

Aref urges focus on finishing incomplete refinery projects

Iran's vice president stated that the refining industry is considered a strategic industry for the country, emphasizing that priority in expanding refinery capacity should be given to incomplete development projects.

Mohammadreza Aref made the comments on Sunday evening during a meeting to review the performance and strategic plans for the development of the country's refining and distribution industry, attended by several officials in the field as well as representatives from refineries, Shana reported. He praised the efforts of managers and workers in this sector, describing their works as significant and added that the oil industry is a driving force for the nation, along with the upstream sectors like refineries, which are considered strategic industries.

The vice president further noted that, under current circumstances, priority should be given to expanding existing refineries and completing incomplete projects rather than starting new ones. Addressing refinery managers, Aref urged them to step forward with motivation and exploit high-tech technologies, as well as the potential and talent of young Iranian experts.

He recalled that in the past, top high school graduates often prioritized studying at Petroleum University of Technology among their top three choices, stating, "Today, we need to create the same environment again so that talented graduates will actively get engaged in this industry." Aref assured that the government would offer full cooperation in addressing customs issues related to the equipment and modernization of refineries. However, he emphasized that environmental issues and related permits must be handled in a way that they do not harm the environment.

Aref reiterated the need to prioritize incomplete and developmental projects when expanding refinery capacity and mentioned that increasing productivity—set by law to grow by 2.8 percent across targeted eight units—can be achieved through modern and high-tech technologies, stating, "You should head in that direction."

The VP expressed concern that some priorities in this industry have not been correctly identified, pointing out that several decades ago, the cost of desulfurization in refineries was significantly lower, but resistance to this change has led to substantially higher costs today.

Pezeshkian: Iran bent on completion of INSTC with Russia

Economy Desk

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian said on Monday that his government is determined to complete the International North South Transit Corridor (INSTC).

Pezeshkian made the announcement in a meeting with Vitaly Gennadyevich Savelyev, the Russian deputy prime minister for transport, as both sides discussed the expansion of bilateral relations and strategies for accelerating the completion of the strategic INSTC project, reported president.ir.

Pezeshkian highlighted the priority of implementation of the Rasht-Astara railway project as a part of INSTC

under the Iran-Russia agreement. He stated that Iran is committed to the terms of the agreement and called on the Russian side to begin mapping the route and preparing for project implementation as soon as possible.

"The Iranian government emphasizes the execution of this agreement, and our Minister of Roads and Urban Development [Farzaneh Sadeq-Malvajerd] is responsible for overseeing its implementation," Pezeshkian said. For his part, Savelyev, extended warm regards from the Russian president and prime minister to Pezeshkian and invited him to visit Russia in early 2025,

saying that the Russian government is preparing for this visit and the associated negotiations. Highlighting the Rasht-Astara railway project, Savelyev reaffirmed his government's commitment to its execution.

He noted that Russia has secured the necessary line of credit and is collaborating with Azerbaijan on the INSTC. Savelyev also expressed the Russian government's desire to expedite the implementation of the project, stating that Russia and Azerbaijan have agreed to modernize the portion of the railway located in their territories and called on Tehran to pave the ground for upgrading its section of



of the railway. He described the increase in cargo transport between Russia and

Iran as growing and expressed optimism that the implementation of the Astara-Rasht railway

agreement could initially facilitate the transfer of 15 million tons of goods between the two countries.

Telecom 2024 kicked off in Tehran

VP says at least 20% of job creation should be attributed to IT sector



Economy Desk

The 25th International Exhibition of Telecommunications, Information Technology and Digital Economy, known as Telecom 2024 opened in Tehran on Monday, featuring 148 domestic and foreign companies.

Speaking at the opening ceremony, Vice President Mohammadreza Aref highlighted the advantages of the information technology sector in the country, particularly the presence of motivated and intelligent personnel with strong scientific capabilities.

Aref referred to certain challenges, noting that efforts to involve the private sector in the information technology domain were met with legal barriers in the third development plan.

"Our expectation from this exhibition is to take a step forward in the technology industry after showcasing domestic and foreign achievements and comparing the results of these challenges," the VP said.

He noted that emerging high-tech and converging technologies primarily stem from the information technology sector, emphasizing the need to identify its significant role in employment, especially for graduates. Aref anticipates that at least 20 percent of job creation should be attributed to the IT sector.

The vice president also highlighted the importance of assessing the contribution of the IT sector to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), stating that at least 10 percent of the GDP should derive from this area.

He criticized the underutilization of Iran's capacities within the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) in the past years, underlining that many member countries are eager to collaborate and adopt Iranian technologies.

The VP pointed out that Iran's presence in organizations such as EAEU, SCO, and BRICS offers a substantial market opportunity, urging the need to learn from past failures to capital-

ize on the ECO's capacity.

Aref reiterated that the government's strategy revolves around cooperation with regional countries, emphasizing the necessity of balancing domestic needs with regional and global interactions and collaborations.

He noted that Iran is benefiting from the latest technological advances thanks to domestic researchers and has established strong collaborations with international scientific entities and distinguished Iranian scholars abroad.

"The contributions of Iranian scientists abroad and their scientific services at home are significant," Aref added.

He also stressed the importance of utilizing artificial intelligence (AI) while adhering to its principles, declaring that the government's serious strategy involves exporting technical and engineering services, where telecommunication has traditionally played a prominent role.

Hemmati: Forex rate cannot be fixed amid 30% inflation



Economy Desk

Iran's Economy Minister Abdolnaser Hemmati said fixing the forex rate can lead to corruption while maintaining a stable exchange rate under a 30% inflation is impossible.

Speaking during a session of the Parliament's Economic Committee on Monday, Hemmati also said it is estimated that people hold about \$20 billion to \$40 billion in cash, explaining that this accumulation of cash is aimed at preserving their assets against inflation.

He pointed out that the rise in the dollar price has not addressed the nation's non-oil trade deficit, which reached \$17 billion in the previous year, marking an unprecedented level. Hemmati indicated that while the nominal exchange rate [NIMA system] remained stable in the last Iranian year, the country experienced inflation rates of 42% to 52%.

He argued that having four different exchange rates is untenable, advocating for a regulated floating exchange rate in accordance with parliamentary law, where the Central Bank of Iran can manage rates within a 3% fluctuation.

He highlighted that the official exchange rate was approximately 40,000 toman per dollar last year, while the free-market rate reached as high as 68,000 toman in the first month of Iranian calendar (March 20-April 19) before retracting.

Hemmati pointed out that the 40% disparity between market and nominal rates leads to substantial economic rents, and supported the Central Bank of Iran's recent establishment of a negotiated currency market, warning that if the exchange rate remains fixed, the country would face reduced exports, increased import demand, and further corruption.

While stressing the need for increased efforts to reduce inflation, Hemmati defended the government's performance, stating that the CBI is striving to stabilize the real exchange rate to align it closer to market rates and expressed hope that this would soon occur.

Iran achieves know-how to extract shale oil from reservoirs

Researchers from the Technical Faculties Campus of University of Tehran, in collaboration with the Exploration Department of the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC), developed a technology to extract shale oil from reservoirs. For the first time in Iran, a research project has developed the necessary technology for extract-

ing shale oil from reserves using toxic coke technology at the laboratory and in semi-industrial scales, IRNA reported on Monday. This technological initiative was led by Ali Shekarifard, an associate professor at the Technical Faculties Campus of University of Tehran, in collaboration with Estonia's Tallinn University of Technology,

aimed to conduct expert studies for the exploration and evaluation of the exploitability of oil shales in Ghalikouh, located in the western Lorestan Province. According to Shekarifard, this research has laid the groundwork for establishing a new oil shale industry in Iran by acquiring essential technical knowledge.

Iran found shale oil reserves of two billion barrels of light crude in its western Lorestan Province in February 2017. Shale oil is an unconventional oil produced from oil shale rock fragments by pyrolysis, hydrogenation, or thermal dissolution. These processes convert the organic matter within the rock (kero-

gen) into synthetic oil and gas. The resulting oil can be used immediately as a fuel or upgraded to meet refinery feedstock specifications by adding hydrogen and removing impurities such as sulfur and nitrogen.

The refined products can be used for the same purposes as those derived from crude oil.