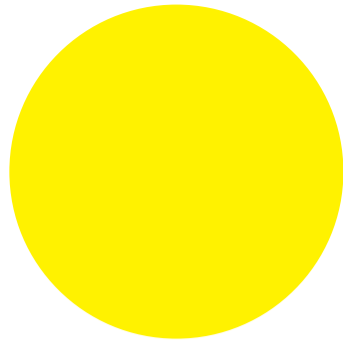


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Iran Daily

Vol. 7539 • Monday, January 6, 2025 • Dey 17, 1403 • Rajab 5, 1446 • 100,000 rials • 8 pages



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Iran Stands Strong

7 By Ehsan Azimirad
Iranian lawmaker

One of the legacies of the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini was the designation of the last Friday of the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan as International Quds Day, highlighting the Palestinian cause as the foremost concern of the Islamic world. This laid the groundwork for the onset of Islamic awakening, which breathed new life into the Resistance Front against the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories.

The 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran reinforced the Resistance Front in Palestine, which subsequently expanded to encompass Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen. Concurrently, the Israeli regime, with American backing, ramped up extensive assaults on the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and southern Lebanon, which were seen as the front-line strongholds in the struggle for justice against the Israeli occupation.

During the 2016 US presidential election campaign, then-president Barack Obama and secretary of state Hillary Clinton were accused by Donald Trump of having a hand in the creation of ISIS, as the world witnessed the expansion of this terrorist group's activities in Syria and then Iraq.

Amid these developments, the Islamic Republic felt a moral obligation to defend Islamic territories and the oppressed. Under the directive of Iran's Leader Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, the Quds Force, commanded by General Qassem Soleimani, was tasked with stepping in to liberate the frontline of the Syrian resistance from the clutches of extremists. From the outset, General Soleimani convinced Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to hold on to power and then began to reclaim areas occupied by ISIS in Syria and Iraq, ultimately declaring the defeat of ISIS in late 2017.

Following this, Syria entered a phase of relative peace and security. However, the Syrian government failed to win the approval of its people, who were dissatisfied with the country's economic conditions.

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President warns energy shortages at critical level, urges unity



Economy Desk

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian stated that the current energy shortages have reached a critical level even as he expressed optimism about their resolution through unity. Pezeshkian, speaking on Sunday during the 47th graduation ceremony of Imam Hassan Mojtaba (AS) University of Police Sciences, emphasized that with the cooperation and support of all sectors of the government, the issue of shortages can be resolved. The president also on Saturday ordered the establishment of an Energy Optimization and Strategic Management Organization during a meeting of a working group on addressing gas sector energy imbalances. The meeting was attended by the heads of the three branches of government. At the beginning of the meeting, Hamid Pourmohammadi, head of the Plan and Budget

Organization (PBO), outlined the overall process of the national plan to address gas sector energy shortages. Details of the plan were also discussed and reviewed in the presence of the top three officials.

Pezeshkian urged the working group to accurately gather data on household gas consumption users to prevent unfair treatment of lower-income groups. He emphasized that the plan must prioritize fairness and justice in its implementation.

The president also stressed the need to penalize high-consumption users while introducing incentives for low-consumption households.

He placed a premium on the importance of public education on energy conservation through media and social platforms, noting that each phase of the national plan requires a media strategy, which the working group should consider.

Cargo handling at Iranian ports hits 175m tons



Iranian Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) announced that 175 million tons of goods were loaded and unloaded at Iranian ports in first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20 to December 22, 2024). More than 20 million tons of oil goods and over 39 million tons of non-oil goods were unloaded at the Iranian ports between March 20 and December 22, 2024, the organization added, as reported by Mehr News Agency. According to the report, more than 60 million tons of goods were unloaded at the Iranian ports during the nine months to December 22.

Qalibaf says 45 mcm of gas saved daily via presidential campaign



Mohammad-Baqer Qalibaf, the speaker of Iran's Parliament, announced that public cooperation with President Masoud Pezeshkian's request to lower home heating by 2 degrees Celsius has resulted in savings of 40 to 45 million cubic meters of gas per day. Speaking at a joint meeting hosted by the Parliament's Energy Committee on Sunday, attended by Energy Minister Abbas Aliabadi and Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad, Qalibaf emphasized that Iran's energy shortages have been a recurring issue for years and recent discussions have largely echoed past conversations without significant progress, as reported by Tasnim News Agency. Qalibaf underscored that while "energy imbalance" is often discussed, the core issue lies in "managerial imbalance," saying, "We don't have an energy imbalance; we have a

managerial imbalance. Until we address the latter, we cannot resolve the former."

The speaker highlighted structural flaws in Iran's energy sector, both in production and consumption, which have led to policy-making errors. He pointed out that while gas accounts for 9% of global energy production, it makes up 90% of Iran's electricity generation.

"We use 30% of the country's gas to produce 90% of its electricity. This reflects flaws in both policy and execution," the senior MP said. Qalibaf called for the establishment of a dedicated energy institution to address these issues, emphasizing that resolving energy imbalances requires clear production and consumption targets, as well as measures to

reduce waste. "Efficiency improvements, not just consumption cuts, are key to creating wealth and growth opportunities," he added. On fuel smuggling, Qalibaf expressed confidence that recent anti-smuggling measures would soon yield significant results.

"The government has exclusive control over energy resources, imports, and major fuel consumption. There is no excuse for the current gaps, and we are working closely with the government to address this," he said. He also mentioned that a definitive roadmap to address energy shortages was finalized during a recent meeting of the heads of the three branches of government, attended by experts and ministers. Qalibaf highlighted the

importance of smart energy systems, predicting that 70-80% of the 30 million liters of fuel wasted daily could be saved within two months of implementing smart technologies, reducing the need for restrictive measures.

'South Pars pressure boost project is critical'

Speaking at the meeting, Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad stated that the South Pars pressure boost project is a top priority for the country. The project, which includes seven phases, each costing \$2.5 billion and taking 4-5 years to complete, is essential for increasing gas production. However, he cautioned that resolving energy imbalances in the short term through this project

may be unrealistic.

10,000 MW rise in electricity output

Energy Minister Abbas Aliabadi outlined plans to reduce energy imbalances, including upgrading the Siah Bisheh power plant to increase electricity generation by 600 MW.

He noted improved investor interest in the energy sector and expressed hope that, with ongoing investments in renewables, electricity production would increase by over 10,000 MW next year. However, he acknowledged that the current energy shortages stand at 24,000 MW. Aliabadi also highlighted efforts to reduce energy losses through smart meters, aiming to cut losses to 25,000 MW, which currently stand at 35,000 MW.

ICCIMA calls for Expediency Council approval of FATF to boost economy

The head of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) urged the Expediency Council to approve the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) bill, underscoring the need for financial transparency and attracting foreign investment to boost the country's economy. Speaking at a meeting of the chamber's board of representatives on Sunday, Samad Hassanzadeh highlighted the economic challenges facing Iran, including hard currency and banking issues, as well as energy shortages, which have plagued businesses for years. Hassanzadeh noted that the chamber has been in discussions with government offi-

cial, including the Ministry of Energy and the Ministry of Industry, Mine, and Trade, to address these problems. He also pointed to meetings with Central Bank of Iran (CBI) officials to tackle forex-related issues. Hassanzadeh praised the efforts of Mohammadreza Farzin, the CBI governor, in designing a currency exchange market to help traders access foreign currency. He expressed hope that the government under President Masoud Pezeshkian would consider the private sector's concerns in its decision-making processes. During a recent meeting with the president, Hassanzadeh

said Pezeshkian expressed optimism about resolving the FATF issue, noting the Leader's emphasis on finding a solution. The chamber president stressed that addressing these issues would bring hope to the private sector, improve financial transparency, attract foreign investment, and enhance international trade while reducing transaction costs. He also pointed out that recent instabilities in hard currency have driven up the cost of raw materials and imports, creating challenges for producers in securing working capital. Hassanzadeh highlighted that Farzin had injected 250 trillion tomans (approximately \$3.12

billion) into the banking system to provide loans to small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Without such measures, he warned, production units would face shortages of raw materials and intermediate goods. Regarding energy shortages, Hassanzadeh noted that production units have suffered significant losses in recent months due to power cuts. While the Ministry of Energy is responsible for compensating these losses, he acknowledged that the current economic situation makes this difficult. Instead, the ICCIMA has proposed extending deadlines for producers to pay government dues, such as energy costs and



social security contributions, Hassanzadeh said, adding that the government is expected to announce a new plan soon.

Experience magic, majesty of Bandar Kong

Iranica Desk

As one of the cities in Hormozgan Province, Bandar Kong is located in southern Iran and is recognized as the central district of Bandar Lengeh. It lies about five kilometers from Bandar Lengeh and connects to the waters of the Persian Gulf via a coastal line. This stunning port city, with its rich blend of historical, cultural, and natural attractions, is emerging as a captivating destination for travel enthusiasts.

The climate in southern Iran is typically warm and humid, and Bandar Kong is no exception. As one of the southern port cities, it experiences high humidity levels, especially during the summer months, which can be challenging for non-locals who are not accustomed to such conditions. Therefore, the best times to travel to Bandar Kong are in the fall, winter, and during Nowruz (Persian New Year) when the weather becomes more spring-like. Bandar Kong boasts a rich his-

torical background, having once been considered one of the key trade bases in the Persian Gulf. This beautiful port is renowned not only for its delectable cuisine but also for offering travelers a distinctive experience through its historical sites, pristine natural landscapes, and welcoming local accommodations, IRNA wrote. The people of Bandar Kong, shaped by the city's long and vibrant history, possess a rich and diverse culture. Over the years, various traditions and customs

have intertwined to create the unique cultural fabric of Bandar Kong today. The residents are deeply committed to their customs, traditions, and history, striving to keep them alive. These customs and traditions permeate every aspect of daily life and are regarded as one of the region's main attractions. Amidst the various events, local foods, handicrafts, and other cultural phenomena, one can clearly trace the diverse traditions of the people of this land. Among the many ceremonies

celebrated by the people of Bandar Kong, the following are particularly noteworthy:

Sea New Year: This vibrant summer ceremony, known as Nowruz-e Daryai in Persian, involves people gathering by the sea to splash each other with red clay, paint tree trunks and animal horns, and engage in joyful celebration.

Wedding Ceremony: The customs and ceremonies surrounding marriage in Bandar Kong are celebrated with great grandeur. Historically, each marriage

was marked by seven days and nights of feasting and joy. Nowadays, due to economic conditions, the ceremony is typically held over three days; however, efforts are made to honor all traditional customs. The bride and groom reside in rooms adorned with mirrors and colorful ornaments for a period ranging from one week to six months. Among the highlights of Bandar Kong are the Portuguese Castle and the Anthropology Museum, which showcase the city's unique heritage.

Portuguese Castle

At one point in history, the southern region of Iran was occupied by the Portuguese. During this time, they constructed a harbor and military fortress in Bandar Kong to safeguard their interests. Today, from that grand structure, only a tower and remnants of the fortress remain. The tower, made of stone and mortar, invites visitors to walk inside and admire its architectural beauty.



Ponds

One of the significant attractions of Bandar Lengeh is its traditional ponds. These ponds, which have been utilized since ancient times for water storage, include one of the largest cisterns known as Berkeh-ey Darya Dowlat, named for its impressive dimensions. This remarkable cistern has a diameter of approximately 28 meters and a depth of about 14 meters. Constructed of stone and mortar, Berkeh Darya Dowlat features a large windcatcher on top for natural ventilation of the water inside. The vastness of this cistern means that it was designed without a roof,



allowing it to remain naturally cool. Dating back to the Atabakan Era of Fars Province, Berkeh-ey Darya Dowlat has

remained intact since then. To visit this beautiful cistern, you can head north from Bandar Kong toward the Bastak road.

Lashton Fortress

One of the must-visit attractions during your trip to Bandar Kong

is the ancient Lashton Fortress, which dates back to before the Islamic era. This historical for-

ress offers a unique glimpse into the region's past. When you ascend to the highest point of the castle, you are rewarded with breathtaking views of the surrounding *kaluts*, the entire city of Bandar Kong, and the vast expanse of the Persian Gulf. Its strategic location atop one of the mountains in the area means that Lashton Fortress is not easily visible from below. Historically, a staircase was carved into the mountain's rocks to provide access to the castle, which was surrounded by a high wall and protected by several watchtowers. From these vantage points, guards could effectively monitor the surrounding areas and keep a watchful eye on the Persian Gulf.



Shopping centers

Since ancient times, Bandar Kong has served as a hub for trade and the movement of various commercial ships, making it a vibrant marketplace. The city boasts beautiful markets that are perfect for shopping. The fish market is a highlight, offering freshly caught fish to both travelers and locals. Another significant market is the Bandar Bazaar, located on Talghani Street, where you can find a variety of handicrafts made by local artisans. Additionally, the Badgir Shopping Center, situated on Shahid Rajaei Street, is another great spot to purchase goods at reasonable prices.

Beach

One of the enchanting sights in Bandar Kong is the array of boats at the wharf and beach. The scene, filled with both small and large boats, provides a picturesque backdrop for your photographs. At the beach, there is also a park where you can enjoy leisurely walks amidst the pleasant breeze coming from the Persian Gulf, creating a delightful experience during your visit to Bandar Kong.



Anthropology Museum

In a bid to preserve the tradition of seafaring, prominent figures from Bandar Kong decided to gather tools, equipment, and navigational maps for public display. This museum is housed in a building characterized by windcatchers and architectural elements typical of Bandar Kong. Among its valuable artifacts are various ancient vessels. One room in the museum is specially decorated to symbolize a "wedding chamber," reflecting the marriage customs of the local people that have been cherished since ancient times. A visit to this museum will provide you with a deeper understanding of the culture and heritage of the people of Bandar Kong.



Galbatan House

The architecture of the houses in Bandar Kong is distinctive and unique, with the "Galbatan House" standing out as one of the most important examples of this architectural style. This house is regarded as one of the most significant cultural symbols and architectural works in Bandar Kong. From ancient times, the construc-

tion of historic houses in Bandar Kong was designed to exemplify hospitality, inviting guests into the home through every element of its design.

Like many other Iranian houses, Galbatan House features a central courtyard surrounded by rooms serving various purposes. The historic Galbatan House is the largest historic residence in Bandar

Kong and effectively represents the lifestyle of an aristocratic family. With its beautiful plasterwork and unique designs, it is one of the major attractions of Bandar Kong, despite its simple entrance and facade. Furthermore, Galbatan House boasts the highest number of windcatchers among the houses in Bandar Kong, with five, which is significant in its own right.

Transforming for future Downsizing gov't, revitalizing Iran's economy



By Amin Shojaei
Guest contributor

OPINION
EXCLUSIVE

Iran's economy has long been plagued by the challenges of having an oversized government. Official statistics indicate that in 2023, over 3,500 trillion IRR was spent on expenses related to the operation of the government, with 75% allocated to the salaries of public employees. The number of government employees in Iran exceeds 4 million, far surpassing comparable countries such as Turkey, which employs only 2.5 million public workers. This inefficient structure not only imposes a financial burden on the public budget but also limits the government's ability to invest in infrastructure and developmental projects. A similar pattern is observed in state-owned enterprises (SOEs). Reports reveal that out of over 500 SOEs, nearly 70% are unprofitable, incurring annual operational losses of over 150 trillion IRR. Privatizing these enterprises could reduce costs and improve efficiency.



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian (facing camera) attends a session of the country's parliament to defend his proposed ministers, who are sitting beside him, on August 17, 2024.
IRNA

Positive effects of downsizing gov't
Downsizing the government could have profound positive impacts on Iran's economic and social fabric. First, reducing government operating expenses frees up resources for critical investments in infrastructure and industrial development. Experiences from countries like Turkey and Argentina demonstrate that privatization and reducing state intervention foster private sector growth and job creation. For example, Argentina's President Javier Milei achieved a 30% reduction in government costs in sectors like energy and transportation through strategic privatization. Moreover, downsizing the government plays a vital role in curbing administrative corruption. Transparency International reports that countries with smaller governments generally score higher on transparency indices. Reducing overlapping institutions and limiting government interventions can enhance fiscal transparency and minimize corruption.

Priorities for downsizing

One of the most critical areas requiring reform is the unprofitable SOEs. Privatizing these entities, especially in the energy and transportation sectors, could reduce the financial burden on the government while boosting efficiency. For instance, privatizing 20% of

state-run hospitals, according to Iran's Islamic Parliament Research Center, could save the government up to 15 trillion IRR annually without compromising the quality of healthcare services.

Moreover, reducing the number of ministries and merging parallel institutions can have a significant impact on reducing administrative costs. In Iran, the existence of more than 18 ministries and affiliated organizations has increased overlapping responsibilities and inefficiencies. Merging related ministries, based on thorough expert studies, can reduce the operational costs of these entities by up to 10%.

Lessons from Argentina, US

Javier Milei, the president of Argentina, introduced sweeping economic reforms that brought significant changes to the nation's economy. By reducing the number of ministries from 21 to 14 and privatizing unprofitable SOEs, he simplified the government structure and increased productivity. These measures led to a reduction in government expenses and improvements in key economic indicators. For example, monthly inflation dropped from 25% to 2.7%, and for the first time in nearly a year, the annual inflation rate fell below 200%, reaching 193%.

Former US president Donald Trump undertook efforts to reduce

the size of the federal government and increase its efficiency during his presidency. He introduced plans to cut federal workforce numbers and emphasized privatizing government services. In his 2024 campaign, Trump promised to leverage innovative technologies and private sector capabilities to cut federal expenses by \$2 trillion. His agenda included reducing bureaucracy in the healthcare, energy, and transportation sectors.

Additionally, Elon Musk, CEO of Tesla and SpaceX, whom Trump recently named the leader of a government efficiency commission, proposed using artificial intelligence and advanced technologies to streamline government processes and save billions in public spending.

Downsizing the government, though a significant challenge for Iran's economy, is an unavoidable necessity to achieve sustainable development and social equity. The successful experiences of Argentina and the reform strategies proposed by Donald Trump in the US demonstrate that, despite challenges, a smaller government can lead to reduced expenses, improved transparency, and enhanced efficiency. It is time for Iran to learn from these experiences, embark on structural reforms, and pave the way for a brighter economic future.

Lights off in Iran

What caused power crisis, what comes next?



By Aarti Nagraj
Journalist

PERSPECTIVE

As Iran struggles with a major energy crisis, with businesses and government offices partially shut and remote learning underway in certain areas, strong and immediate government action is needed to stem the "significant" economic impact it is

having, according to analysts.

The country has been struggling to cope with increased demand during the winter months and has already called on households to lower heating levels to avoid blackouts.

Recently, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian also apologised to the public in a local interview. "Unfortunately, this [Iranian calendar] year, we are compelled to ask the public to show some restraint," he said, adding that "we will work hard to ensure that such events do not occur next [calendar] year."

The current crisis stems from the government's "inability to manage energy and petrol consumption costs effectively," said Mahdi Ghodsi, an economist at The Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies. In Iran, one litre of fully subsidised petrol costs about 15,000 rials or less than 2 US cents, according to the unofficial rate on December 25 on the currency exchange site Bonbast.

In 2023, the fossil fuel subsidy per capita for Iran was estimated to be about \$917.5, according to International Energy Agency estimates. Subsidies covering oil, electricity, and gas increased to more than \$154 billion in 2022, before falling to \$81.8 billion in 2023, the IEA said.

Daily petrol consumption reached 111.3 million litres in the last Iranian fiscal year, which starts mid-March, up from 102 million litres the previous year, according to official data.

"This heavy consumption is coupled with significant government subsidies, which have become unsustainable," Ghodsi said. Long-standing issues such as underinvestment in power infrastructure have also led to the current situation.

Iran possesses vast hydrocarbon reserves — it was the fourth-largest crude oil producer in OPEC in 2023 and ranked as the world's third-largest oil and second-largest natural gas reserve holder the same year, according to the US Energy Information Administration.

However, despite being a major oil producer, the main reason for the imbalance in energy production and consumption in Iran is energy subsidies, said Mohammad Farzanegan, professor of Middle East economics at the Centre for Near and Middle Eastern Studies, Philipps-University Marburg in Germany.

"As a result of cheap energy, the energy intensity of production remains high, and there is less interest or incentive to improve energy efficiency," Farzanegan said. "It is also problematic to attract private investors and foreign direct investment in sectors where the government actively intervenes in regulating prices."

Economic sanctions have also increased the political risk in Iran and raised the transaction costs for international projects, he added.

Dimming economic growth

Iran's economy has already been struggling under crippling Western sanctions and while the economic impact of the power

crisis is "significant," it grows more severe as power cuts become longer and more frequent, said Ghodsi.

"Power cut disrupts economies of scale, reducing efficiency not only during the outage itself but also in the recovery period once power is restored. This inefficiency compounds over time, particularly if the power cuts are unpredictable," he explained.

While the economic cost of the power crisis has not yet been fully estimated, Farzanegan cited a recent estimate by the former director of the Iran Chamber of Commerce in local media, which projected a loss of \$110 million a day due to power cuts last calendar year.

While there is talk about increasing fuel prices and cutting out subsidies, "energy is sensitive and ... a lot of people rely on cheap energy," said Alex Vatanka, senior fellow and director of the Iran programme at the Middle East Institute.

"Instead of suddenly increasing the price of energy, the government could have spent the last year or two educating the public about good practices when it comes to energy use. [People] have become used to almost free energy, but the government doesn't engage in education on those things. Instead, it educates about ideological issues," he said. Subsidies can be reduced and removed, but the government will need to compensate for that, he explained. Energy efficiency can and should be improved, considering the amount of energy that is wasted in the country, but political and foreign policy change is critical for any change, Vatanka said.

According to Farzanegan, to rectify the situation, there is a need for energy subsidy reform and the removal of US sanctions.

"Both require a strong government, political will, and significant support from civil society. A large campaign within Iran is necessary to raise public awareness of the significant and costly effects that the continuation of energy consumption subsidies has caused."

At the same time, the government needs to find a way to negotiate with the new administration in the US to lift the sanctions. The latter may "require difficult agreements," he said.

To navigate the current crisis and restore stability, the government must take bold and decisive action, added Ghodsi. It must "prioritise cutting unnecessary expenditures that do not serve the public interest."

The full article first appeared on *The National*.



Two women request a taxi on a phone app during a recent blackout in Tehran, Iran.
NYT

Iran's economic standing, major projects



OFFICIAL NAME
Islamic Republic of Iran

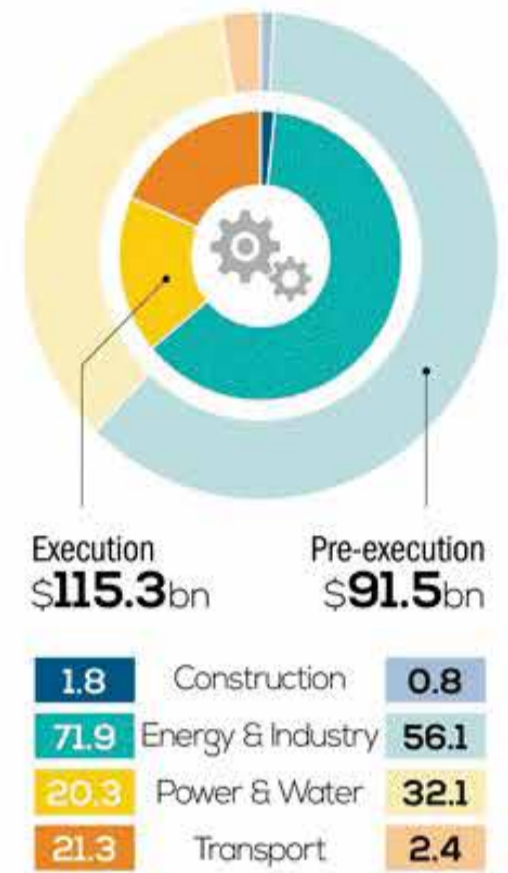
CAPITAL
Tehran

CURRENCY
Iranian rial

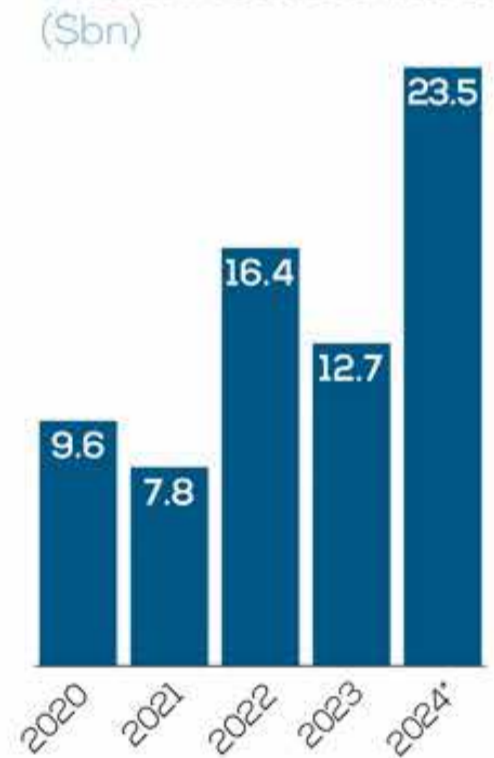
POPULATION
89.8 million

AREA
1.7 million square kilometres

ACTIVE PROJECTS



CONTRACT AWARDS (\$bn)



*=As of 1 November 2024
Source: MEED Projects

KEY ECONOMIC INDICATORS

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Real GDP growth (% change)	4.7	3.8	5.0	3.7	3.1
Nominal GDP (\$bn)	289.3	376.3	372.8	434.2	463.7
Inflation, average consumer prices (%)	40.2	45.8	40.7	31.7	29.5
Current account balance (% of GDP)	3.9	3.8	2.8	2.9	3.0
Fiscal balance (% of GDP)	-3.2	-2.8	-2.8	-3.1	-3.4
Government debt (% of GDP)	42.4	36.9	34.0	34.6	34.9

Source: IMF (October 2024)

TOP 10 PROJECTS PAST STUDY

Project	Industry	Owner	Value (\$m)	Status*	Start date	Due date
Kish gas field development: phase 2	Gas	NIOC	2,500	Feed	2025	2028
Kish gas field development: phase 3	Gas	NIOC	2,500	Feed	2025	2028
South Azadegan field development: phase 2	Oil	Pedec	2,500	Feed	2024	2026
Aghar gas field development: phase 2	Gas	ICOFC	1,180	Feed	2025	2028
Tabriz combined-cycle power plant	Power	MoE	700	Feed	2026	2028
Gorgan to Gonbad railway	Transport	CDTI	500	Design	2025	2027
Sepah Square to Azadegan highway tunnel	Transport	MRUD	471	Design	2025	2027
Shadgan combined-cycle power plant	Power	MoE	350	Main bidding	2025	2027
Crystal melamine unit	Chemical	SPC	250	Bid evaluation	2024	2027
Synthetic cotton unit (Staple) development	Industrial	STPC	100	Design	2025	2027

*=As of 1 November 2024; NIOC=National Iranian Oil Company; Pedec=Petroleum Engineering & Development Company; ICOFC=Iranian Central Oil Fields Company; MoE=Ministry of Energy; CDTI=Construction & Development of Transportation Infrastructures Company; MRUD=Ministry of Roads & Urban Development; SPC=Shiraz Petrochemical Company; STPC=Shahid Tongdovian Petrochemical Company | Source: MEED Projects

Will Taremi turn his fortune around in Italian Super Cup final?

Sports Desk

Mahdi Taremi will be looking to lift a first trophy with Inter when his team takes on archrival AC Milan in the Italian Super Cup final in Riyadh's Al Awwal Park tonight.

On top of that, however, the Iranian international striker will have personal reasons to seize the occasion in Derby della Madonnina: Ending a frustrating goal drought with the Nerazzurri colors.

Taremi, who became Porto's third all-time leading marksman with 91 strikes in 182 outings before embarking on a new chapter of his career in July, is yet to find his scoring boots for the Serie A champion. His contribution has been limited to a single goal in 20 games across all competitions – a penalty kick during a 4-0 win against Red Star Belgrade in the UEFA Champions League in October.

The bad news for the 32-year-old Iranian has been the dazzling form of French teammate Marcus Thuram, who is the joint top scorer – alongside Atalanta's Mateo Retegui – in the Italian top flight with 12 goals.

Barely given a chance in the starting XI for the domestic



Inter striker Mahdi Taremi is seen in a training session, ahead of the Italian Super Cup final against AC Milan, in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on January 4, 2025.

● INTER.IT

games, Taremi came off the bench at halftime to replace injured Thuram before a second-half brace from Dutch wing-

back Denzel Dumfries secured a 2-0 win against Atalanta in Thursday's Super Cup semifinal. The Frenchman remains a major

doubt for the final with a thigh injury and Taremi will be hoping to be trusted with a place in the front duo alongside skipper

Lautaro Martinez, who has been dealing with his own slump in form of late as his strike against Cagliari on December 28 has

been the Argentine's only goal in 10 games in all competitions. Stats have been against the Lautaro-Taremi partnership as the two have found the net once apiece in 366 minutes together on the pitch – the game against Red Star – which could see head coach Simone Inzaghi pick Joaquin Correa or Marko Arnautović, who have three goals between them this season, over the Iranian.

However, Taremi has proven to be the man for the finals.

During his illustrious four years with Porto, the prolific Iranian won two Super Cups, scoring twice in the 2022 triumph, while contributing with three final strikes to inspire the Dragons to three successive Taça de Portugal titles.

The Iranian will be eager to play yet another decisive part in a final showdown, if only given a chance against his Porto coach Sergio Conceicao, who is now in charge of the Rossoneri bench.

Iranian wrestler Rezaei aiming high after dominating National Ch'ships

Sports Desk

Yassin Rezaei will be keen to build on an emphatic run at the Free-style Wrestling National Championships in pursuing a place in the Iranian squad in September's World Championships in Zagreb. An Asian 61kg bronze medalist in 2023, Rezaei stole the show in a higher weight class at the domestic event in Gorgan, which served as the opening phase of the Iranian trials for the UWW Worlds. Rezaei began his 65kg campaign on Wednesday in style, making a quick work of Fardin Heidari by technical superiority in 58 seconds, before hammering Omran Hosseini 10-0 to march into the quarterfinals.

Dominant triumphs over

Amirhossein Sabzali (14-2) and Amirreza Taymourizad (14-3) sent Rezaei into the final showdown, where he eased to a 13-1 victory over Dariush Hazratqolizadeh in the first period to walk away with the ultimate prize.

"I was truly pleased with my performance in the competitions as I won all of my five bouts by technical superiority," Rezaei told the official website of the Iranian Wrestling Federation.

The Iranian was full of praise for his coach, Ali Khodaei, as well as his father, who "helped me out with learning different techniques when I was a kid."

"All the years of watching videos and reviewing techniques helped me take advantage of different wrestling moves, especially

throwing ones, in the national championships," added the Iranian.

"The competition gave me the opportunity to introduce myself as a top 65kg contender in the country and I will be looking to go all the way in the selection process to win the Iranian spot for the world event."

Rezaei will still face stern competition to secure the national team spot, as former world champion and Olympic silver medalist Rahman Amouzad remains the favorite to represent the country in the Croatian capital.

"My ultimate goal is to win the world and Olympic gold medals and I am ready to battle any wrestler to achieve that," Rezaei insisted.



● IAWF

Arteta rages at penalty award in Brighton draw



Arsenal's William Saliba (2) concedes a second-half penalty after fouling João Pedro in a 1-1 draw against Brighton & Hove Albion in the Premier League in Brighton, Britain, on Jan. 4, 2025.

● REUTERS

THE GUARDIAN – Mikel Arteta hit out at Anthony Taylor for awarding the penalty that pegged back Arsenal at Brighton but admitted his side lacked enough "freshness" to hold on for victory. Ethan Nwaneri's second Premier League goal had given the visitors the lead in the first half but the Arsenal manager was left raging when William Saliba was penalised by Taylor for catching João Pedro in the face as he attempted to head the ball away.

"I have never seen a decision like this in my career. I asked the boys if they have and nobody has seen it before," said Arteta. "When you look at the incident, the distance, the player, João touching the ball, then Saliba touching the ball, you can see contact there. I checked [with the

officials]. After three seconds they said they had already checked. It seems quick."

The 1-1 draw leaves Arsenal five points behind Liverpool but having played two matches more than the leaders. There was more bad news for Arteta, with the 17-year-old Nwaneri forced off at half-time with injury and Martin Ødegaard, the captain, able to come on only as a second-half substitute because of illness, while Kai Havertz was again not involved.

Arsenal host Newcastle in the first leg of their Carabao Cup semi-final on Tuesday before Manchester United visit in the FA Cup next Sunday. Arteta admitted they have so far struggled to cope with the hectic schedule of nine matches in January and acknowledged that his players

ran out of steam in the second half against Brighton.

"The run that we are on especially with all the situations, injuries and players that we are missing – I think the team deserves a lot of credit," he said. "It's disappointing because it's not about how much effort we put in today but it was more about the freshness and the quality that we have to deliver in the second half to dominate the game much better."

Asked whether his plans for the transfer window had changed, he added: "We cannot make a decision based on one performance for one day with a lot of circumstances, not only the players that we lost but the fact that we had to take Ethan out. Hopefully on Tuesday we will be in a better position."

Pezeshkian: Police guarantee country's move toward justice

National Desk

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian described poverty and discrimination as the main factors behind dissatisfaction and misdeeds among the public, saying that administering justice would decrease the rate of crimes in the society.

Addressing the commanders of Iran's Law Enforcement Forces at Imam Hassan Mojtaba (AS) University of Police Sciences in Tehran, where he attended the

graduation ceremony of cadets, Pezeshkian said the personnel of the Law Enforcement Forces are one of the most effective forces in charge of delivering justice across the country.

The president called on law enforcement personnel to deal with all members of society, including criminals, in a fair manner.

Pezeshkian hailed the law enforcement forces for their strength as well as relentless efforts aimed at upholding justice in the country.

"Chaos, violence and injustice would have prevailed in society if law enforcement forces had not been active," Pezeshkian said, likening the forces to strongholds that are crucial to society.

"Wherever you are, people feel safe, and this is a sign of hope in a bright future. You are the guarantors of the country's move toward justice," Pezeshkian added.

The president also underlined that the scientific and technical capabilities of the armed forces, especially the police



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian (R) addresses the graduation ceremony of cadets of the Law Enforcement Forces in Tehran, Iran, on January 5, 2025.

● president.ir

force, should upgrade. Masoud Pezeshkian also voiced his administration's full support for the law enforcement forces, pledging to provide them with all necessary welfare services to make sure the security forces will fulfill their duties with peace of mind.



Araghchi: Resistance not to be eliminated with bombs, martyrdom of leaders

International Desk

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi described the Axis of Resistance as a "holy cause" that will not be eliminated with bullets, bombs and through the martyrdom of its leaders.

Araghchi made the remarks during a ceremony held at the Foreign Ministry on Sunday to commemorate the 5th martyrdom anniversary of Iran's top anti-terror commander Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani.

He said Soleimani transformed the concept of resistance into a strategic military approach, known as the Axis of Resistance, which has resulted in the formation of an "indestructible" force throughout the region.

General Soleimani, commander of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the second-in-command of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), and their companions were assassinated in a US drone strike authorized by then-US President Donald Trump near Baghdad International Airport on January 3, 2020.

Both commanders were highly revered across West Asia because of their key role in fighting the Daesh Takfiri terrorist group in Iraq and Syria.

The Resistance Axis, Araghchi



Abbas Araghchi
● IRNA

added, is "a cause that cannot be eliminated with weapons. It is not dependent on a person and does not perish with the martyrdom of a commander and a leader."

The top Iranian diplomat also noted that the blood of martyrs is the main weapon of the resistance school of thought.

"The enemies should not assume that if the Resistance Axis suffers any harm, it will be a victory for them; this is the beginning of their defeat," he emphasized.

Araghchi also said diplomacy is part of the resistance school of thought that is inseparable from the military field.

The Israeli regime has since October last year assassinated several heads of the resistance front, including the leader of Lebanon's Hezbollah, Sayyad Hassan Nasrallah, and Hamas chief Yahya Sinwar during its military campaigns in the Gaza Strip and Lebanon.

Iran's Armed Forces kick off two-month drills across country

National Desk

A commander of Iran's Armed Forces announced the beginning of two-month drills by the country's military across the country.

Brigadier General Ali Shadmani said on Sunday that for two months, Iran's sky, lands, and seas will host the Armed Forces' Eghtedar (Authority) Exercises.

The drills are part of the ongoing exercises of the Armed Forces and are carried out annually, but this year, some of the drills were postponed in order to maintain and enhance the readiness of the Armed Forces.

Shadmani said on the ground, elite units of the Army's Ground Forces in the west and east of the country, special units of the ground forces of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) in the west, southwest, and south of the country,

and tens of thousands of voluntary forces will do counterterrorism practices.

He added that in the sky, the Army's Air Force and Air Defense Force, along with the IRGC Aerospace Force, will practice air defense of important centers in the country using modern equipment and at the sea, the Army's Navy will hold exercises in the northern Indian Ocean and the Sea of Oman, with the IRGC Navy focusing on the three Persian Gulf islands of Abu Musa, the Greater and Lesser Tunbs as well as the strategic Strait of Hormuz.

His announcement came as the IRGC's Ground Force has begun a military exercise — codenamed Payambar-e-A'azam (Great Prophet) 19 — in the western province of Kermanshah since Saturday.

The IRGC has said the focus of the military drill is on rapid reaction op-



● MEHR

erations. The second day of the drill centered on the transfer of forces and equipment.

The Payambar-e-A'azam 19 exercise, which will continue until January 10, is being held in order to maintain the readiness of the forces and to use the latest equipment and tools.

Iranian military forces hold routine exercises according to a detailed schedule in various parts of the country in order to test their weaponry and equipment and evaluate their combat readiness.

Iran stands strong ...

People's discontent was reflected within the ranks of the military, particularly as Assad released many former ISIS members soon after the group's defeat, even facilitating their recruitment into the army, thus undermining its foundations.

In such a social climate in Syria, the activities of groups like Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) in their battle against Assad became easier. The HTS, despite its terrorist background, emerged with a different image and stance, refraining from the violence and massacres reminiscent of ISIS. Consequently, the advance of the HTS faced little resistance from the people and the army, receiving support instead in various cities, leading to the collapse of the Syrian government.

This reflects the reality of the situation in Syria and has no bearing on the weakening of the Resistance Front or the Islamic Republic of Iran. The claim that Iran withdrew due to fear of Syria is entirely misguided. Iran accepted the call for assistance from Syria and the international community during the far worse conditions of the ISIS crisis, successfully rescuing Syria from ISIS's grip.

However, two months before the fall of Assad, Iranian intelligence officials from the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) and the Ministry of Intelligence warned Syrian officials about potential movements and indicated that Iran could assist if needed. After that, no request for help came from them, and understandably, Iran refrained from intervening to avoid being accused of meddling in Syrian affairs and to prevent the needless

sacrifice of its forces.

Nonetheless, the events in Syria today have not shaken the resolve and capacity of the Resistance Front to continue its path. As Leader said, Syrian youth will stand up against oppression and reclaim their land from despots. Despite having lost many of its commanders, the Resistance Front has not shown any signs of weakness. Today, Ansarullah in Yemen is operating decisively and effectively against Israel, and despite all its efforts, the Israeli regime has failed to dismantle the armed resistance of Hezbollah and Hamas in Lebanon and Gaza.

On the other hand, had Iran not engaged in combatting extremists in Syria and Iraq, ISIS might have approached its borders and infiltrated the country, as they came within 40 kilometers of Iran's borders at one point. Therefore, the Islamic Republic and the Resistance Axis will continue on their path. As the Leader emphasized, it is crucial not to instill despair in the hearts of the people or to make statements that could undermine unity and synergy among Muslims.

Despite all the developments, the Islamic Republic remains the sole key player in the dynamics of the Middle East, with the Resistance Front playing a leading role. This means that if anything is to happen in Syria, Iran will still have a crucial part to play. Although Iran may appear to have withdrawn from Syria, it continues to hold influence over events there.

The situation in Syria is extremely fluid; just recently, Abu Mohammed al-Jolani was being discussed as the head of a transitional government, but chatter is now emerging that he may

not be able to play a role in Syria's political future. There are widespread disagreements in Syria at present, with each party seeking their share from the United States, Turkey, the Israeli regime and even from groups surrounding Jolani.

Undoubtedly, these issues will continue to pose challenges and resolving them will require multilateral meetings to be held. Should a conference be convened to address Syria's outstanding issues, the Islamic Republic of Iran will play a pivotal role in such meets, contributing to finding solutions for Syria's problems and asserting its strategic influence in regional affairs. Syria is a country rich in natural resources, and the United States, Turkey, the Israeli regime and others are pursuing their own agendas there, seeking a share of the energy, resources and potentials of this blessed land. This quest for shares will inevitably lead to tensions and it remains to be seen how figures like Jolani deal with them.

Furthermore, the Syrian people themselves have expectations of the current rulers of their country. In recent days, there has been crackdown on protesting Alawites, suggesting that the initial few days of deceptive calm may be drawing to a close and Syria's new rulers are beginning to reveal their true colors. If the people of Syria are subjected to oppression, they will undoubtedly rise up and change the equations in the country. I believe that the people of Syria will play their role in the political future of their nation, steering the country back toward supporting the Resistance Front once again.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



Iran ranks 3rd in Int'l IQ Test 2024

According to the International IQ Test, updated on January 1, Iran ranked third worldwide, with an impressive average Intelligence Quotient (IQ) of 106.84. The International IQ Test, which drew participation from over 1.39 million individuals worldwide, places South Korea at the top with an average IQ of 107.54, followed closely by China at 106.99. Iran's placement among these leading nations underscores the high intellectual capacity of its population and reflects a broader trend of elevated IQ scores in many East Asian countries. The IQ measurement serves as an indicator of cognitive abilities, categorizing the majority of individuals within a standard range of 70 to 130. The results reveal that only 2 percent of the population scores below 70 or above 130, making Iran's average score noteworthy in a global context. Several factors contribute to Iran's commendable IQ score. The country's strong emphasis on education, particularly in basic sciences, coupled with a cultural focus on academic achievement and family support in nurturing intellectual talents, has played a pivotal role. Iranian families traditionally prioritize education, fostering environments where academic success is highly valued. Experts suggest that this achievement could serve as a catalyst for devising new strategies to leverage the nation's

intellectual resources for sustainable development. The potential for harnessing these talents could lead to significant advancements in various sectors, including technology, science, and the arts. The 2024 rankings reveal a geographical distribution of IQ scores that highlights the superiority of East Asia in terms of human development. Six Asian countries, including South Korea, China, Iran, Japan, Singapore, and Mongolia, feature in the top ten, reflecting their commitment to rigorous educational practices and the integration of innovative learning technologies. European nations like Austria, Canada, and Germany also appear in the top tier, showcasing effective research-based educational systems that promote creative learning. However, the absence of African and many Latin American countries from the upper rankings raises concerns regarding educational inequalities and disparities in access to resources. Iran's average IQ of 106.84 positions it as a leader in intellectual capacity within the region, and experts believe this recognition could inspire further investments in education and research. By capitalizing on its intellectual strengths, Iran has the potential to enhance its global competitiveness and drive innovation. While the IQ test provides insights



into cognitive abilities, it is crucial to remember that intelligence is multifaceted. Factors such as motivation, values, and personality traits also

play significant roles in an individual's overall capabilities. The International IQ Test, modeled on Raven's Matrices, offers a comprehensive and

fair assessment that transcends linguistic and cultural barriers, making it a reliable tool for measuring intelligence internationally.

Three Iranian movies to be screened at India's Third Eye Asian Film Festival



Arts & Culture Desk

The 21st edition of the Third Eye Asian Film Festival in Mumbai will showcase three films supported by the Farabi Cinema Foundation: 'Captain', 'Sima's Unfinished Narration', and 'Hook'. Three Iranian films 'Captain', 'Sima's Unfinished Narration', and 'Hook', all produced by Farabi Cinema Foundation will be showcased at the 21st edition of the Third Eye Asian Film Festival in Mumbai, running from January 10 to 16, IRNA reported. 'Captain', directed by Mohammad Hamzei and produced by Saber Emami, tells the story of an 11-year-old boy named Isa, whose unwavering belief in his future as a football star for the Ira-

nian national team remains unshaken despite his battle with cancer. The film portrays Isa's resilience as he undergoes treatment in the hospital's cancer ward, never losing sight of his dream. In 'Sima's Unfinished Narration', directed by Alireza Samadi and produced by Majid Reza Bala, the life of Dr. Arash Samin, a renowned sociology professor, takes an unexpected turn when a photo of him is published online, disrupting his peaceful existence with his doctor wife and daughter. 'Hook', directed by Ali Rigi and produced by Ali Ashtipour, follows the journey of two Baloch brothers, both athletes fueled by their passion for sports. The brothers strive to achieve their ambitious dreams, facing not only the challenges of competition but also societal and personal barriers. Their story is one of determination, as they push beyond their limits and support each other in their pursuit of excellence. The Farabi Cinema Foundation has a strong presence at this festival, with two of its films, 'Sea Boys' and 'Squad of Girls', screening at the 20th edition last year. 'Squad of Girls' was awarded a special festival trophy, highlighting the foundation's consistent success in promoting Iranian cinema on the international stage.

President hails advancements in vaccine production



Social Desk

President Masoud Pezeshkian highlighted Iran's significant strides in vaccine production, emphasizing the nation's capacity to meet both human and animal health needs. The president made the remarks on Sunday in a message he issued to a ceremony held in Tehran, which marked the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the Razi Vaccine and Serum Research Institute, president.ir reported. Pezeshkian noted that Iran has successfully developed a variety of vaccines, including those specifically designed for livestock and poultry, as well as seven vaccines from the human vaccination portfolio. He proudly mentioned the country's groundbreaking achievement in creating the world's first inject-

able and inhalable COVID-19 vaccine. The president underscored the importance of domestic vaccine production in preventing foreign currency outflows, stating that it could enhance non-oil exports by providing biological products to neighboring countries. He expressed confidence that ongoing efforts and innovations in vaccine development will further bolster Iran's public health and economic resilience. The ceremony celebrated not only the historical achievements in vaccine research and production but also looked forward to the future potential of Iran's scientific endeavors in health care. Pezeshkian's remarks were delivered by Minister of Agriculture Gholamreza Nouri Ghezalfeh, reflecting a unified commitment to advancing the nation's health initiatives.

One in four animal sale ads in Iran features endangered fauna, sparking biodiversity crisis

The head of Iran's Department of Environment, Shina Ansari, stated that 25 percent of the species advertised for sale in the country are endangered. In a recent news published by IRNA, Ansari wrote, "25 percent of the species advertised for sale are listed as prohibited in international trade under the Convention on International

Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)." Ansari highlighted that "advertising in cyberspace" has contributed to the promotion of animal trafficking, noting that "the smuggling of wildlife has become one of the greatest threats to the country's biodiversity." The environment chief further emphasized that the

sale of "all animal species in Iran is illegal," revealing that a range of animals, from lion cubs to pythons, Iranian squirrels, and various reptiles and birds, are being traded illegally in the country. She added that keeping Iranian squirrels as pets not only decreases the population of this species but also leads to the destruction of

the Zagros forests, as some individuals burn or cut down trees to capture these squirrels. According to Ansari, research from the Parliament Research Center indicates that factors such as "financial needs," "entertainment," "superstitious beliefs," and "ignorance" are the primary reasons behind wildlife trafficking in the country.

Last June, coinciding with "International Day for Biological Diversity," an environmental official announced that the "rate of biodiversity extinction" in the country has increased "hundreds of times" compared to the last two centuries, with some plant and animal species experiencing an extinction rate "thousands of times higher."

