options that it provides. Iran is vitally important due to its vast reserves of crude oil and natural gas. Its total oil reserves are estimated at 209 billion barrels and that of natural gas at 33,988 billion cubic metres, which at the end of 2021, accounted for 24% of the oil reserves of West Asia and 12% of the world. Despite crippling economic sanctions and the ongoing war in Gaza, Iran's crude production in May 2024 rose to 3.4 million barrels per day (bpd) while crude oil exports in March 2024 averaged 1.61 million bpd.

### Options for closer partnership

The Chabahar Port has been the driving force of the bilateral relationship in recent times. In a deal signed on May 13 this year, India and Iran signed a 10-year contract for the operation of the port. Chabahar Port also provides easy and short access to India's Kandla and Mumbai ports. As it is located outside the Strait of Hormuz, it insulates India's trade from any threat of closure of sea lanes due to conflicts in the Persian Gulf region. In addition, a

railway link of 700 km between Chabahar and Zahedan city is being fast-tracked, to be connected later to the railway network of Iran. A further road link from Zahedan to Zaranj in Afghanistan could provide seamless connectivity for humanitarian aid from India to Afghanistan.

Energy supplies are the next big possibility. Before May 2019, Iran met almost 12% of India's crude oil needs. As bilateral ties take better shape, oil and gas imports could re-commence from Iran which could then open up a new range of possibilities to fulfil India's energy needs.

To combat the threat of terror groups operating from Pakistan, India and Iran could conduct joint counterterrorism exercises and develop intelligence-sharing mechanisms. On the naval front, port calls at Iranian ports and the development of logistical facilities in the Persian Gulf could prove extremely useful.

### Aspects of Indian diplomacy

India and Iran can achieve a lot together. There is recognition that too much time has already been lost. India's ability to de-hyphenate ties and engage inde-



The first consignment of Indian equipment for the development of port activities at Iran's Chabahar Port  
● TINN

The ambitious Iran-Oman-India gas pipeline has been under discussion since 1993. In May 2022, Iran and Oman agreed to develop two undersea gas pipelines and an oil field along their maritime borders. If this materialises, extending these to India could be an option.

Close military cooperation with Iran is also a possibility. The two countries had signed a defence cooperation agreement in 2001 but nothing came of it, mainly due to Western sanctions on Iran. In recent years, Iran has developed modern weapons platforms such as short- and medium-range ballistic missiles, hypersonic missiles, and armed drones. India too is looking to develop cheap and effective armed drones and could find an effective partner in Iran.

pendently with nations that are adversarial to each other, such as Iran and Israel, could be useful in driving the ties. Also, India's decision to exercise strategic autonomy in issues of national interest, as seen in its engagement with Russia during the Ukraine war, is a useful precedent to invigorate ties with Iran.

India, under Modi 3.0, is looking to strengthen India's outreach and strategic convergence in West Asia. Similarly, Iran is looking to consolidate its diplomatic gains of recent years and considers India to be an important partner. The meeting at the BRICS Summit may have just given the right impetus for both.

The full article first appeared on The Hindu.

# Household names lined up for National Wrestling Championships

## Sports Desk

Kamran Qasempour's bid for a berth in next year's Wrestling World Championships will begin with participation at the National Championships.

Those wrestlers who failed to win a medal at the Paris Olympics and last month's World Championships will have to take part at December's national event to have a shot at a place in the Iranian freestyle squad, according to the selection process for major international tournaments in 2025, which was unveiled by the sport's governing body in the country this week.

Two-time world gold medalist Qasempour made his long-awaited return to action in October's world event in Tirana but missed out on the 92kg podium after his last-four setback against Russian sensation Abdulrashid Sadulaev was followed by a 6-2 loss to American great David Taylor in the third-place bout.

Double world bronze winner Younes Emami will also have to participate at the National Championships after his freestyle 74kg campaign in Paris came to an end against American Kyle Dake in the quarterfinals.

Alireza Sarlak, a former world and Asian silver medalist, also left the French capital empty-handed due to a weigh-in failure in the 57kg class and will be in action at the flagship do-



Iranian freestyle wrestler Kamran Qasempour (blue) is seen in action against American David Taylor in the 92kg bronze-medal bout at the Wrestling World Championships in Tirana, Albania, on Oct. 31, 2024.  
● UWW

the Iranian 97kg slot at the Paris Olympics, looked to be back to top form in his familiar 92kg territory when he eased past opponents from Japan, Turkey, and Moldova. Awaiting Qasempour in the last-four round was two-time Olympic champion Sadulaev, who was chasing a sixth world gold in Tirana. Qasempour looked to have done enough for a famous victory before the Russian scored a four-point takedown with four seconds left on the clock to secure a 5-3 win.

"Kamran had been out of action for months with an injury before the competitions and did not have proper training. Sadulaev is an all-time great in the sport and was the clear favorite in the semifinal," Dorostkar said, adding: "Qasempour still came up with the right gameplan against Sadulaev and delivered a brave performance. He would have won the bout if it wasn't for his single mistake as well as Sadulaev's higher experience in the closing seconds."

"Kamran suffered a mental breakdown after the semifinal setback and couldn't sleep all night. We tried to lift his spirits for the bronze-medal contest, but to no avail, and the mental strain ultimately got the better of him against Taylor."

mestic competition.

Rahman Amouzad, Amirhossein Zare', and Amir-Ali Azarpira – the Iranian medal-winning trio at the Paris Games – as well as Mohammad Nokhodi, who won a 79kg bronze in the Albanian capital, will join the latter stages

of the Iranian trials.

Joining them in being exempt from the National Championships are Ali Mo'meni, Ebrahim Khari, Abbas Ebrahimzadeh, Ali Khorramdel, Ali Rezaei, Mahdi Yousefi, Abolfazl Rahmani, Amirhossein Firouzpour, Mah-

di Hajiloueian, and Amirreza Ma'soumi – Iranian medalists at the world junior and under-23 championships – as well as 2023 world cadet champion Sina Khalili and two-time world silver winner Amirmohammad Yazdani.

## 'Mental breakdown'

Pejman Dorostkar, the head coach of the Iranian freestyle team, believes a "mental breakdown" cost Qasempour in his bout against Taylor last month. Qasempour, who stood behind Azarpira in the pecking order for

## Iran midfielder Qoddous ruled out of Kyrgyzstan game with injury

### Sports Desk

Iran midfielder Saman Qoddous will miss Tuesday's World Cup qualifier against Kyrgyzstan in Bishkek with a hamstring injury.

The Ittihad Kalba player, who sat out Thursday's 3-2 victory over North Korea with the same problem, left the Iranian squad on Saturday to fly back to the UAE for further treatment on his injury.

Tractor center-back Shoja Khalilzadeh also missed the visit to the Kyrgyz capital after receiving his marching orders in the second half against North Korea and is likely to be replaced by Persepolis defender Hossein Kan'anizadegan in the starting XI. Mohammad Mohebbi, who found the net twice on Thursday, will be the other key absentee for Team Melli in Bishkek after suffering the same injury as Qoddous, as Sepahan's Mahdi Limouchi received a late callup to fill in for the Rostov FC winger.

Iran sits atop the Group A table with 13 points after five rounds of matches – three points clear of second-placed Uzbekistan, which fell to a 3-2 loss to Qatar in Doha last time out in the Asian qualifiers, and, more significantly, six above the United Arab Emirates and Qatar.

With a top-two finish in each of the three groups securing direct qualification for the 2026 finals, maximum points in Tuesday's game will all but guarantee a place for Amir Qalenoee's side in the showpiece cohosted by the United States, Mexico, and Canada.

Iran had to dig deep for a 1-0 win on home soil in the reverse fixture in September, with a Mahdi Taremi's first-half strike making the difference between the two sides in Isfahan's Fooladshahr Stadium.

## Alcaraz relishing role in Nadal's career farewell in Davis Cup



● CLIVE BRUNSKILL/GETTY IMAGES

REUTERS – Spain's Carlos Alcaraz said playing in Rafa Nadal's career farewell in the Davis Cup Final Eight will be the most special event he will play in his career.

Nadal, who captured 22 Grand Slam titles in a glittering career, will make his final bow in the team event being staged in Malaga starting Tuesday.

Spain will face the Netherlands in their opening match in what is likely to be a momentous occasion.

"It's probably the most special tournament I'll play in my career, because of what's happening, because of the circumstances," Alcaraz was quoted by the ATP website after arriving in Spain following his ATP Finals exit.

"The Davis Cup has always been a tournament that I'd

love to win one day, I'm passionate about representing Spain.

"Having Rafa by my side, knowing it's his last tournament, will make it much more special."

The 21-year-old Alcaraz, who already owns four Grand Slam titles, played with Nadal at this year's Paris Olympics, the pair losing in the quarterfinals.

"I'll try to contribute and help the team any way I can – for me, for Spain and especially for Rafa," Alcaraz said.

"No player deserves more to finish the incredible career he had with a title, and I know how special the Davis Cup is for him. It will be a difficult challenge but winning it for Rafa is a huge motivation."

Spain have won the Davis Cup six times, the last occasion in

2019 when Nadal inspired the hosts to the trophy in Madrid.

"Rafa's farewell is much more important, at least for me," Alcaraz said. "The Davis Cup is every year. Rafa's farewell, saying goodbye to a legend of the sport, unfortunately only happens once. Personally I'm very excited to be by Rafa's side for his farewell."

"And the fact that it's in the Davis, which is a very important tournament for him, virtually where he started his career with that victory against (Andy) Roddick (in 2004). It will be an incredible event because of the occasion and hopefully it will end with the title."

Eight nations are contesting the Davis Cup Final Eight with action taking place in Malaga between Nov. 19 and Nov. 24.

# Iran notifies EU of 'limited' opportunity for nuclear diplomacy

**International Desk**

Iran's foreign minister said in a warning to the European countries that an opportunity has arisen for the revival of nuclear negotiations but it is "limited." Abbas Araghchi's comments came after the head of UN nuclear watchdog Rafael Grossi visited Iran and held talks with high-ranking officials. "There is still an opportunity for diplomacy, although this opportunity is not much, it is a limited opportunity," Araghchi said in an interview with the state television. Talks, though, could resume between Iran and the European countries soon towards enabling the revival of the 2015 nuclear agreement, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the top diplomat said. He reminded that the UN Security Council Resolution 2231, which endorsed the JCPOA upon its conclusion, would expire next October. "Therefore, if we fall short of coming to an agreement before that, we will come across some critical conditions."

However, Iran was "completely ready" to engage in fresh negotiations that would yield results if the other parties were "truly willing" to lead the talks towards fruition too, according to Araghchi. The visit by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) director general is seen as one of the last chances for diplomacy before US President-elect Donald Trump returns to the White House in January. During his first term between 2017 and 2021, Trump imposed a policy known as "maximum pressure" against Iran. This included Washington tearing up the nuclear deal that had been reached under his predecessor, Barack Obama in 2015. Trump reinstated heavy sanctions, which the current US administration of Joe Biden has maintained. "Our nuclear path in the next year will be a sensitive and complicated one, but we are prepared for any scenario and conditions," Araghchi said on Saturday. He said Iran will be ready for both "confrontation" and "coop-



Abbas Araghchi

eration", whichever path the other side decides to follow. During his visit, the IAEA chief held talks with Araghchi as well as with President Masoud Pezeshkian and Iran's nuclear chief Mohammad Eslami. Grossi also toured the key uranium enrichment plants of Natanz and Fordo in central Iran.

**IAEA meeting**

His visit came ahead of a meet-

ing of the IAEA's Board of Governors later this month at which Britain, France and Germany could propose a new anti-Iran resolution. In his interview on Saturday, Araghchi warned against such a measure. "If a resolution is passed against us, it will face reciprocal actions from Iran. We will take new measures in our nuclear program that they will certainly not like."

"It looks like there is a political approach in this area, [as part of which] the Westerners are trying to force the agency's Director General [Rafael Grossi] into complicating the situation," the top diplomat stated. Expectations have run high that Trump will take a harder line with Tehran when he takes office in January. The New York Times reported on Thursday that Trump's tech

billionaire ally Elon Musk had met the Iranian ambassador to the UN in a bid to defuse Tehran-Washington tensions. Araghchi in his interview on Saturday denied that such a meeting had taken place. "Now is not the time for such meetings. It is not wise, and there is no will for it."

**Israel's attacks**

During his interview, Araghchi also warned the Israeli regime about the consequences of launching further aggression against Iran, including the country's nuclear facilities. "Whenever the Zionist regime takes an action against the Islamic Republic, we will respond with comparable and proportionate measures," the top diplomat said. "In fact, they know what will happen if they carry out an attack against our nuclear installations," he added. The official reminded that the regime has issued a number of threats against the Islamic Republic's nuclear sites, which Tehran has duly reported to the IAEA.

## Israeli strike kills dozens in Gaza's Beit Lahiya

Hezbollah's spokesman assassinated by Israel



AFP

An Israeli attack on a residential tower in Beit Lahiya, north Gaza, killed at least 72 people, Gaza's Government Media Office said on Sunday. The civil defense said its teams are unable to reach the area, and that dozens more are wounded and trapped under the rubble. The Israeli strikes also hit a central Beirut district where a Lebanese source reported the death of Hezbollah's spokesman in one raid. A Lebanese security source said Hezbollah spokesman Mohammed Afif was killed in a strike on Beirut's Ras al-Nabaa district, one of relatively few attacks outside the group's strongholds. Israel's military declined to comment, AFP reported. A year after the Gaza war began in last Oc-

tober, Israel launched a major assault in the north of the Palestinian territory which it claimed was meant to stop Hamas fighters from regrouping there. Gaza's civil defense spokesman Mahmud Bassal said three separate attacks on refugee camps in central Gaza also killed 15 people, and an Israeli drone strike on the southern city of Rafah killed five. Gaza's health ministry on Sunday said the overall death toll in more than 13 months of war had reached 43,846. The majority of the dead are civilians, according to ministry figures, which the United Nations considers reliable. Pope Francis has called for an investigation to determine if Israel's attacks in Gaza constitute genocide, according to excerpts released Sunday from an upcoming new book ahead of the pontiff's jubilee year. It's the first time that Francis has openly urged for an investigation of genocide allegations over Israel's actions in the Gaza Strip. In September, he said Israel's attacks in Gaza and Lebanon have been "immoral" and disproportionate, and that its military has gone beyond the rules of war.

**Attacks on Lebanon**

On Israel's second front in the north, the Lebanese security source, speaking on condition

of anonymity, said Hezbollah's Afif was killed in a strike on a central Beirut building which housed the office of the Lebanese branch of Syria's ruling Baath party. Lebanese state media earlier said the Israeli strike on Ras al-Nabaa district killed at least one person and wounded three. Previous strikes claimed by Israel have killed senior Hezbollah officials, including its leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah in late September. AFP TV footage showed several strikes hit Hezbollah's south Beirut stronghold earlier, after the Israeli military warned people to evacuate. The Israeli army said about 20 projectiles were seen crossing from Lebanon into Israel on Sunday, and that some were intercepted. Israel has escalated its bombing of Lebanon since September 23 and has since sent in ground troops, following almost a year of limited exchanges of fire with Hezbollah fighters. Lebanese authorities say more than 3,452 people have been killed since October last year, with most casualties recorded since September. Israel says 48 soldiers have been killed fighting Hezbollah. In Israel, police said they arrested three suspects over flares shot near the home of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in the central city of Caesarea, while he was away.

## Pezeshkian: Government bent on implementing sea-based plans

**National Desk**

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian said his government is determined to implement sea-based development plans which are important for the country's development, growth and prosperity. Pezeshkian made the remarks in a meeting held on Sunday to review development plans focusing on Makoran coastal area in the country's southeast. Pezeshkian pointed to the fact that the blue economy plays an important role in the development of countries that have access to the seas. "One of our main priorities in the 14th government is pursuing and developing the sea-based economy for prosperity and economic development across the country." "It is necessary to design our development plans with a broad but realistic view so that we can come atop in the region in terms of economy and technology," he said. Iran's Ports and Maritime Or-

ganization (PMO), in a recent report, underlined the importance of the country's maritime capacities and the role that the sector can play in developing the country's economy. Last Monday, the president highlighted the importance of fundamental reforms in the proposed plans for the development of the Makoran coastal region, issuing four key directives to facilitate the preparation of the necessary conditions for development in the region. Pezeshkian referred to the necessity of achieving the desired outcomes in the proposed development plans for the Makoran region as requiring problem-solving and providing solutions to the issues with the goal of creating a region that serves the people and the country. The geopolitical, geostrategic and geoeconomic advantages of Makoran hosting a comprehensive sea, road, rail and air transportation network along oil and gas transmission lines would enormously fortify Iran and upgrade its status.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi  
Cartoonist



## Assad calls eradication of terrorism 'regional, int'l responsibility'

**International Desk**

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad said regional countries and the international community are required to bring an end to terrorism plaguing the West Asia region. He made the remarks during a meeting with Iran's Defense Minister Brigadier General Aziz Nasirzadeh in the Syrian capital of Damascus on Sunday. Assad said that eradicating terrorism is a regional and international responsibility, warning that the threats posed by the scourge endanger all people across the world. The Syrian president and the Iranian defense chief also dis-

cussed defense and security issues in the region, as well as ways to strengthen Tehran-Damascus cooperation aimed at countering terrorism and enhancing regional stability and security. Earlier in the day, Nasirzadeh held talks with his Syrian counterpart Lieutenant General Ali Mahmoud Abbas on a range of bilateral and regional issues. Nasirzadeh and Abbas exchanged their views on the promotion of defense cooperation between the two countries. They also highlighted the key role of the regional countries in ensuring security and called for the withdrawal of foreign



forces from the region. Speaking to reporters upon his arrival in Damascus on Saturday, the Iranian defense minister highlighted Syria's place in Iran's foreign policy. Hailing Syria's valuable experiences in the war on terrorism, Nasirzadeh described Syria as a main pillar of the Axis of Resistance. In 2017, military advisory

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad (R) meets Iran's Defense Minister Brigadier General Aziz Nasirzadeh (L) in Damascus, Syria on November 17, 2024. SYRIAN PRESIDENCY assistance provided by the Islamic Republic helped the government in Damascus to score a monumental victory over the Daesh terrorist group.

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# Unveiling tourism potential of Zanzan Province

## Iranica Desk

Zanzan Province is located in the northwest part of the country, and many people pass through this province to reach their destinations. This province has unparalleled and unique capacities in various sectors, especially in the field of cultural heritage, tourism, and handicrafts. According to experts and authorities, these specific and sometimes astonishing capacities have not been introduced to the public as they should be, and this issue requires more attention.



● Soltaniyeh Dome



● Katleh Khur Cave



● Mahneshan Colored Mountains



● Grand Bazaar of Zanzan



● A garden in Khorramdarreh

## Historical significance

Statistics show that more than 2,000 historical and natural sites have been identified in Zanzan Province, of which 925 have been registered on Iran's National Heritage List. Additionally, Zanzan Province is home to numerous valuable archaeological sites, with landmarks such as the Soltaniyeh Dome, the largest brick dome in the world, and the Grand Bazaar of Zanzan, one of the longest covered bazaars in Iran, standing out among them. The existence of six salt men dating back 2,700 years, the Sangi Caravanserai (Stone Caravanserai) from the Safavid era, the seven-story Katleh Khur Cave in Khodabandeh dating back 120 million years, the Mahneshan Colored Mountains as a natural attraction, as well as historical bridges, tombs, baths, and mosques, along with exquisite handicrafts, are among the other tourism capacities of this province. Experiencing them is truly rewarding for any traveler.

## Tourism events and growth

Deputy head of Zanzan Province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization stated that 44 tourism events are held in Zanzan throughout the year, with 22 of them registered in the national calendar of tourism events. Davood Abayan emphasized the positive impact of these events on neighboring provinces such as West Azarbaijan and East Azarbaijan, adding that Zanzan is considered one of the leading provinces in hosting tourism events in the northwest region. This official noted that this year, the number of tourists choosing Zanzan Province as their travel destination has increased.

He mentioned that the capacity of beds in the province's accommodation centers was fully occupied this summer, a level of occupancy that has not been seen before. It

indicates the development of the tourism sector and the benefits of tourism for the local economy. Abayan said, "We strive to effectively showcase the province's offerings at the national level through structured planning and hosting various tourism events in national, regional, and local dimensions." He further stated that fortunately, this goal has largely been achieved in the province, and on the other hand, the risk of tourism investment has decreased in the region. This is important as it could lead to not only the creation of added value but also the enhancement of tourism infrastructure in the province. He mentioned that the provincial investment technical committee meets every two weeks to issue preliminary approvals for investment requests, indicating investor interest in the tourism sector of Zanzan Province.

## Investment opportunities

Head of Zanzan's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Department stated that the Grand Bazaar of Zanzan, the World Heritage Site of the Soltaniyeh Dome, and the gardens of Khorramdarreh and Abhar are among the main attractions of this province. Mehdi Baqeri added that being located on a major northwest transit route, the existence of highways, proximity to eight important provinces, the availability of a railway and airport, suitable transportation facilities, especially buses, access to land for creating tourism infrastructure, and the beautiful nature of the province's villages are other advantages of this province.

## Challenges in tourism development

This official referred to the challenges facing the tourism sector in the province and said that the lack of up-to-date, thoughtful, and

creative management in the tourism sector, the absence of consultancy and attraction of new investments, the lack of innovative proposals to attract both foreign and domestic investors, and the creation of income and added value for local residents, as well as the absence of comprehensive planning to guide investors toward special tourism projects, are among these issues.

## Future projects and potential

Baqeri noted that the implementation of prestigious and large-scale projects, such as a health village with clinics, health centers, hotels, and specialized and super-specialized hospitals adhering to global standards and at reasonable costs to attract health tourists from neighboring countries, could significantly help in revenue generation and job creation in the province.

He stated that in this regard, the execution of such prestigious and large-scale projects could greatly contribute to income generation and employment in the province. He continued that the creation of a recreational and tourism area near the expressway, the use of advanced high-speed trains, proper rail laying for quick and safe transit, and the establishment of a place for the temporary accommodation of tourists with appropriate facilities can help enhance tourism in the province.

## Funding challenges

Hossein Khamseh, a tourism expert in the province, referred to the lack of sufficient funding as the most significant challenge facing tourism in the region. He mentioned that despite the province's capacities, large-scale tourism projects have not been defined, adding: "This issue is related to reasons such as the high costs of implementing these

projects, which has in turn created challenges."

## Need for strategic planning

This expert emphasized that the establishment of large-scale tourism projects in the province has national significance and continued: "For example, the launch of the Mahneshan Geopark has been considered in the provincial planning document, which is defined based on geographical location and provincial capacity, and geological studies have shown that Zanzan has the capacity to establish such a geopark." Khamseh stated that the establishment of such a park would have a national and eventually international impact, indicating that undertaking such a project would naturally require a substantial amount of funding, which has unfortunately been neglected and somewhat forgotten, although there is still a possibility for such a plan to be implemented.

## Importance of budget allocation

He noted that the allocation of budget for tourism projects is another challenge in this sector, stating: "In many provinces, specific budgets have been defined for certain issues, allowing them to spend on their priority matters." He added: "An example is the promotion and advertising of tourism, which has a specific budget line in some provinces, including Kurdistan, but unfortunately, such a line has not been foreseen in Zanzan Province." Khamseh emphasized that the province must focus on the important issue of advertising and information dissemination for progress and development in tourism, stating: "The results of this are clearly observable in neighboring provinces; therefore, in the current situation, this issue should not be overlooked."