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## Leader Extols Private Sector as Vital for Iran's Progress

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Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei (2nd L) visits the "Pioneers of Progress" exhibition, a national event showcasing the achievements and capabilities of the private sector in Tehran on January 21, 2025. [khamenei.ir](http://khamenei.ir)

### Outlook for Iran's economy in 2025

ANALYSIS EXCLUSIVE

Iran's economy has faced numerous challenges in recent decades, ranging from international sanctions to fluctuations in oil prices and instability in economic policies. The present article analyzes the state of Iran's economy at the start of 2025, especially in relation to global and regional trends. Moreover, it addresses existing challenges, proposes solutions, and provides forecasts for the future of Iran's economy, supported by statistics and charts. [Page 7 >](#)

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# Leader extols private sector as vital for Iran's progress

## Economy Desk

Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei emphasized that the only way to advance the country is by leveraging the capabilities of the private sector. He made the remarks on Tuesday during a visit to the "Pioneers of Progress" exhibition, a national event showcasing the achievements and capabilities of the private sector, according to Khamenei.ir. The exhibition featured the private sector's accomplishments in various fields, including information and communication technology, satellite equipment manufacturing, artificial intelligence, aircraft repair tools and equipment, mining and geology, oil, gas, and petrochemical industries, steel and aluminum production, home appliances, maritime industries, carpet manufacturing, water and electricity industries, textiles, medical and hospital equipment, drug production, the Royan Research Institute, agricultural and livestock production, handicrafts, and tourism. During the visit, representatives from various private sector companies raised concerns and complaints about the

challenges and obstacles they face. Addressing the ministers present at the exhibition, the Leader stressed that the government and state officials must work to resolve these issues, as the country's progress depends on empowering the private sector. He reiterated that utilizing the private sector's capacities and capabilities is the only way to move the country forward. In the water and electricity industry, after Energy Minister Abbas Aliabadi explained efforts to address shortages in the electricity sector, the Leader acknowledged that the remarks were positive and accurate but emphasized that they must be put into practice. He noted that while the issue of imbalances and their solutions have been discussed in recent years, there is still a significant gap from achieving the desired outcome. Regarding private sector complaints about the lengthy and complex process of obtaining permits, Ayatollah Khamenei stated that this is a critical issue. He urged the government and responsible agencies to devise fundamental solutions to streamline and expedite the process of permit issuance.



Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei (L) is being briefed by Energy Minister Abbas Aliabadi (R) during a visit to the "Pioneers of Progress" exhibition, a national event showcasing the achievements and capabilities of the private sector in Tehran on January 21, 2025. [leader.ir](http://leader.ir)

## Pezeshkian urges consortium formation to purchase solar panels

### Economy Desk

A meeting chaired by President Masoud Pezeshkian was held Tuesday to accelerate the implementation of renewable energy projects with a focus on solar power plants, during which the president called for the formation of a consortium to purchase solar panels. The session, attended by the heads of the Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Organization (SATBA), the Tourism Financial Group, the National Development Fund, the Plan and Budget Organization, reviewed progress on the government's plan to establish at least 30,000 megawatts of electricity

generation capacity from renewable sources, reported president.ir. After hearing reports on the matter, the president emphasized that the primary goal is to achieve sufficient electricity production capacity to effectively manage peak consumption during next summer. Pezeshkian stated that the best approach to advancing this initiative is to form a consortium led by the SATBA, with the participation of financial institutions, banks, and all entities interested in developing large and small solar power plants. The consortium would collectively purchase solar panels in bulk. The president stressed

that the consortium should procure the most advanced and suitable solar panels and power plant equipment at the lowest cost and highest quality, distributing them among domestic contractors. "This would ensure the projects are completed as quickly as possible, with minimal costs and optimal quality," Pezeshkian added. It was decided that the executive framework for the initiative would be drafted in a meeting hosted by the Plan and Budget Organization as the final version will be presented for approval in a subsequent meeting chaired by the president and attended by the participants at the said meeting.

## Iran calls on UNSC to defend Gaza's territorial integrity

### International Desk

Iran's ambassador and permanent representative to the United Nations called on the Security Council to take a strong stance in "defending Gaza's territorial integrity" after a cease-fire agreement between Hamas and Israel came into effect in Gaza on Sunday. "While a welcome step, the cease-fire must be transformed into a permanent and sustainable solution. This demands the full withdrawal of Israeli forces, the unimpeded delivery of humanitarian aid, and a robust, comprehensive reconstruction plan for Gaza," Amir Saeid Irvani said on Monday, as he addressed the Security Council during a session to discuss the Israeli regime's war crimes against Palestinians. "Israel's unwillingness to fully withdraw and its insistence on maintaining control over Gaza's security

undermines these efforts and perpetuates instability," he added. The Iranian diplomat also urged the international community to prioritize safeguarding the mandate of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA), and ensure predictable, sustained funding to support displaced Palestinians. The Iranian diplomat noted that Gaza remains the center of a deep humanitarian crisis, noting that the tragedy has exposed double standards, moral failures, and inaction from the international community and the Security Council. He said that the atrocities committed by the Israeli regime in Gaza are shocking. "Families have been wiped out, hospitals and schools destroyed, and critical infrastructure demolished. The blockade on Gaza has turned life for over two million people into a daily struggle, depriving them of

food, water, medicine, and electricity. These actions are collective punishment on an unimaginable scale," Irvani said. The Israeli regime has killed more than 47,000 people, mostly women and children, and wounded over 111,000 Palestinians. The Palestinian Civil Defense agency says it estimated there are 10,000 bodies under destroyed structures across the strip. Since the beginning of cease-fire on Sunday, Palestinians have been searching for their loved ones killed in the Israeli strikes and have recovered dozens of bodies buried under rubble. The United Nations estimated last month that 69% of the structures in Gaza have been damaged or completely destroyed. The Israel's war on Gaza have also displaced 90 percent of the Gaza population.

## Iran ready to start talks on lifting 'illegal' sanctions: Deputy FM

### IAEA chief says Iran needs to strike nuclear understanding with Trump

### International Desk

Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister for Legal and International Affairs Kazem Gharibabadi said Tehran is ready to start negotiations to lift "illegal and unilateral" sanctions imposed on Iran. "We have always been ready for this, and if there is (readiness) on the other sides, we believe that the negotiations will take shape and will reach a conclusion," Gharibabadi told reporters on the sidelines of the 75th anniversary of the adoption of the 1949 Geneva Conventions. "We believe that there are appropriate opportunities for dialogue and understanding, this is an issue that has already been discussed and everyone knows. Iran's nuclear program is peaceful, and unilateral and illegal sanctions have not achieved their goals," he said.

"We do not deny that sanctions in any case affect the lives of people, not only in Iran but in every country that is subject to bans, but the goal of the sanctions is to cause other changes in the countries under sanctions and so far, they have not achieved their goals." He underlined that the best way is to start talks to lift the sanctions and return to the right and proper path. Regarding the continuation of negotiations with three European countries involved in the 2015 nuclear agreement, Gharibabadi said, "We agreed to continue the talks and we will set the next date through consultations." Iran and France, Germany and the UK have held two rounds of negotiations on Iran's nuclear program in the recent months. Tensions between Iran and European countries have escalated over the past

two years due to European accusations of Iran's uranium enrichment as well as delivery of missiles and drones to Russia. Since taking office in July, the Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian has repeatedly announced his government's readiness to hold talks with the Western countries to resolve their disputes over Iran's nuclear program.

### Direct negotiations with US

Ahmad Bakhshayesh, an Iranian lawmaker, said Pezeshkian favors direct negotiations with the United States to put an end to long-standing differences, including Iran's nuclear issue. Bakhshayesh said on Sunday that Oman has traditionally mediated between the two nations, but direct talks would be more effective. International Atomic Energy Agency Director General Rafael Mariano Gros-

si also said Tuesday in Davos that Iran needs to reach an understanding over its nuclear activities with the new administration of US President Donald Trump. "There was an agreement that existed before President Trump decided that was not the path he wanted to follow," Grossi said. "Now we need to come to terms with how we deal with this, excluding of course, a war. We don't want more wars." "We are engaging with Russia, with China, with the European countries, but it's clear for everybody that the US is indispensable," Grossi said. "What we need is to find an understanding. This is going to be our mission in the next few weeks." In 2015, Iran proved the peaceful nature of its nuclear program to the world by signing the nuclear deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive



Plan of Action (JCPOA), with six world powers. However, Washington's unilateral withdrawal in 2018 and its subsequent re-imposition of sanctions against Tehran left the future of the deal in limbo. In 2019, Iran started to roll back the limits it had accepted under the JCPOA after the other parties, especially the European countries, failed to live up to their commitments.



# Interconnection of tourism and hospitality in Mazandaran Province



## Iranica Desk

A member of Iran's Tourism Experts Association referred to an increase in annual travel to Mazandaran Province, emphasizing that developing unique services within the hospitality industry is essential for the success of the tourism sector in the region.

In an interview with IRNA, Mehran Hosseini highlighted the close relationship between the tourism and hospitality sectors, asserting that tourism serves as the primary driver, directly generating demand for hospitality services, while the hospitality sector acts as a foundational component of tourism, IRNA wrote.

He remarked that the hospitality industry is a critical part of tourism infrastructure, stating that hotels and accommodations play a crucial role in attracting both domestic and international tourists. The quality of services and facilities they provide can significantly

enhance or diminish tourists' travel experiences. Hosseini pointed out that a variety of hotels with diverse qualities effectively attract tourists with different tastes and budgets. He also noted that hotels can showcase local culture and lifestyle through their architecture, cuisine, and services, enriching the cultural experience for tourists during their stay.

Hosseini emphasized the hospitality industry's significant impact on tourism development, highlighting its crucial role in enhancing infrastructure, increasing competitiveness with modern hotels, and delivering professional services that can differentiate countries or regions from their competitors. He noted that this growth can create extensive job opportunities in various fields, such as management, customer service, culinary arts, and housekeeping. Naturally, an increase in tourists will attract more investment in the construc-

tion and development of hotels and accommodations.

Additionally, Hosseini mentioned other tourism facilities that, through synergy, accelerate tourism growth and provide a comprehensive experience for travelers. These include food outlets and restaurants — particularly those offering local cuisine, which many tourists seek — as well as shopping and entertainment centers that offer various recreational services, encouraging tourists to extend their stays. Furthermore, transportation plays a vital role in tourism, with easy access to hotels, facilities, and attractions through efficient transportation infrastructure (ground, air, sea, and rail) being essential.

He noted that another sector that will both directly and indirectly impact the growth of the hospitality industry is its influence on related industries, such as handicrafts and local prod-

ucts. As tourism grows, so does the demand for souvenirs, handicrafts, and local goods, thereby supporting local producers. Moreover, the industry's need for online reservations, virtual tours, digital advertising, and tourist feedback fosters the advancement of new technologies.

The Secretary of the Mazandaran Province's Association of Sustainable Green Tourism emphasized that tourism acts as a primary driver, creating a demand for accommodation and directly necessitating hospitality services. Consequently, hospitality functions as a foundational and service-oriented sector of tourism, with the variety of services offered depending on the type of tourism — such as business, recreational, health, cultural, and more.

Hosseini underscored that a crucial principle for maintaining and enhancing business in the market is the role of loyal customers.

The quality of services provided in hotels and the positive experiences created by resort managers during guests' stays encourage tourists to return. This not only impacts repeat visits but also directly influences word-of-mouth advertising, which is often referred to in electronic tourism as viral marketing.

He also highlighted another way the hospitality industry contributes to tourism development: beyond supporting tourism, hospitality expands it by delivering innovative and targeted services. By fostering trust and assurance through the presence of reputable hotel brands, which create a sense of security and comfort for tourists, hotels offering multilingual international services, diverse cuisines, and special amenities effectively attract foreign tourists.

Hosseini noted that green hotels, which prioritize environmental sustainability, are becoming increasingly

competitive in today's tourism market and are particularly favored by ecotourism enthusiasts.

He also highlighted the importance of providing a scientific framework and innovative strategies to attract tourists with competitive advantages in the hospitality industry.

In his view, the industry faces several challenges in the current competitive landscape, including a growing demand for personalized experiences, heightened competition from shared accommodation platforms, and various global economic and social impacts. He emphasized the necessity of adopting a scientific approach centered on innovation, competitive advantages, and delivering customer-centric services.

He stated that Mazandaran Province, as the primary choice for tourists in the country, is experiencing an increase in the number of incoming tourists and a

diversity of needs, wishes, and millions of requests for leisure activities. Many of these tourists, unlike in traditional travel periods where trips occurred once a year, are now traveling more frequently — especially from neighboring provinces and the central regions of the country, which hold a significant portion of the population— due to changes in lifestyle.

Hosseini continued that, in such conditions, attention to scientific frameworks and innovative strategies that will provide tools for competitive advantage and a larger share of the dynamic and growing tourism market is essential. This requires commitment and initial investment, where the cost-intensive aspects will, in the long run, serve as a source of investment for implementing these strategies and other innovative and creative methods due to the dynamism within the hospitality and tourism industries.

## Unveiling majesty of Marmar Palace in Ramsar

### Iranica Desk

When summer arrives, many travelers flock to Ramsar in Mazandaran Province to enjoy its lush forests, breathtaking countryside, and sandy beaches along the Caspian Sea. This picturesque city, known for its unique climate and natural beauty, is often referred to as the "Bride of the Caspian," attracting visitors seeking both relaxation and adventure. One of the key attractions in Ramsar that shouldn't be missed is the Marmar Palace (Royal Palace), located in the heart of the city.

Situated on Rajaei Street, Marmar Palace is just eight minutes from the old hotel in Ramsar and only a ten-minute drive to the stunning Caspian Sea coast. Built in 1937, the palace was taken over by the Mostazafan Foundation after the victory of the Islamic Revolution and is now open



to visitors as a museum. Ramsar itself boasts a rich history, with roots dating back to ancient Persia, and the area is dotted with cultural landmarks and natural wonders, making it a perfect destination for history buffs and nature lovers alike.

The palace is surrounded by a botanical garden that spans about 6,000 square meters, showcasing a diverse range of plants, including some native species unique to the region. However, the architectural beauty of the 600-meter mansion is what draws

many visitors. True to its name, the palace features a stunning marble façade, with a marble pool, porch, and intricately carved columns that impress at first sight. The reflection of these columns in the pool, among the fish, adds to its charm. Inside, the palace boasts



a central hall and several spacious eastern and western rooms. The furniture, chandeliers, candlesticks, desks, and other decorative items dating back to the Pahlavi I dynasty fascinate many visitors, along with the stucco ceilings and elegant fireplaces. The walls

are adorned with invaluable artworks collected throughout the complex, highlighting the rich artistic heritage of Iran.

To the south of Marmar Palace, another entrance showcases a marble sculpture of two extinct Mazandaran tigers, a poignant reminder

of wildlife lost to the region. This sculpture serves as a symbol of the importance of wildlife conservation, a cause that resonates deeply with both locals and visitors. The palace complex also includes an old bathroom, a warehouse, and an installation building. Notably, both the garden and mansion of Marmar Palace have been inscribed on Iran's National Heritage List.

Visitors to Ramsar can also explore other attractions, such as the nearby Alborz Mountains, which offer hiking trails and stunning vistas, or the charming local markets where traditional crafts and delicious Persian cuisine can be enjoyed. With its blend of natural beauty, historical significance, and cultural richness, Ramsar and Marmar Palace together create an unforgettable experience for anyone looking to immerse themselves in the heart of Iran.

● wikipedia.org



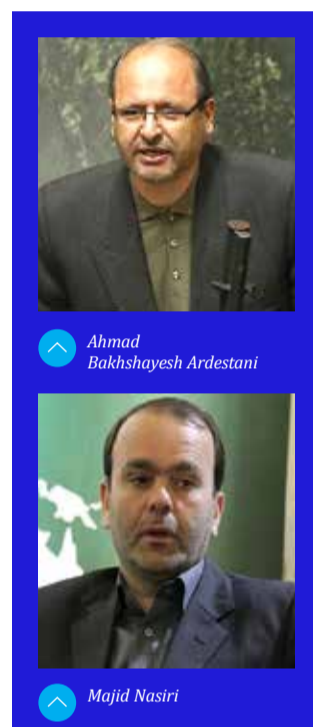
# Prospect of Iran's long-term deals with West

## Balancing ties with West, East is an imperative

International Desk  
**INTERVIEW**

A "comprehensive strategic partnership" treaty between Iran and Russia was inked on Friday in Moscow, by Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin. The 20-year deal, which comprises an introduction and 47 articles, is a roadmap for developing bilateral relations. Iran has also sealed a 25-year agreement with China, formally known as the "Iran-China 25-Year Comprehensive Cooperation Agreement," in March 2021. It encompasses a broad range of cooperation between the two countries, including economic, military, and security aspects. Following these extensive deals, there are now signs from government officials that similar agreements may be established with the West, a signal that is not well-received by hardliners who oppose any negotiations with the West.

Two members of the Iranian Parliament assert that a long-term agreement between Iran and the West not only presents no issues but also addresses existing concerns. Majid Nasirpour says it is enough for the government to reach a conclusion on this matter; the problem of the hardliners is solvable. Ahmad Bakhshayesh Ardestani also speaks of the advantages of contracts with the West.



● GETTY IMAGES



The country needs global relations for further development, and part of these relations are with European countries. We have a long history with Europe, and we have always had exchanges in scientific and economic fields. Establishing and strengthening these ties can help the country achieve its plans.

### Potential for similar deals with West

Ahmad Bakhshayesh Ardestani, a member of the National Security and Foreign Policy Commission of the parliament, evaluated the comprehensive strategic agreement between Iran and Russia and the possibility of similar agreements with the West: If the West adjusts its positions, why not? We can sign a 20-year agreement with them. Geopolitically and in terms of the balance of power, an agreement between Iran with Russia and China could be seen as a provocation by the West, considering Iran was under Western influence from approximately 1940 to 1979, and the West maintained an active presence in the region due to its strategic position. The Middle East is very important to the West. In the early days of the war between Gaza and Israel, the US said that if Israel did not exist, we would create it. This statement is made to ensure security stability for the Middle East and to facilitate the unhindered flow of oil to the West. Iran used to play this role for the US and the West, which is why they are attracted to such agreements.

The 20 and 25-year agreements that Iran signed with Russia and China could be provocative and tempting for the West, encouraging them to adjust their positions and enter into a 20-year agreement with Iran. There's no harm in that. Moreover, since the onset of the [Islamic] Revolution, we have engaged in various negotiations with Europe, encompassing constructive, critical, nuclear, and JCPOA-related discussions. The

issue is that Europe consistently looks to the US; if we establish relations with the US and negotiations commence, Europe will inevitably follow suit.

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian raised this point because, apart from security and defense issues, Iran's agreements with China and Russia have not improved people's livelihoods, unlike the JCPOA, which led to a drop in the dollar rate and an easier life for people the very next day after its signing. European leaders visited Iran, although Iran did not allow the import of American Ford cars, and Trump stated that the JCPOA was not in the US' interest but in France's, as it was reviving Renault in Iran. On this basis, Pezeshkian says we are ready to negotiate with the West and sign a multi-year agreement. He makes these statements because if we don't look to the West and constantly focus on the East, the Russians and Chinese will impose whatever they want on us, as in the case of the three islands where they issued a statement saying that Iran and the UAE's issues should be resolved in the Hague Court, and we responded that we do not accept their sovereignty over Crimea. If Iran has relations with the West, a balance will be achieved, and it can work with the East with discretion. Therefore, if Iran works with Europe and the US, it will gain more benefits from Russia and China.

### Impact of long-term agreements with East

The first effect of Iran's long-term agreements with Russia and China is creating an atmosphere, es-

pecially after Bashar al-Assad's government in Syria collapsed and he sought refuge in Russia, it was perceived that the discourse of Resistance [against the Israeli regime] had weakened, causing tremors and the impression among the people that Iran was isolated. However, when such an agreement is signed, it strengthens and solidifies the relationship, especially since both Iran and Russia are under sanctions. Regarding the market, the Iranian and Russian markets will open up to each other, facilitating the formation of commercial and financial agreements between the two countries. However, historical distrust between the Iranian people and Russia persists, which may impact these economic interactions. On the other hand, a 20-year agreement between Iran and Russia could serve as a roadmap or even be enticing for the West, which aimed to apply so much pressure on Iran that Tehran would eventually concede. However, when the West realizes that intensifying pressure on Iran leads to its pivot towards the East, these pressures will psychologically diminish. Concerning the impact on people's lives, we have yet to see BRICS or the Shanghai Cooperation Organization significantly affect daily life. Although Iran, under Ebrahim Raisi's government, managed to export approximately one and a half million barrels of oil, people's lives remain challenging and constrained, with no relief in sight.

### Imperative of balancing ties with West and East

It doesn't seem that relations with Russia will have a signif-

icant impact on people's lives unless the country establishes a relationship with the West and balance this equation.

### Ready for practical action with West

Majid Nasirpour, a member of the Independent Faction of the parliament evaluated the comprehensive strategic agreement between Iran and Russia and made proposals to the government for signing such agreements with Western countries: In my opinion, not only is the signing of such long-term agreements possible, but it is also a necessity. The country needs global relations for further development, and part of these relations are with European countries. We have a long history with Europe, and we have always had exchanges in scientific and economic fields. Establishing and strengthening these ties can help the country achieve its plans. Therefore, this is a serious matter, and the government should pursue it precisely. However, there are individuals who are extreme, create unnecessary confrontations, and engage in actions that have cost the country dearly over many years, such as the incident involving the Saudi embassy and its subsequent repercussions. [Saudi Arabia severed diplomatic relations with Iran in January 2016 following protests held outside the Saudi Embassy in Tehran. Some demonstrators, who were opposing the execution of prominent Shia Muslim cleric Nimr al-Nimr by the Saudi government, stormed and set fire to the Saudi Embassy in Tehran.]

It appears that the Islamic Republic, at this moment, is in a position where these statements (the necessity of ties with the

West) are made in full alignment, and if any action is taken, it will be in complete accord with the entire Establishment. Therefore, if the decision of the establishment and the general interests of the country require it, necessary measures must be taken to prevent unwarranted interventions by extremists in these areas. It seems that the country is planning to overcome the challenges ahead, and if the country's requirements and issues necessitate it, this decision will definitely be made and implemented.

### Balance between West, East in int'l relations

Anyway, these kinds of relations can help create a balance between the East and the West and affect our interactions. Regardless of their mutual influence, Iran can secure the country's interests through both global poles by creating new literature in international relations. Naturally, in these interactions, the counterpart countries pursue their interests, and this path should be a win-win situation.

Iran has never had a problem with negotiations or even actions, as in 2013 when Hassan Rouhani became president, with the leadership's wisdom and permission, the government entered negotiations even at a higher level than the European Union. This shows that the country has never been closed to negotiations and is always ready. But these negotiations must also bear fruit, and if the negotiating countries show signs of securing the interests of the Islamic Republic, Iran is nat-

urally ready to negotiate and, more importantly, take practical action while safeguarding the interests of the Islamic Republic.

### Balance between the West and the East in international relations

Nevertheless, such relationships can influence the creation of a balance between East and West and our interactions. However, regardless of the mutual effects they have on each other, Iran can secure the country's interests through both global poles by producing a new discourse in international relations. Naturally, in these interactions, the opposing countries pursue their own interests, and this path should ideally be a win-win situation.

Iran has never had an issue with negotiation or even taking action. For instance, in 2013, when Hassan Rouhani became president, with the guidance of the Leader [Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei], the government engaged in negotiations even at a level higher than the European Union. This indicates that the country has never acted closed off to talks and is always ready. However, these negotiations must yield results, and if the negotiating countries signal their commitment to securing the interests of the Islamic Republic, Iran is naturally prepared to negotiate and, beyond that, ready to take practical action while preserving the interests of the Islamic Republic.

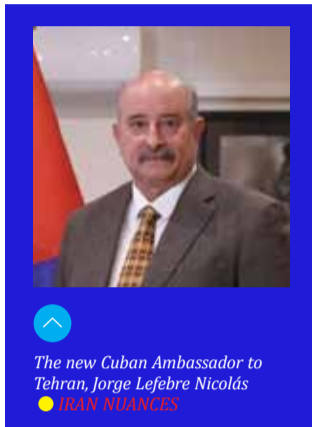
The article was first published by the Persian language Khabaronline news agency.



# From Havana to Tehran: Cuban perspective on Trump's return, US relations

International Desk  
**INTERVIEW**

The US State Department recently removed Cuba from its list of state sponsors of terrorism. Jorge Lefebre Nicolás, the new Cuban Ambassador to Tehran, in an interview, discussed the dimensions, reasons, and implications of this decision. The interview also addressed questions regarding the cease-fire in Gaza, the return of Donald Trump to power, and Tehran-Havana relations. The partial script of the interview is provided below:



“

we all want a world without sanctions where we can interact, engage, and develop together. Sanctions have shown that this path is not the right one. How many countries are under sanctions now? They haven't achieved their intended goals with sanctions. Dialogue and negotiation are the solution.

**IRAN NUANCES:** What is the Cuban government's assessment and reaction to the US government's decision to remove Cuba from the list of state sponsors of terrorism?

**AMBASSADOR:** This decision made by the Joe Biden administration is renewed annually, and it is an important decision. This was a decision made almost four years ago by the Trump administration, and since then, other sanctions have been added. However, this particular sanction had the most detrimental impact on Cuba's economy and people.

Unfortunately, this action has no relation to reality, and they use this tool solely to exert pressure on countries. If they were genuinely seeking to identify state sponsors of terrorism, Israel should have been on this list long before now. The US itself should also be on this list.

This was one of the sanctions that put the most pressure on the Cuban economy. The lifting of these sanctions has given us some breathing room and made it a bit easier to operate. However, we are still experiencing the bitter taste of sanctions, and despite never having had any connection to terrorism, we were placed on the list for so long.

This recent action has a positive effect, but its impact is very limited because the other sanctions remain in place, and these sanctions have been imposed on us for over 60 years.

**Why did the Biden administration decide to remove Cuba from this list in its final days?**

That's a question we have as well, why they did this now and not during the previous years. Biden worked with Barack Obama in the past, and Obama removed Cuba from the list towards the end of his term. After Trump came to power, he put us back on the list. However, when Biden became president, he did nothing and waited until now.

This action is a method of exerting pressure on countries. Their thinking is that by applying economic pressure, they can enforce and impose their decisions. For this reason, they kept Cuba on the list to achieve their goals. They did not have the courage to remove Cuba from the list and did so during the last days of their term.

**Do you see an immediate impact of this decision in**

**the economic sphere? Given Trump's return to power, how will the above decision affect relations between Cuba and the US?**

This decision was recently made, and it will take about 30 days for the banks to be notified. It should also be noted that even when this decision is implemented, the fear of doing business with Cuba still exists. Therefore, we must wait for this fear to subside so that companies and banks can do business with Cuba. Banks are very careful not to be subjected to US sanctions. As such, we must wait for this fear to subside and for the banks to enter into commercial transactions with Cuba. But we are in a special situation right now. Trump, the person who imposed the sanctions, is returning. There is a possibility that he will re-impose the above sanctions. Time will clarify this issue.

**Beyond the recent decision, what policy do you think the new US administration will pursue towards Cuba?**

When Trump came to power, he unfortunately adopted the wrong policies towards Cuba. He imposed more than 240 sanctions on the Cuban economy, which are still in place. I don't think there are many sanctions left to be imposed. When we look at the people around Trump, we see that these people hate Cuba and Iran. Therefore, we must proceed cautiously and should not be too optimistic. We have a balanced approach to this issue.

**The US's action of including countries, namely Cuba, on the terrorist list and then removing them has fueled speculation. Some believe this demonstrates that the US's actions are politically motivated and have no grounds in reality. Others consider the failure of the previous policy to be the reason for its revision. What is your opinion?**

I think it's a political game because there is no reason to argue that this decision was based on it. These decisions are made to exert pressure on some coun-

tries. Sometimes, it is even related to the elections in those countries (the US). Imposing more sanctions makes the groups that support sanctions vote for them (in the US) more. Now that (Democrats) have lost the election, they are lifting this lie-based sanction that is of no benefit to them.

**Cuba, Iran, and some other countries have been under US and Western sanctions for a long time. Some even in the US believe that excessive use of the sanctions diminishes the effectiveness of this tool. How do you see the future of the indiscriminate use of sanctions?**

The US is a country that has turned sanctions into a major foreign policy tool. We see Israel's actions in Palestine and are still waiting for the US to impose a sanction on Israel and its military. Sanctions have become a policy for powers that want to bring their opposing countries to their knees. These sanctions have been in place for so long that countries like Iran and Cuba have learned how to circumvent them and find ways to bypass them. The prolonged sanctions have also caused some countries not to keep them on their agenda. This means that countries that have been sanctioned continue their activities. However, the US still maintains this policy and imposes sanctions whenever it wants against a country or a group of countries.

**A cease-fire has been announced and implemented in Gaza. What is your assessment of that agreement? Has Israel achieved its military goals? What should be done in the post-ceasefire phase, especially given that Cuba recently given to join South Africa in pursuing Israel's crimes through the International Court of Justice (ICJ)?**

Israel is a disgrace to humanity. This is one of the most violent genocides that has ever happened. But there are countries that support Palestine, and you saw that South Africa took this action in the court with the aim of stopping Israel's genocide. Cuba also supports this action.

The first thing we have to do is stop the killing of thousands of women and children. Then hold Israel accountable for its actions so that it pays the price for those actions. I know what they will say is that Hamas started it and hundreds of people were killed. But we have to look before that date and see what Israelis had done in Palestine, how many people they had killed and what genocides they had committed. Nothing and no conditions justify the killing of 46,000 people as retaliation for an attack.

Israel's main goal is to expel Palestinians from their land, but Israel has not been able to achieve this goal and I think it never will.

**Do you consider this amount of killing and destruction to be a victory for Israel? In your opinion, who is the winner and loser of the war?**

Perhaps some Israelis, especially the extremists, will say that they have achieved their goal. But I'm sure that even there are those who are ashamed of what their government is doing. The interesting thing that happened was that the veil was lifted from many people's eyes to see the truth about Israel. Before that, Israel claimed that the Holocaust happened to them and that they are an oppressed nation against whom a series of actions have been taken. But now they have proven that they are a nation that kills people, women and children, and even destroys schools.

**You have been in Tehran for some time. What is your assessment of the state of Iran-Cuba relations? What potentials and areas do the two countries have for further cooperation?**

Fortunately, Iran-Cuba relations are historical and are now in their 46th year. Despite the sanctions against it, Iran has been able to make good economic progress and achieve many of its goals. We, along with Iran, must learn how to overcome sanctions. Our political relations are excellent, and we are trying to bring economic relations to the same level.

The joint Iran-Cuba commission will be held in two weeks, during which various agreements will be discussed. Recently, an exhibition was held in Cuba in which dozens of Iranian companies participated. We are looking for more common points to strengthen economic cooperation. We have made very good progress in the fields of health technology and communications. We are trying to expand relations in other commercial sectors, the industrial sector, and the food sector.

**In your opinion, what qualitative impact have various international developments had on the relationship between Iran and Cuba? Are issues such as sanctions, the return of Trump to power, and other international developments a threat to the two countries' relations, or an opportunity?**

These things are not new. It's been 46 years since the Islamic Revolution in Iran and 64 years since the Cuban Revolution, and both countries are still standing strong. In fact, these events (sanctions and even military threats) have often been an opportunity for the relationship between the two countries. For example, Iran has made progress in the industrial sector that it did not have before the sanctions, or even 10 or 15 years ago. Sanctions sometimes force you to take the initiative and act based on domestic and existing resources, without expecting anything from the outside.

Naturally, we all want a world without sanctions where we can interact, engage, and develop together. Sanctions have shown that this path is not the right one. How many countries are under sanctions now? They haven't achieved their intended goals with sanctions. Dialogue and negotiation are the solution. However, if the goal is to impose sanctions to pressure us into doing something, we will never do it. On the contrary, they will make us stronger and enable us to circumvent the sanctions and even prepare for future events.

**Another question about Trump. In your opinion, who**

**would be more worried about Trump's return, the so-called "enemies" of the US or its friends and allies? How do you see the next few years?**

First, we need to address who is an enemy and who isn't. We, that is Iran and Cuba, are not the enemies of the American people. The US government has placed us in this category. Since they see us as enemies, we don't have good expectations of Mr. Trump. We're waiting to see what they do, so we can react accordingly. Therefore, we don't have positive expectations, and we will strive to respond.

I think those who should be more worried are the friends of the US. Look at the problems Trump has caused in the world before he even came to power. He even does this with his friendly countries. His remarks about occupying the Panama Canal or turning Canada into a star on the American flag are strange. He also talked about NATO expenses a while ago, saying that European countries should pay for themselves and that the US shouldn't cover their expenses.

Trump wants to deport hundreds or thousands of immigrants, even though the US is fundamentally a country of immigrants. He threatens everyone, and for him, there's no difference between friends or foes. Biden, who spoke recently, said, as he leaves this position (Presidency), he is very concerned about it. He said that an oligarchy is forming in the US, which is very dangerous; that is, people who have money in America are taking actions for themselves. Biden said that he was worried about the impact of this on American society. Therefore, the US is being taken over by people who are rich and crazy.

For this reason, I think everyone should be worried (smiles). We will see changes in the next four years, and we will see a different world. But what I am sure of is that after his four years in office, we will be here, and we will talk to each other, and we will have no problem.

The above is a part of the interview conducted by Iran Nuances.



# New Iran volleyball coach Piazza to follow in Velasco's footsteps

## Sports Desk

New national team head coach Roberto Piazza said he aims to make the same impact in Iranian volleyball as former Argentine boss Julio Velasco did during his tenure.

Piazza, 57, signed a two-year contract with the Iranian Volleyball Federation in Tehran on Monday, with the option of a two-year extension, which could see the Italian remain in charge for the next Olympic Games in Los Angeles.

"I want to thank the head of the federation [Milad Taqavi] for giving me the opportunity to work in this country," Piazza said in a press conference, adding: "I believe we can build many things from the scratch and that is why I accepted this role."

"I want to do what Velasco did here, which is to transform the world's perception of Iranian volleyball," added the Italian.

Velasco was appointed to the Iranian job in 2011 and went on to orchestrate the country's breakthrough onto the global stage of the sport, introducing arguably the all-time finest generation of the national team players, including world-class setter Saeid Ma'roof, Seyyed Mohammad Mousavi, Farhad Qaemi, and Shahram Mahmoudi. During his three-year stint, Iran dethroned China, South Korea, and Japan as the continental powerhouse, winning a maiden Asian title in 2011 before repeating the success two years



later. Iran also qualified for the FIVB World League – rebranded as the Volleyball Nations League in 2018 – for the first time in 2013.

Iran will be looking for a fresh start under the Italian coach following a dire run of results over the past two years – during which it had dreadful campaigns in back-to-back Nations League events and failed to qualify for the Paris Olympics, while being outclassed by Japan on home

soil in the 2023 Asian Championship final.

A first major tournament for the team and Piazza will be the Nations League in June, starting with a Week 1 visit to Rio de Janeiro, where Iran will take on international heavyweights Brazil and USA, as well as Slovenia – VNL semifinalist last year – and Ukraine.

"Iran has had mixed results over the past couple of years, and my coaching staff and I will have to

find out where we need to improve," said the Italian, who will keep his job in the top-flight side Powervolley Milano in his home country.

"Our work will begin with a first training camp in May, where I will get to know the players at my disposal to see how I can get the best out of them. I'm sure my assistant Tomaso Totolo's knowledge of Iranian players will be a great help.

"There are some top players in

Iranian volleyball, who are currently playing in high-profile leagues all across Europe. There are also up-and-coming young talents, who are capable of reaching the highest level of the game in the near future," said the former coach of the Dutch national team.

Asked if his commitment with Milano would affect his preparation plans for the Iranian team, Piazza said: "All club competitions in Europe will be

Italian Roberto Piazza attends a press conference after being unveiled as the new head coach of the Iranian volleyball national team in Tehran, Iran, on January 20, 2025.

● FOROUGH TAHERKHANI/  
VOLLEYBALL.IR

finished by late April, and that is when players in Italy, Poland, and Turkey will be released to join their national teams. We will have about three weeks to train and play friendly games before the Nations League starts in June, which is a decent amount of time for preparation. That is how I worked in the Netherlands, and I am sure there won't be any problem in that regard."

Iran will head to Belgrade to face Serbia in the VNL second week opener on June 25. Piazza's side will then play Argentina and Germany before the Italian reunites with the Netherlands in the Serbian capital on June 29. The third and the final week of the preliminary phase in Gdańsk, Poland, will see Iran square off against European powerhouses Poland (July 16) and France (July 19), who met in the Olympic final last August, either side of an all-Asian battle against China.

Iran will hope to be in contention for a top-eight place in the 16-team table, and a berth in the VNL Finals, when going head-to-head with Bulgaria in the final round of the preliminaries on July 20.

## Australian Open:

### Zverev raises his game to down Paul and reach semis again



Alexander Zverev hits a serve during his Australian Open last-eight win against Tommy Paul in Melbourne, Australia, on January 21, 2025.  
● JAIMI JOY/REUTERS

REUTERS – Alexander Zverev played his best tennis when it mattered most to down Tommy Paul 7-6(1) 7-6(0) 2-6 6-1 on Tuesday and reach his third Australian Open semi-final in five years, keeping alive his dream of finally landing a Grand Slam title. The 27-year-old German was unable to find his peak level for much of a match played in the stifling afternoon heat on Rod Laver Arena but dominated his American opponent in tiebreaks to lock up the first two sets. Paul bagged the third set but second seed Zverev upped his intensity to whip through the fourth.

"To be honest, I should have been down two sets to love, he played better than me. I was not playing great," Zverev said after

reaching his ninth Grand Slam semi-final, the most among active players who have not won a major.

"(Somehow) I'm up two sets to love and all of a sudden, I need only one more set, and the fourth set was definitely the best that I've played.

"I'm obviously extremely happy to be back in the semi-finals."

Paul, semi-finalist in 2023, had beaten Zverev in their two previous meetings and worked assiduously to gain the upper hand in the first two sets only for the German to raise his game to drag him back into a dog fight.

"He did what he always does," said the American. "He picks up his level at the big moments, and my level unfortunately

dropped in the big moments today."

Elsewhere, Paula Badosa advanced to her first Grand Slam semi-final at the third attempt after beating Coco Gauff on Tuesday but the Spaniard said that just reaching the final four did not give her license to play with more freedom.

"I'm never going to feel freedom until I win the tournament," said the former world number two after her 7-5 6-4 win over an error-prone third seed Gauff.

"I'm always like this. It's my personality, my character. Today, of course, maybe I had a little bit less expectations, but I still had pressure, because I wanted to win so badly.

"I'll step on the court in the semi-finals, I don't care against whom, and I'll want to win so badly. That's part of me. When I'm in the final round, my level rises and I just want to give my 100% there and leave it all on the court."

World number 12 Badosa had fallen out of the top 50 due to a series of injuries, including a chronic back problem that made her consider retirement.

## Warriors thrashed in worst home defeat under Kerr



BBC – The Golden State Warriors suffered their heaviest home defeat under coach Steve Kerr as they were thrashed 125-85 by the Boston Celtics. Kerr, who won five NBA Championships as a player, has claimed a further four as head coach of the Warriors since taking charge in 2014. But the Warriors were outclassed by the defending champions, who showed no mercy in a 40-point victory that is the Warriors' biggest home defeat since a 45-point reverse against the Dallas Mavericks in 1985.

Leading by 15 points at half-time, the Celtics hit 43 points in the third quarter alone to underline their dominance.

Jayson Tatum top scored for the Celtics with 22 points, while Kristaps Porzingis and Jaylen Brown added 18 points and 17 points respectively.

"We've got to flush this one down the toilet and get ready for Sac," said Kerr, whose side face the Sacramento Kings in their next match.

"We've been very competitive all year. Our guys have fought, but we've had a handful of these where we get blown out.

Celtics center Kristaps Porzingis (8) shoots during an NBA victory over the Warriors in San Francisco, CA, US, on January 20, 2025.  
● JED JACOBSON/AP

These are demoralising." The Warriors, who last won the Championship in 2022 by beating the Celtics in the finals, sit a place outside the play-off positions in the Western Conference in 11th spot. The Celtics are second in the Eastern Conference standings behind the Cleveland Cavaliers.



# Outlook for Iran's economy in 2025



By Amin Shojaei  
Guest contributor

## ANALYSIS EXCLUSIVE

Iran's economy has faced numerous challenges in recent decades, ranging from international sanctions to fluctuations in oil prices and instability in economic policies. The present article analyzes the state of Iran's economy at the start of 2025, especially in relation to global and regional trends. Moreover, it addresses existing challenges, proposes solutions, and provides forecasts for the future of Iran's economy, supported by statistics and charts.

### Current state of Iran's economy

In recent years, Iran's economy has experienced negative growth, influenced by factors such as economic sanctions and ineffective domestic policies. In 2023, the inflation rate averaged over 40%, and the national currency underwent a significant devaluation. According to a report by the Central Bank of Iran, the country's GDP grew modestly by 1.5% in 2024, which is considerably lower than the global average of 3.2% and the Middle East regional average of 4.8%.

### Shortages in infrastructure, energy

#### • Electricity shortages

In 2024, Iran faced a 25-gigawatt electricity deficit, leading to widespread outages across various industrial and residential sectors. This situation not only disrupted industrial production but also imposed significant stress on the daily lives of citizens.

#### • Gas shortages

A decline in gas production from shared fields, combined with increasing domestic consumption, has created challenges in meeting the country's energy needs. This issue has directly impacted gas-dependent industries, resulting in reduced production and higher product prices.

#### • Aging infrastructure

Many of Iran's infrastructures, including railways, the electricity grid, and oil and gas facilities, are in a critical state due to insufficient investment and lack of major repairs. Estimates indicate that over 40% of Iran's oil and gas facilities require immediate modernization.

### Comparison with global, regional economies in 2025

While many countries are leveraging technological transformations and opportunities in the digital economy, Iran's economy continues to rely heavily on traditional industries such as oil and gas. For instance:

#### • Global perspective

China, with a 5% GDP growth rate, and India, with 6% growth, are advancing steadily. In contrast, forecasts suggest that Iran's economy will experience growth of less than 2%.

#### • Regional perspective

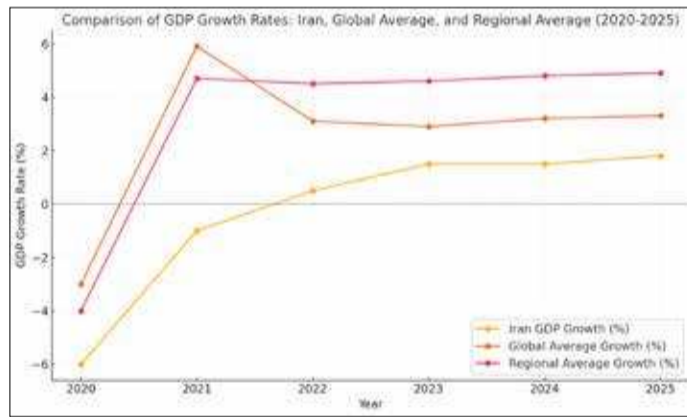
In the Middle East, Saudi Arabia, with \$328 billion in oil revenue in 2024, and Iraq, with \$120 billion, are significantly ahead of Iran, which generat-



ed only \$40 billion in the same year. Furthermore, regional countries such as the UAE have diversified their economies, capturing a larger share of global markets.

### 3. Dependency on oil, gas

Over 50% of the Iranian government's revenue still comes from oil exports. Declining global demand for fossil fuels and intense competition in the



The chart compares the GDP growth rates of Iran with the global average and regional average (2020-2025), highlighting the significant gap during this period.

### Challenges facing Iran's economy

#### 1. International sanctions, non-membership in FATF

Iran remains on the FATF blacklist, which severely restricts access to the international banking network. The lack of membership in this organization has increased trade transaction costs and reduced Iran's attractiveness for foreign investment.

#### 2. Inflation, currency devaluation

According to reports, Iran's inflation rate reached 45% in 2024, and the value of the Rial depreciated by over 30% against the dollar. This has led to a decline in the purchasing power of Iranians and increased pressure on lower-income segments of society.

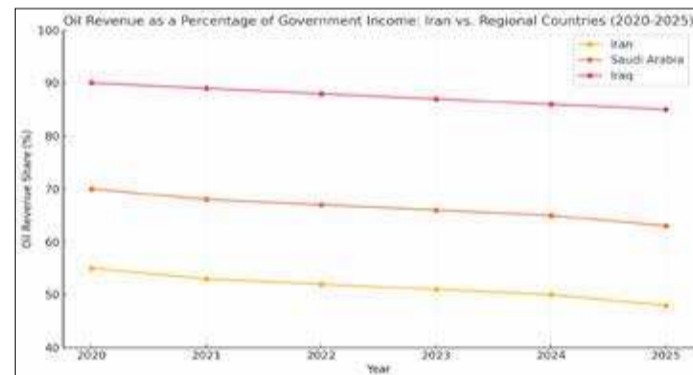
global market have created uncertainty about Iran's economic future.

#### 4. Inefficient management

The lack of coordination in economic policies, including the failure to reform banking structures and the absence of financial transparency, has eroded public trust in the government. Inefficient management has also led to resource wastage and reduced productivity across various economic sectors.

#### 5. Brain drain

Statistics show that over 70,000 scientific and professional elites left the country in 2024, reducing human capital and innovation potential. Advanced regional countries such as Qatar and the UAE have taken advantage of this opportunity to attract skilled professionals.



The chart compares oil revenue as a percentage of government income in Iran compared to two regional countries (2020-2025), illustrating the share of oil in Iran's government revenue compared to Saudi Arabia and Iraq.

### Solutions for improving current situation

#### 1. Enhancing financial transparency, structural reforms

Increasing the transparency in the economic policies of the country and implementing banking structure reforms can boost public and investor confidence. Enacting anti-corruption laws and improving regulatory performance will also play a key role.

#### 2. FATF membership

Exiting the FATF blacklist and striving to establish international banking relations can improve Iran's access to foreign financial resources. This step will lower trade costs and enhance Iran's attractiveness to foreign investors.

#### 3. Investment in renewable energy

Reducing dependency on oil and gas through the development of renewable energy sources will diversify Iran's economy. For instance, investing in solar and wind projects can increase the capacity for clean energy production.

#### 4. Development of knowledge-based industries

Supporting startups and technology-driven companies can steer the economy toward sustainability. Advancing modern technologies can increase economic productivity and create new job opportunities.

#### 5. Infrastructure improvement

Investing in the modernization of critical facilities such as the electricity grid, railways, and gas transmission lines can enhance Iran's economic productivity. A comprehensive plan for infrastructure renovation is essential.

### Forecast for Iran's economy in 2025

Assuming the current situation persists, the outlook for Iran's economy in 2025 remains bleak. According to forecasts:

#### • Inflation

The inflation rate is expected to exceed 50%, further intensifying the financial burden on the population.

#### • Economic growth

GDP growth is predicted to remain below 2%, indicating Iran's inability to compete with regional countries.

#### • Inequality

The economic inequality index is projected to rise, deepening social crises.

### Possible scenarios

#### • Optimistic scenario

If sanctions are eased and structural reforms are implemented, economic growth could reach 4%. Reforming economic structures could reduce inequality and attract foreign investment.

#### • Pessimistic scenario

If the current situation continues, inflation and unemployment rates will rise, and social inequality will deepen. Reduced oil production and declining exports could further exacerbate the economic crisis.

#### • Stable scenario

With the implementation of limited reforms and better resource management, Iran's economic growth could reach approximately 2.5%. However, this figure would still remain below the regional average.

Iran's economy in 2025 will face structural, political, and international challenges that, if not addressed urgently, will lead to a continuation of stagnation and inflation. Comparisons indicate that Iran has not sufficiently utilized its economic opportunities compared to regional countries like Saudi Arabia and Iraq.

Ultimately, proposed solutions such as enhancing transparency, joining the FATF, and developing the infrastructure could pave the way for improving the country's economy. However, achieving these goals requires political will and fundamental reforms. Strengthening international relations, reducing dependency on oil, and investing in modern technologies are crucial steps to place Iran on the path to sustainable growth.



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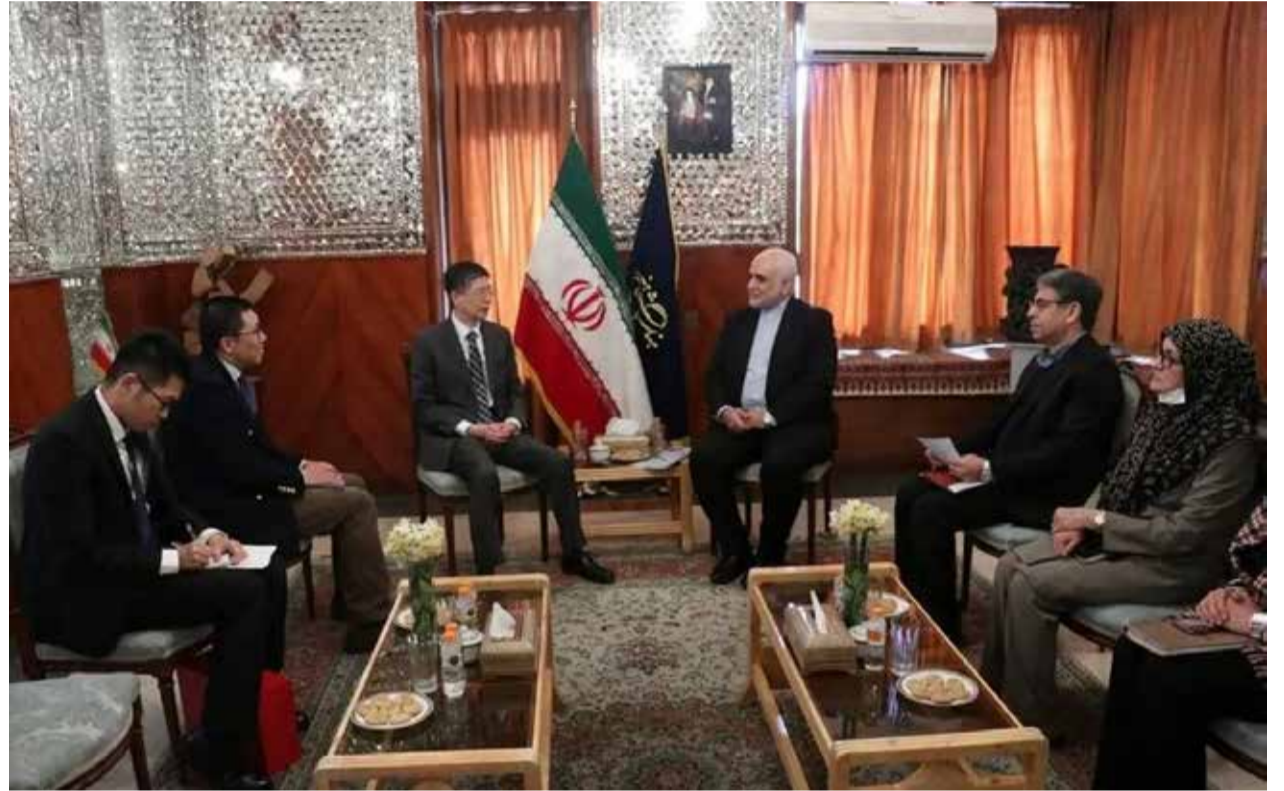


# Chinese 'One Belt, One Road' initiative requires cultural, artistic integration: *Official*

## Arts & Culture Desk

Majid Shah-Hosseini, the head of the Iranian Academy of Arts, asserted that China's strategic initiative "One Belt, One Road," currently being pursued in West Asia, would be incomplete without a cultural and artistic framework. He made these remarks during a meeting with Cong Peiwu, the Chinese ambassador to Iran, and his accompanying delegation, IRNA reported. The gathering, attended by embassy secretaries and several officials from the Iranian academy, focused on reviewing the historical cultural and artistic ties between Iran and China. Participants exchanged ideas and proposed strategies for implementing a recently signed memorandum of understanding between the art academies of both nations. During the meeting, Shah-Hosseini expressed his pleasure with the official visits that took place during the Iranian academy's delegation trip to China, thanking the Chinese side for their hospitality. He highlighted the vast intellectual and artistic potential of the academy's members, whom he described as the "heartbeat" of the organization, particularly in areas like traditional and modern arts, artificial intelligence, future studies in art, and digital art. He stated, "The Belt and Road initiative, without cultural and artistic attachments, is essentially an unfinished project." In this context, the Iranian Academy of Arts is eager to engage in collaborative efforts within cinematic

projects, including "Silk Road 2," organizing biennial exhibitions for Belt and Road countries, translating art books, conducting webinars to showcase the cultural and historical identities of Iran and China, and hosting art exhibitions such as a painting show by artist Juan Zhou. Shah-Hosseini emphasized that this strategic initiative serves the interests of both ancient civilizations and will only be realized through practical steps taken by both academies. Shah-Hosseini also noted the need for a comprehensive understanding of ancient civilizations, stating, "Unlike the torrents from emerging countries lacking deep-rooted cultural foundations, ancient civilizations offer gentle and enduring rains that rejuvenate cultural climates." He expressed hope for a future where culture and art become a common language in today's world. Ambassador Cong Peiwu agreed with the Iranian proposals, describing the discussed ideas as wise and insightful. He emphasized that cultural exchange and civilizational interaction play a crucial role in the relationship between the two countries, stating, "This dialogue and peaceful coexistence among civilizations remove distances and tensions." Cong highlighted the historical significance of the Silk Road as a conduit for cultural exchange, noting that instruments such as the Iranian Sorna (double-reed musical instrument) and Barbat (a string instrument) have traveled to China along this route. He mentioned recent cultural cooperation, including the ongoing exhibition



"The Glory of Ancient Iran" taking place in three major Chinese cities. Plus, he pointed out advancements in Persian language education, stating that over ten universities are now nurturing future experts to enhance bilateral relations. In closing, both sides exchanged gifts as a symbolic gesture and expressed hope that continued collaboration would fos-

ter further growth in cultural and artistic endeavors. The "One Belt, One Road" initiative, introduced by Chinese President Xi Jinping in the fall of 2013 during his visits to Kazakhstan and Indonesia, encompasses the "Economic Belt" and the "21st Century Maritime Silk Road." This project aims to connect four continents, and Beijing seeks to utilize its re-

sources and those of various countries, including Iran, to advance the initiative.

# Fajr Int'l Theater Festival, catalyst for nat'l unity, cultural exchange: *Minister*

## Arts & Culture Desk

In a message to the 43rd Fajr International Theater Festival, Iran's Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Abbas Salehi, emphasized the festival's potential to foster deep synergies that enhance national unity. He noted that the event holds the promise of instilling joy, tolerance,

and global dialogue, IRNA wrote. Salehi's statement highlighted the rich legacy of Iranian Islamic art, which he described as a "treasure trove of truth-seeking, virtue, and shared human aesthetics." He asserted that the performing arts in Iran, drawing upon this profound heritage, embody

visual attractiveness and substantive depth, allowing for the expression of lofty messages on the stages of Iranian theater. The minister acknowledged the dedication of artists throughout generations, who have preserved the authentic essence of their homeland with passion and commitment.

He also recognized the audience's role, particularly in challenging historical contexts, in safeguarding national values and cultural heritage, sometimes at great personal cost. "They have embodied knowledge, goodness, and beauty in their lives with remarkable patience and resilience," he stated. Salehi characterized

these individuals as the intellectual and ethical assets of the nation, contributing significantly to the quality of Iran's performing arts. The minister further expressed that the festival is ripe for utilizing the rich capacities of theater as a medium for conveying the peace-loving spirit of the Iranian people.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi  
Cartoonist



# Iranians spend 12 to 30 minutes a day reading

## Arts & Culture Desk

The average time spent on reading in Iran ranges from 12 to 30 minutes daily, the head of the Iran Book and Literature House, revealed according to various assessments. During a visit to the Abi cultural complex and bookstore in Shiraz, Ebrahim Heidari, noted, "There are differing metrics for evaluating the reading rate in the country. Based on several authorities, the average reading time is reported to be between 12 and 30 minutes." He cited research conducted in 2020 by the Research Center for Culture, Art and Communications, which indicated a reading average of 12 minutes, while the Statistical Center of Iran reported just nine minutes. Other

sources have suggested a higher figure of 30 minutes, IRNA reported. Heidari also addressed the declining print runs of books, attributing this trend to a combination of economic, cultural, political, and technological factors. "Despite facing challenges, books still have their admirers," he stated, acknowledging that this sector, like others, has experienced reductions in engagement. He emphasized that the economy influences culture, explaining that books are cultural commodities evaluated alongside other goods. "The reading rate is not confined solely to books," Heidari added. He highlighted the government's approach to fostering a politically and culturally open environment, clarify-



ing that this does not equate to a disregard for the arts. "The publishing and literary sectors require a space for freedom within the framework of the law," he noted. Heidari concluded by underscoring the government's commitment to decentralizing cultural and artistic events and promoting public participation in these efforts.