

# Aref highlights FTA role in expansion of Iran's exports

## Economy Desk

Iranian Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref said that free trade agreement (FTA) would play a crucial role in expanding the country's exports.

Speaking at the High Council for Non-Oil Exports meeting on Wednesday, Aref said that non-oil exports are a priority for the current government, which is committed to strengthening trade ties with neighboring countries.

The meeting, which marked the first session in nearly four years, was attended by ministers and top officials from organizations involved in export activities.

The vice president stressed that the development of non-oil exports is vital for the government's economic strategy, saying, "With the establishment of official relations through international and regional mechanisms, now is the time to push for a real export boom."

Aref pointed to Iran's active participation in international bodies such as Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and BRICS, as well as key regional agreements, which have led to valuable connections.

He noted that even countries previously uninterested in expanding relations are now eager to engage, creating an op-

portunity to significantly boost exports.

"Signing FTA will provide the framework to seriously advance Iran's exports and improve the country's foreign trade status," Aref said.

During the meeting, seven proposed initiatives to boost exports were discussed, with attendees offering their own suggestions for export development and strategies within their respective sectors.

## Incentives for exporters, technical services export

In his remarks, Aref highlighted the importance of reviving export incentives that are attractive to exporters.

"We must learn from past experiences to identify the obstacles that hindered the effectiveness of these incentives," he said, adding that these measures must be quickly operationalized to see tangible improvements in export growth.

Aref also emphasized the need to expand Iran's export of technical and engineering services, a sector where Iranian professionals have a strong track record.

"This is an important area for our country's exports, and we must take it seriously and work towards its development," he said.

The vice president also noted



the importance of setting export targets and identifying specific markets.

"We need to define our export goals and target markets as soon as possible. Are we focusing on increasing exports within the region, or do we aim to expand markets from Asia to Africa?"

Aref asked.

## Leveraging provincial capacities for export growth

Aref underscored the need to utilize the capacities of provincial governments, particularly in border regions.

"When we selected governors for border provinces, we made it clear that they must actively work on developing cross-border trade, whether through border markets or economic agreements with neighboring countries," he said.

The vice president also called

for strengthening the role of trade attachés in target export markets, stressing the importance of private sector cooperation.

"To achieve the export leap we are aiming for, we must fully engage the private sector," he concluded.

## Minister: Petro-refineries could help cut sales of unprocessed commodity



The minister of oil announced plans to reduce crude oil exports as he emphasized the importance of petrochemical refineries and mini-refineries.

Mohsen Paknejad noted that these initiatives are part of a framework

outlined in the Seventh Development Plan (2024-28), saying that, "Efforts are underway to maximize the activation of these capacities," Shana reported. Paknejad, addressing the Oil Ministry's plan under the current administration, reiterated that petrochemical

refineries and mini-refineries play a critical role in reducing crude exports. The minister of oil also stressed that clarifying the status of fuel smuggling in the country is a public demand.

He added that the Ministry of Oil, alongside other relevant bodies, has a duty to assist in addressing this issue. Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian on Tuesday emphasized the government's commitment to combating daily fuel smuggling, calling it a significant waste of national wealth.

Speaking at a meeting of the Headquarters to Combat the Smuggling of Goods and Currency, Pezeshkian described the current state of fuel smuggling — tens of millions of liters per day — as both a catastrophe and evidence of inefficiency.

He remarked, "As an Iranian citizen, not just as president, I find it completely unacceptable that, within a production and distribution system controlled by us, 20 to 30 million liters of fuel are smuggled daily." Pezeshkian dismissed long-term plans as inadequate, stressing the need for

immediate, practical solutions to the crisis.

"When such a massive amount of fuel is being smuggled and we cannot stop it, can we reasonably expect the public to accept measures like cutting energy, gas, or electricity supplies to industries to manage consumption?" he asked.

The president stressed that effective solutions should address the root causes rather than targeting those at the lower end of the smuggling chain.

"We must avoid creating new problems by threatening the livelihoods of those involved at the final stages of this cycle. Instead, we need to reform the underlying sources of the issue," he said.

The president tasked the Headquarters to Combat the Smuggling of Goods and Currency with holding regular meetings over the next month to conduct expert analysis, identify the root causes of fuel smuggling and design practical solutions.

He urged the use of academic and student expertise, noting that their inde-

pendence allows for clearer problem analysis and solution development.

He called on every organization to take decisive steps within their power to prevent the waste of the nation's resources.

The president also urged the identification of inactive entities, vehicles, equipment, or units that consume subsidized fuel inefficiently or fail to meet activity benchmarks.

"I am sure we will stop this waste and the smuggling of the country's wealth," Pezeshkian affirmed.

"We must adopt proven scientific methods for optimal fuel management. My aim is to reform and improve the country's administration. With God's help and public support, we will amend ineffective laws and resolve these issues."

During the meeting, a detailed report was presented on the methods, routes, and origins of the daily smuggling of 20 to 30 million liters of fuel. Relevant bodies also shared their views and proposed strategies to combat the problem.

## Iran-Bahrain détente ...

In recent days, Bahrain's Ministry of

Foreign Affairs has announced coordination with Iran's Foreign Ministry to "establish the necessary legal frameworks" for the resumption of diplomatic relations between the two countries. This indicates a serious desire and intention from both countries to restore friendly and systematic relations after years of severance. This interaction is significant as it highlights the efforts of both countries to achieve balance and establish new connections in the Persian Gulf region.

The historical interactions and commercial and cultural ties between Iran and Bahrain are highly significant and can strengthen and develop economic relations, enhance cultural exchanges, and ensure sustainable security in the Persian Gulf region.

In the current critical period, when the West Asia region is experiencing rapid challenges and transformations, it is essential to consider national interests as a set of desires and objectives that a country aims to achieve to maintain and enhance its security, welfare, and interests. By pursuing active and smart

diplomacy, the restoration of relations with the countries of the Persian Gulf should be regarded as a logical and unavoidable policy.

The establishment of friendly relations between Iran and the Persian Gulf countries will challenge the "Iranophobia" project of the Zionist regime, which seeks to infiltrate the Persian Gulf countries. This will also enable the Islamic Republic of Iran to focus on more serious regional issues, particularly the Zionist regime.

Moreover, by advancing economic diplomacy, Iran can shape a new chapter

in relations with Bahrain by defining mutual economic interests. This can pave the way for strategic cooperation in trade development, joint investments, and collaboration in energy, oil, and gas sectors. This could lead to the continuation of friendly relations between the two countries and contribute to sustainable security in the region.

Considering that relations between Iran and Bahrain in recent decades have been influenced by various factors and affected by regional and international developments, it is now an

opportune time to define a roadmap for strategic cooperation between the two countries in areas of mutual interest. This can create a favorable model for other countries in the region. It will establish strategic balance in the Persian Gulf and limit the activities of extraregional actors who have always sought to create tensions in the region with the "Iranophobia" card. It will also demonstrate that guaranteeing sustainable security in the Persian Gulf is only possible through the participation and cooperation of regional countries.