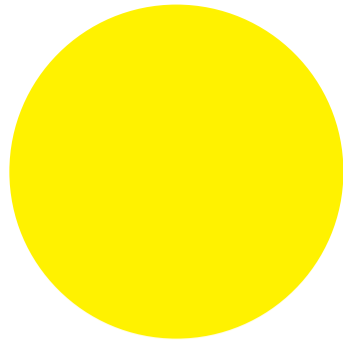


Tehran, Muscat agree to drop trade tariffs, boost customs ties

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MASOUD PEZESHKIAN



DONALD TRUMP

### Diplomacy; pathway for US-Iran engagement

By Ebrahim Beheshti  
Journalist

**OPINION EXCLUSIVE**

Recent remarks by US President Donald Trump about Iran's nuclear program have left many hardline anti-Iran factions feeling disheartened. These hardliners had anticipated a much tougher approach from Trump toward Tehran, even expecting it to be one of his first executive orders upon taking office. However, Trump has been treading carefully when fielding reporters' questions on Iran, going as far as clearly stating that the situation with Iran is different. He has also expressed hope that the scenario of the US backing an Is-

raeli military strike on Iran's nuclear facilities will not come to pass and that Iran will opt for a deal.

It appears Trump has acknowledged that Iran is indeed a different case. Tehran already demonstrated its good faith in the nuclear saga by signing the JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action). Even after the US administration's withdrawal from the deal, Iran remained committed to its obligations for an extended period. It was only when the Europeans failed to safeguard Iran's interests under the agreement that Tehran started to scale back its commitments. Iranian officials have repeatedly stressed over the years that they will fall back in line with the nuclear deal once the other parties fulfill their end of the bargain and Iran reaps the promised benefits.

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**INTERVIEW EXCLUSIVE**

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## VP outlines gov't strategy to empower private sector

Economy Desk

Vice President Mohammadreza Aref visited the "Pioneers of Progress" exhibition, a national event showcasing the achievements and capabilities of the private sector in Tehran on Thursday afternoon. During his visit, the VP reviewed the latest advancements in the private sector and emphasized that the current administration's strategy is to empower the private sector under government oversight and facilitation.

Aref toured various pavilions at the exhibition, engaging with private sector representatives and key economic drivers, according to [fvpresident.ir](http://fvpresident.ir). He was briefed on recent achievements, localization of major industries, technological advancements, and selected projects aimed at achieving an 8% economic growth target during the Seventh Economic Development Plan.

The vice president visited booths representing sectors such as oil and gas, aluminum, petrochemicals, steel, mining, transportation, medical equipment, pharmaceuticals, and information technology.

He heeded concerns and requests from private sector figures, including support for downstream industries, reducing government bureaucracy, streamlining permit issuance, revising restrictive regulations, addressing currency and tariff issues, facilitating raw material imports, resolving tax challenges, and mitigating energy shortages affecting production.

Aref reiterated the government's serious commitment to supporting the private sector, stating that separate meetings would be held with each sector to address their specific issues.

He highlighted the significance of Article 44 of the Constitution, noting that prior to its implementation, governments were inclined to operate within their own frameworks. However, the policy opened new avenues for the private sector to play a more active role in the economy.

"The most important step to facilitate the private sector's activity is deregulation," Aref said. "This requires revising laws, changing the approach of regulatory bodies, and ensuring coordination between the government, Parliament, and relevant bodies to avoid creating new restrictive regulations."

He added that achieving 8% growth requires private sector investment, which necessitates giving investors control over their capital and providing them with necessary assurances. Aref emphasized that global experiences have shown privatization and deregulation to be key drivers of economic development.

"The current administration's strategy is to strengthen the private sector's role under government supervision and facilitation, enabling it to contribute more significantly to increasing the gross domestic product (GDP)," he said.

"The current 40% share of the private sector and economic drivers in GDP must be expanded."

Aref acknowledged the legitimacy of the private sector's demands, stating that the government is obligated to remove barriers and enable its greater participation in the economy.

He noted that the private sector enjoys the potential not only to meet domestic needs but also to play a significant role in exporting goods and techno-engineering services to neighboring countries and the broader region.

"The private sector has the capacity to elevate Iran's economic presence in the region and beyond," he concluded.

# Economy minister reports 18% hike y/y in non-oil exports

Economy Desk

Iran's Economy Minister Abdolnaser Hemmati announced that non-oil exports reached \$47.8 billion in the first 10 months of the current Iranian year (March 20, 2024-January 19, 2025), marking an 18% increase compared to the same period last year.

In a post on his X page, Hemmati cited the latest customs data, noting that imports rose by 3% during the period to \$56 billion, including \$6.3 billion in gold.

"Excluding gold, imports decreased by 10% year-on-year," the minister added.

The minister also highlighted that the non-oil trade deficit, excluding gold imports, dropped from \$12.5 billion to \$2 billion over a two-year period.

Including over \$30 billion in oil exports during the same timeframe, Iran's overall trade surplus (oil and non-oil) exceeded \$28 billion, according to the minister.



Iran has been working to diversify its economy and reduce its reliance on oil exports amid fluctuating global oil prices and US-led sanctions targeting its energy sector. The country has increasingly

focused on boosting non-oil exports, including agricultural goods, petrochemicals, and industrial products to stabilize its economy and generate foreign currency revenue. The growth in non-oil ex-

ports comes as Iran seeks to strengthen trade ties with neighboring countries and key partners such as China, India and Russia.

Recent agreements, including a 25-year strategic partner-

ship with China and efforts to expand trade within regional blocs like the Eurasian Economic Union, have been part of Tehran's strategy to mitigate the impact of sanctions and access new markets.

## Tehran, Muscat agree to drop trade tariffs, boost customs ties



The Islamic Republic of Iran and the Sultanate of Oman reached an agreement to eliminate trade tariffs as part of attempts to further expand bilateral economic relationship. During the 21st session of Iran-Oman Joint Economic Cooperation Commission in Muscat on Friday, the two sides signed a joint economic memorandum of understanding in the field of preferential trade and customs cooperation.

"Three specific agendas were raised during the meeting; the first of which was negotiation over preferential trade and the elimination of tariffs between the two countries. The issue was agreed upon and will take effect as of next week," Iranian Minister of Industry, Mines and Trade Mohammad Atabak said. He added that prominent investment opportunities were also highlighted, and an agreement was also inked on the enhancement of trade and investment cooperation between the two sides.

"The third agenda was the necessary customs and administrative cooperation between the two sides to facilitate trade.

Relevant necessary planning has been done, and the matter will be concluded in the near future," Atabak pointed out.

Commenting on various meetings with Omani officials, Atabak stated that the establishment of a shipping line between the southern Iranian port city of Bandar Abbas and Oman, an increase in the number of flights, and stronger bilateral maritime collaboration were discussed in the meeting with Omani Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, Saeed bin Hamoud bin Saeed al-Maawali.

Holding separate meetings with Oman's Minister of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion, Qais Mohammed al-Yousef, and Minister of Energy and Minerals, Salim Nasser al-Aufi, was among other developments on the 21st session of Iran-Oman Joint Economic Cooperation Commission.

Oman has long been an interlocutor in interactions between the West and Iran. The country has mediated the release of several foreign citizens and dual nationals.

## Iran maintains 10th global standing as crude steel output rises in 2024



By Reza  
Abesh Ahmadlou  
Staff writer

Iran's crude steel production saw steady growth in 2024, solidifying its position as one of the world's top 10 steel-producing nations, according to data released by the World Steel Association. The report, published on Friday, highlighted Iran's continued efforts to expand its steel industry amid global economic challenges and shifting market dynamics as well as power outages in the country. In 2024, Iran produced 31 million tons of steel ingots, marking a 0.8% increase compared to the previous year. The growth reflects the country's ongoing investments in its steel sector, which has become a key pillar of its industrial and economic development strategy. Iran's production accounted for roughly 1.68% of the global total, which topped 1.839 billion tons in 2024.

Globally, Iran ranked 10th among the world's largest steel producers, maintaining its position from 2023. China remained the dominant leader, producing 1.005 billion tons, or about 54.6% of the world's total output. India followed in second place with 149.6 million tons, while Japan, the United States, and Russia rounded out the top five. Iran's ranking ahead of countries like Brazil and Germany underscores its growing influence in the global steel market.

According to the report, China churned out 76 million tons of crude steel in December 2024, up 11.8% in December 2023. India produced 13.6 million tons, up 9.5%. Japan produced 6.9 million,



down 1.1%. The US cast 6.7 million tons, down 2.4%. Russia is estimated to have produced 5.7 million tons, down 8.6%. South Korea produced 5.2 million tons, down 3.2%. Germany cast 2.7 million tons, up 4.1%. Turkey produced 3 million tons, down 7.6%. Brazil's output hit 2.6 million, up 1.8% and Iran produced 2.6 million tons, down 8.2%.

The expansion of Iran's steel industry is part of a broader strategy to reduce the country's reliance on oil exports and diversify its economy. Steel production is a critical component of Iran's non-oil export sector, with significant quantities shipped to neighboring Iraq. The government has also prioritized domestic infrastructure projects, which have driven demand for steel within the country.

Despite these achievements, Iran's steel industry faces challenges, including international sanctions that limit access to advanced technology and foreign investment. Additionally, global economic uncertainties, such as fluctuating demand and rising energy costs, have impacted production and export capabilities. However, Iran has

sought to mitigate these issues by strengthening trade ties with regional partners and investing in domestic innovation.

The World Steel Association's report also highlighted global trends in steel production, noting a 0.9% decrease in worldwide output compared to 2023. Iran's ability to maintain its production growth amid these trends demonstrates the resilience of its steel sector.

Looking ahead, Iran aims to further increase its crude steel production capacity, with a target of reaching 55 million metric tons annually in the near future. Achieving this goal will require significant investments in infrastructure, technology, and workforce development, as well as continued efforts to navigate geopolitical and economic challenges.

As Iran continues to expand its steel industry, its role in the global market is expected to grow, reinforcing its position as a key player in the world's industrial landscape. The 2024 production figures underscore the country's progress and its determination to build a more diversified and resilient economy.



Experts' proposals for easing energy shortages:

# Reforms in pricing policies, consumption will help

Tehran should not show 'signs of weakness' against possible renewed maximum pressure

Hiking fuel prices to match with production costs only path to economic recovery



Alireza Kafshkanan (l) speaks as another Iranian expert in the field of energy, Amin Noorbakhsh, looks on during an interview with Iran Daily.  
● HOSSEIN NAGHIZADEH/IRAN DAILY

By Mostafa Shirmohamadi & Sadeq Dehqan  
Staff writers

**INTERVIEW  
EXCLUSIVE**

The energy deficit in electricity and gas supply have recently become hot-button issues in Iran's economy, especially as the weather turns cooler, leading to gas shortages and inter-

mittent power outages in both the industrial and residential sectors. The situation has caught the attention of experts regarding energy management, consumption patterns, and the impact of sanctions on the country's economy and energy sector.

At first glance, the emergence of energy shortages, particularly gas, seems puzzling, especially in a country that holds

the second-largest gas reserves in the world. It might not be entirely logical to attribute this solely to external factors like sanctions. Consequently, some experts argue that the deficit is primarily a result of internal mismanagement, linking it to inefficiencies in energy production, distribution, and usage. Conversely, others point to a lack of production infrastructure and failure to modernize

energy facilities, thus tying the energy shortfall to sanctions and the inability to attract foreign investment.

Determining the extent to which internal and external factors have contributed to the deficits requires further digging, but what is clear is that Iran has been grappling with energy shortages for several years now. Given that the energy sector is seen as the back-

bone of the country's economy, finding a quick fix to this issue becomes increasingly urgent. Beyond these issues, another major topic that sheds light on the role of sanctions in the energy sector is the ongoing talks about oil exports. It is clear that a substantial portion of Iran's revenue comes from crude oil sales. The urgency to address oil income becomes even more pronounced with

less than a month remaining until Donald Trump is inaugurated as the new US president, who is expected to bring back the so-called maximum pressure campaign aimed at cutting down Iran's petrodollars. In an interview with Alireza Kafshkanan and Amin Noorbakhsh—two experts in the energy economy—Iran Daily discussed the intricacies of these pressing issues.

**IRAN DAILY:** The energy shortfall in electricity and gas supply have become widely discussed topics recently. Could you briefly outline how these shortages have emerged in recent years? Do you think the deficit is linked to a specific government's performance?

**KAFSHKANAN:** The crisis facing our country, or more accurately, our economy, revolves around the energy deficit. Shortages usually crop up as electricity deficit in summer and a combination of gas and electricity scarcities in winter. In summer, we struggle with electricity shortages due to inadequate power generation and, essentially, a shortage of power plants, leading to consumption outpacing production and creating a deficit. This year,

the power shortfall hit 18,000 megawatts, while in 2021, the last year of president Hassan Rouhani in office, it was only 6,000 MW. By the end of Ebrahim Raisi's government in August, which was cut short as he lost his life in a helicopter crash, the figure climbed to 18,000 MW, with forecasts for next year suggesting peak consumption deficits could soar to 24,000 MW.

I point this out to emphasize that the energy shortage is not a problem that sprang up overnight or solely during incumbent President Masoud Pezeshkian's administration. In winter, we also encounter a gas supply deficit, which has become more pronounced this year. In previous years, we managed the shortages primarily by shutting down indus-

tries. However, this year, in addition to the usual uptick in consumer demand, the government decided to shift some of the pressure caused by the energy shortfall from the industrial sector to the households and small businesses, redistributing the burden of energy shortages. I believe the government made the right call here.

In past years, particularly over the last three years, the government only imposed such shortfalls on industries, labeling it as "demand management," which ultimately led to industries closing during the summer and winter.

Typically, we calculate the total annual gas production against total consumption needs to determine the shortfall or deficit. According to the Supreme Audit

Court, the gas shortfall in 2023 reached 64 billion cubic meters, while usage last year hovered between 256 and 259 billion cubic meters, indicating a deficit of around 25%. This year, naturally, the shortfall is expected to surge, potentially nearing 30%. If we continue down this path, next year's shortfall could jump to 35%. Thus, the deficit issue is not something that can be strictly pinned on this government or the previous one.

**Why does the severity of the energy shortfall seem to worsen each year? Isn't it because the government has not managed to balance production and consumption?**

**KAFSHKANAN:** Consumption growth has outstripped the construction of power plants and gas

production in the country. Plus, keep in mind that power plants are aging year by year; while under president Rouhani, the country built plants with a capacity of 20,000 MW, this was still insufficient to meet the rising demand. During his president Raisi's term, various reports indicate that between 7,500 and 9,000 MW were added to power generation capacity over three years. However, president Raisi himself stated that the country needed around 30,000 MW to offset the electricity shortfall—an ambitious target his administration aimed to hit in four years.

**Can you shed light on Iran's current capacity for oil output and exports? How much could production and sales potentially rise, both under current sanctions and if those sanctions are to lift?**

**NOORBAKHSH:** Iran's refinery capacity for domestic use is clear; it stands at around 1.8 to 2 million barrels per day (bpd). Iran has also been exporting roughly 1.7 million bpd in recent months. Any increase beyond these volumes depends on how much Iran can extract from its oil fields.

First and foremost, we need to assess whether it makes economic sense to develop and extract from joint fields or if we should rely on domestic reserves. Currently, our proven oil reserves sit at 158 billion barrels, and boosting extraction will depend on enhancing our production infrastructure.

When discussing produc-

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**Noorbakhsh:** First and foremost, we need to assess whether it makes economic sense to develop and extract from joint fields or if we should rely on domestic reserves. Currently, our proven oil reserves sit at 158 billion barrels, and boosting extraction will depend on enhancing our production infrastructure.

tion increases in the short term—over the next two years—even if sanctions are lifted, we are not likely to see significant results. A reasonable extraction increase would be around 200,000 to 300,000 bpd. However, we also need to evaluate the future of the oil market. For instance, if oil continues to demand a minimum price of \$60 to \$70 over the next 100 years, we could gradually proceed with field development. On the flip side, if our analysis suggests that oil prices may drop sharply in the next 20 years, we should aggressively pursue maximum field development and ramp up production.

I believe there is potential to boost oil output to 3.8 million bpd in the short run, provided that sanctions and investment restrictions don't linger, allowing us to simultaneously improve production and export infrastructure.

**What is your take on the goal of producing 5.4 million barrels of oil daily by the end of the Seventh Development Plan in March 2029? Do you think this target is achievable given the ongoing sanctions?**

**NOORBAKHSH:** If we look at production realistically, the figure mentioned in the Seventh Development Plan makes sense. Achieving this figure, especially considering the existing sanctions, is an ambitious goal that includes condensates, but it doesn't seem entirely out of reach. However, reaching this target hinges on the development of oil fields, refineries and export infrastructures.







Iranian Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad visits offshore installations at Iran's Forouzan oil field in the Persian Gulf on October 6, 2024. [SPL/ANSA](#)

### How feasible is it to attract and secure investment for the development of fields and refineries under the current circumstances?

**NOORBAKHSH:** Securing financing continues to be a major hurdle for all key projects in the country. I believe that domestic companies have the technical know-how to carry out development projects in many fields, though whether they can fully finance them is a different story. That said, there is potential to draw in investment, and I think we could make this happen through collaborations with China under the 25-year agreement or similar arrangements.

**KAFSHKANAN:** To build on Mr. Noorbakhsh's comments, it is still unclear how long the sanctions will stick around and at what intensity. During President Biden's administration, he at least publicly expressed a desire for greater engagement, stepping away from the maximum pressure policy against Iran. Additionally, the Russia-Ukraine conflict has thrown the global energy market into disarray, making the entire world—especially Western countries—more dependent on energy guarantees, which has led to some le-

niency regarding Iranian sanctions and exports. This has allowed the previous government to ramp up oil exports from around 300,000 to 400,000 barrels to about 1.8 million barrels. However, two factors could shake things up: first, if the Russia-Ukraine war comes to an end and sanctions against Russia are lifted; and second, with Trump back in power, conditions for Iran could turn more challenging unless we strike a deal on our disputes. Otherwise, even China might not be as willing to buy our oil as they were before.

When it comes to developing our oil fields independently, I believe we have solid technical capabilities in this area. We successfully launched Phase 11 of the South Pars gas field in 2023 using domestic expertise. However, we need to admit that technology isn't something we fully control. While we may excel in some areas, we face challenges in oil and gas, which is understandable since international energy giants have poured vast sums into research and development to acquire these technologies, with some holding exclusive rights to certain advancements. Thus, technology transfer

is crucial for field development and resource extraction, and this can only happen with major international companies return to Iran.

In terms of financing, I'll just point out one thing: the amount of investment needed in the oil sector is significantly larger than what's required for electricity

### If we want to keep the electricity deficit at its current level and avoid increasing shortages, how much investment is needed?

**KAFSHKANAN:** To tackle the crisis in the electricity sector, we plan to allocate \$5 billion from the National Development Fund for power production. If we inject this amount into the electricity sector alongside other measures, we could address a significant portion of the current deficit. However, it's natural that meeting future electricity needs in the residential and industrial sectors will require further investments. Regarding gas, just to boost pressure in the South Pars gas field alone, we need to invest \$20 billion to extract gas, as we are currently facing pressure drops in some fields.

**What do you believe is**

### the root cause of the energy shortages?

**KAFSHKANAN:** The root causes of the gas and electricity deficits can be traced back to a bill passed in 2005 known as the Price Stabilization Motion. In my view, this plan really slowed down the nation's development engine and ultimately brought it to a halt in the following years. During the reformist government of president Mohammad Khatami, a program was proposed that aimed for an annual hike of 20% in energy carrier prices to gradually match them with real costs. This scheme was quite successful and coincided with what I consider a golden era for Iran's economy post-Revolution. The public trusted it, leading to its successful implementation. Unfortunately, though, the Price Stabilization Motion upset the supply and demand balance for electricity, leading to government intervention in setting energy carrier prices. From that point on, investment in power plant construction began to decline, and sanctions complicated matters even further. Sanctions have particularly hampered Iran's access to oil and gas technologies. You may recall that Phase 11 of South Pars was put on



**Noorbakhsh:** I believe that domestic companies have the technical know-how to carry out development projects in many fields, though whether they can fully finance them is a different story. That said, there is potential to draw in investment, and I think we could make this happen through collaborations with China under the 25-year agreement or similar arrangements.

hold back then, and subsequently, Total and a Chinese company (Sinopec) pulled out of developing the country's oil and gas fields. Then, when the JCPOA (Iran's nuclear deal) was signed in 2015, those companies returned to Iran, but with the re-imposition of sanctions, Total exited in 2018, followed by the Chinese company in 2019.

**NOORBAKHSH:** Regarding the Price Stabilization Motion mentioned earlier, I must say that this initiative fostered a misguided consumption pattern for energy in the country. Essentially, when we set prices artificially, it sends the wrong signals to consumers. For instance, when someone is buying a house, energy costs are often the last thing on their minds. Similarly, when purchasing a car, they may disregard its fuel usage because gasoline prices in our country are very low. On the other side, regulated fuel prices hinder efforts to optimize fuel consumption, as cutting vehicle fuel consumption requires investment from car makers, which raises production costs. Consumers are often unwilling to pay more for vehicles that consume less fuel. Therefore, until fuel prices are adjusted, we won't see satisfactory results in this area. Of course, any price adjustments should be handled carefully; they shouldn't suddenly double or triple prices. This process should unfold gradually or through other methods to avoid putting undue pressure on vulnerable groups.

**Trump will soon take office, and evidence suggests he may intend to ratchet up pressure on Iran, with one of America's key tools being the prevention of Iranian oil sales. In your opinion, how successful do you think Trump's approach could be?**

**NOORBAKHSH:** Looking at the people around Mr. Trump, I believe he will likely dive back into the maximum pressure strategy, especially in the first nine months, before the snapback deadline set out in the JCPOA. Various assessments suggest that our oil exports could drop by between 200,000 and 600,000 bpd during this period.

However, the current scenario is different from when Trump first rolled out his maximum pressure policy. Back then, most of Iranian barrels went to countries that were US allies, like India, European nations and East Asian countries. These countries quickly swapped out Iranian oil for alternatives, including American crude, after receiving temporary exemptions, which led Iran's oil exports to take a nosedive, even falling below 200,000 bpd in 2020—a situation worsened by the

COVID-19 pandemic.

Now, the feasibility of cranking up maximum pressure depends on two main factors: the mechanism of sanctions and the political landscape. The sanctions mechanism has three critical elements: first, how the US plans to cut off Iran's financial transactions; second, the targeting of tankers carrying Iranian oil; and third, the ways to discourage buyers from purchasing Iranian oil.

One major hurdle in curbing Iran's oil exports is the issue of tankers. The US will probably focus on sanctioning tankers carrying Iranian oil first. During President Biden's time in office, there were precedents for sanctioning oil tankers and Iran tried to replace these vessels with others. If the US ramps up sanctions on tankers this time, Iranian oil exports could run into serious trouble, as finding replacements takes time.

On the political front, it is important to note that most of our oil exports are currently headed to China. I believe that, despite US pushback, China is likely to keep buying oil from Iran—not just to support Iran, but also because China typically maintains a diversified quota for its oil imports. China sees importing oil from Iran as a way to strengthen its energy security.

I think China will keep backing Iranian oil shipments. By speeding up the process of replacing targeted tankers, Iran can hold its export levels steady. Regardless, Iran needs to tough it out in the face of the incoming Trump administration, as showing any signs of weakness could undermine its bargaining position in potential negotiations and deals.

**What are possible solutions to the energy crisis? President Pezeshkian recently apologized for the deficits in the residential sector, which was noteworthy, and promised that these issues wouldn't come up again next year. How feasible is it to tackle these deficits?**

**KAFSHKANAN:** In my opinion, the government can only reduce the severity of the energy crisis; keeping next year's peak consumption deficit at current levels seems pretty unlikely. This year, the Energy Ministry's plan to tackle the electricity shortfall was to split a 5,000-megawatt deficit between the industrial and residential sectors—3,000 MW for industry and 2,000 MW for households. However, in recent days, actual shortages have exceeded 5,000 MW.

I believe the government's plans to address deficits are more focused on strategies laid out in the Seventh



The Iranian-flagged Very Large Crude Carrier (VLCC), MT Arman 114 (L), and the Cameroon-flagged MT S Tinos are seen as they were spotted conducting an allegedly ship-to-ship oil transfer without a permit, according to Indonesia's Maritime Security Agency (Bakamla), near Indonesia's North Natuna Sea, Indonesia, on July 7, 2023, in this handout picture released on July 11, 2023.

REUTERS





Businesses are plunged into darkness after a power outage in downtown Tehran.  
● MEHR



A worker talks on a walkie-talkie in a gas refinery in Iran's north-eastern city of Sarakhs on December 19, 2024, amid a cold snap.  
● SHANA

Development Plan. However, I think the first step to tackling the shortages is lifting the sanctions. We need to push toward an agreement. To address the current power deficit, there needs to be roughly \$80 billion; for oil and gas, around \$180 billion; totaling about \$250 billion in investment, which can only be pulled in through attracting foreign investment. Additionally, an 8% economic growth target has been set in the four-year development plan. If we want to hit this growth, the key driver of economic growth—namely the electricity, gas, and energy sectors—must be revived.

Given that lifting sanctions depends on various factors beyond Iran's control, even if they stay in place, I believe we could still aim for a lower economic growth rate of around 3%. However, this would require all branches of power in the Islamic Republic to come together and take the matter seriously.

#### How can we achieve economic growth even in the face of sanctions?

**KAFSHKANAN:** Absolutely, one of the most crucial factors that can help Iran in this area is resolving the energy economy equation. We need to first tackle the energy shortages and bridge the gap between selling prices and the actual cost of energy production. When we talk about the need to adjust fuel prices, it doesn't mean we should suddenly hike them, as society may not be able to handle such increases and the government will likely steer clear of such moves for security reasons. Another approach would be for the government to sort gas and power consumers into two groups: those who follow appropriate consumption patterns could be exempt from any changes and even incentivized, while tariffs for industries and heavy consumers could be increased.

In this area, we need to tweak tariffs, which has already been done in the residential electricity and gas sectors. Essentially, the energy costs for those who exceed fitting usage

levels should be several times higher than for those who stick to consumption guidelines.

In the industrial sector, the government should aim to bring energy prices closer to actual costs, thereby lowering usage. As you know, during peak consumption times and cold seasons, Iran's energy exports of electricity and gas to neighboring countries, including Iraq, are halted. The gas Iran ships to Iraq generates much-needed foreign revenue and excessive domestic usage can deprive the country of this income.

So, when we have the chance to rake in income from power and gas exports, why should we provide energy to any industry at subsidized prices? Moreover, the benefits of that industry's production don't directly flow to the public. Thus, giving subsidized fuel to industries doesn't seem reasonable and the government has no choice but to adjust fuel prices.

This approach has already been addressed in a law called Removing Barriers to Electricity Industry Development, which stipulates that 1% of the electricity consumption of industries will be transitioned to renewable energy or provided at free market prices over the next five years.

#### What is the current status of the country regarding the development of solar and wind farms and boosting power generation through renewables?

**KAFSHKANAN:** As I mentioned earlier, the Removing Barriers to Electricity Industry Development Act plans for 1% of industrial electricity consumption to switch over to renewable energy each year. We are hopeful that, per this law and the revenue generated from this sector, new solar and wind power plants will be set up across the country. On the other side, during the previous administration, the goal was to produce 10,000 MW of green energy over a four-year span, but only about 250 MW were actually generated during three years of that government's term. Overall, we merely crank

out around 1,300 MW of power from renewable energy resources. The aim remains to bring in another 10,000 MW of clean energy each year, which I think is a bit wishful thinking.

That said, I need to stress that optimizing energy consumption is more crucial than just building renewable and thermal power plants to tackle the existing deficits. For every unit we invest in energy optimization, estimates suggest we could see returns up to seven times the cost of constructing thermal power plants. Therefore, optimizing energy use is vital, especially since it helps cut down on carbon emissions, which is a social responsibility for all governments. More importantly, we could even make revenue by helping reduce carbon emissions through global carbon credits and the Paris Climate Agreement.

#### What is your forecast for oil prices next year and how would a slide in oil prices impact our economy?

**NOORBAKHSH:** In my view, a sharp drop in oil prices is unlikely. Forecasts by 20 economic research institutes indicate that oil prices for next year will hover \$60 to \$75 per barrel. I think it's improbable that oil prices will dip below \$60 unless we encounter another global crisis like COVID-19.

#### What strategies can Iran pursue to boost gas revenues and stabilize its standing as a natural gas exporter?

**NOORBAKHSH:** Given the shifts in the global landscape over the past two decades, we need to change our approach to energy trade, especially gas, which is not just an economic tool but also carries political and security implications. On one hand, we rank third in gas production and second in gas reserves worldwide. On the other, we're geographically positioned among major gas-producing countries like Russia and Turkmenistan, both of which are facing export challenges. Turkmenistan is landlocked and Russia is struggling with serious

issues in gas exports following the Ukraine conflict, with exports down by around 100 billion cubic meters annually.

In light of this, we can step up our role in regional energy trade through both domestic production and trade with these countries. We need to seize the opportunity to first purchase surplus gas from Russia and then from Turkmenistan, thereby solidifying our role in gas trade. However, I believe the gas we acquire should not be used domestically to cover shortages. This gas should be directed toward generating foreign revenue through exports.

The objectives laid out in the Seventh Development Plan indicate that we need to import 20 billion cubic meters of gas annually while exporting a total of 40 billion cubic meters, which I see as a minimal target. Our country's capacity for gas exports far exceeds these figures.

We can sell our gas by developing infrastructure to countries where export conditions are favorable, such as Pakistan and Oman. Gas is less vulnerable to sanctions compared to oil and can politically and strengthen Iran's position in the region. For instance, look at Israel—it produces only one-tenth of Iran's



**Kafshkanan:** Given that lifting sanctions depends on various factors beyond Iran's control, even if they stay in place, I believe we could still aim for a lower economic growth rate of around 3%. However, this would require all branches of power in the Islamic Republic to come together and take the matter seriously.

gas, yet its gas exports in 2023 were about 10% less than ours. Israel has leveraged gas as a tool to break its isolation, exporting to countries like Egypt and Jordan. This is one of the chief reasons these two countries have softened their stance toward Israel. I believe the window of opportunity for gas trading in the region is closing fast and we need to take advantage of it. The Seventh Development Plan represents a crucial moment for rolling out this strategy, especially as Israel and Turkey are eager to capitalize on the current energy situation in the region, particularly after the Ukraine crisis. We must not overlook the fact that the US is determined to prevent this from happening. This approach isn't new; the US has been aiming to undermine Iranian and Russian power in the global gas market for nearly two decades. To achieve this, it has two main strategies: one is to back the gas pipeline projects of competitors to create alternatives for our gas buyers and the other is to destroy the regional gas market via dumping LNG into the global market.

**There are currently talks about agreements to purchase gas from Russia,**

**including the transfer of a specified amount of gas through a yet to be laid undersea pipeline in the Caspian Sea to Iran. What's your take on this and how should we make the most of this opportunity?**

**NOORBAKHSH:** Yes, agreements regarding the pipeline you mentioned have been discussed and we need to see how the details play out. From an economic standpoint, it would be more cost-effective for this pipeline to come into the country over land, as both Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan have the necessary infrastructure. Recent discussions suggest that this gas will be transported via Azerbaijan. The key point is that this gas transfer should happen under a win-win scenario.

Iran can export the gas it imports from Russia primarily to Iraq and Turkey and secondarily to Oman and Pakistan. I believe that Iraq will be our market for at least the next decade and how well we utilize this market's capacity will depend on our own performance. Last but not least, we must prevent any disruptions in our natural gas exports in order to be internationally recognized as a reliable supplier of energy.



● SHANA



# Haraskan archaeological site demands immediate attention, further excavations



## Iranica Desk

The director of the Vigol Cultural Heritage Site, Javad Hosseinzadeh, stated that the Haraskan archaeological site in Aran and Bidgol requires optimal protection and further excavations by Kashan academics and international archaeologists to uncover its residential, political, and industrial sectors. The Haraskan archaeological site is located east of the city of Aran and Bidgol in Isfahan Province, where, during two seasons of archaeological excavations, remains of a fire temple dating back to the Sassanid era, as well as the transitional period from Sassanid to Islamic, have been discovered. This structure is considered by archaeologists to be one of the most exceptional fire temples of the Sassanid period. He noted that Haraskan has

been of interest to historians for many years, adding that the protection processes in this region must be carried out, and what has been discovered from the excavations should be preserved so that further research and excavations can continue.

He stated that given the significance of Haraskan and the artifacts discovered there, further measures should be taken for archaeological explorations and to introduce it to the people of Iran and the world. Hosseinzadeh, referring to the discovery of an inscription in this ancient area, said, "This inscription is carved on the stone benches where the priests sat, narrating in Pahlavi the lighting of the Bahram Fire Temple in the fire temple of Haraskan." He continued, "The mentioned inscription, along with the bases of offering tables, decorated

plaster columns, and sections adorned with lotus flower motifs, is currently on display to the public at the exhibition of Haraskan."

He noted that Sassanid-era pottery, along with early and middle Islamic ceramics featuring stamped designs and golden hues, obtained from two seasons of excavation at the ancient city of Haraskan, are also showcased in this exhibition.

This archaeologist said, "This exhibition has been established next to Haraskan with the assistance of the Aran and Bidgol Municipality."

According to him, based on historical sources, the Sassanid city of Haraskan was abandoned for unknown reasons in the 9th century AH; the ancient site later identified and discovered near Aran and Bidgol is believed by archaeologists and

historians to be the lost Haraskan mentioned in history.

According to IRNA, the Archaeology Group from the University of Kashan began excavation operations at the ancient site of Haraskan in 2021, and after 60 days, significant sections of a fire temple from the late Sassanid and early Islamic periods were uncovered, which archaeologists believe was one of the most important places of worship during the Sassanid era and part of the fire temples of Bahram.

Aran and Bidgol, located 215 kilometers north of Isfahan, is known for its rich cultural heritage and historical significance. The area is characterized by its unique architecture, traditional crafts, and proximity to other historical sites, making it an important region for both tourism and archaeological research.

## Nature and history unite at Sheyvand Waterfall

Sheyvand waterfall is located in the picturesque Sheyvand village of Izeh, Khuzestan Province. Nestled next to the lake formed by the Karun III dam and the Karun II River, Sheyvand village sits in the foothills of the Zagros Mountains, surrounded by lush oak forests. This idyllic setting not only offers stunning natural beauty but also serves as a vital ecosystem for various plant and animal species.

Sheyvand village, along with the neighboring villages of Noshivand and Posht Asiyab, forms a triangular area through which

the river flows. These villages are situated in a region where the Karun River meanders to the east, creating a unique geographical landscape that enhances the area's charm.

### Waterfall details

The Sheyvand Waterfall cascades dramatically from a height of 80 meters, flowing down the Mon-gasht mountain for four kilometers before reaching Sheyvand lake. This stunning waterfall not only captivates visitors with its beauty but also plays a crucial role in irrigating the gardens and paddy fields of

the village. Directly across from this highest waterfall in Khuzestan province lies Zaras tourist village, which attracts visitors looking to experience the natural wonders of the area. Accessing Sheyvand village can be done via barge, ship, or go-fast boat, although a bumpy dirt road is also available for those who prefer to drive. The waterfall itself is about three kilometers from the village, requiring approximately an hour of walking to reach its breathtaking viewpoint.

### Flora and fauna

The biodiversity of Shey-

vand is remarkable, with a variety of animal species including leopards, boars, brown bears, wolves, jackals, foxes, rabbits, rams, sheep, mountain goats, Iranian squirrels, and various birds such as partridges, see-see partridges, nuthatches, shrikes, and woodpeckers. The region is also home to around 230 plant species, including Iranian oak, red ben, oregano, tragacanth, Pistacia atlantica, figs, Montpellier maple, pomegranates, grapes, and walnuts, contributing to the ecological richness of the area.

### Historical significance

In addition to its natural attractions, Sheyvand village boasts historical significance, featuring an Abbasid caravanserai from the Saffavid era. The area is rich with remnants of an ancient fortress, believed to date back approximately 4,000 years BCE. Visitors can also find stone inscriptions and reliefs near the Bardgori crypt, which dates back nearly 1,700 years to the Sassanid era. The village is home to two historic water mills and an old dungeon that reaches a depth of 25 meters, adding to its historical allure.

### Local handicrafts and cuisine

Sheyvand village is also known for its vibrant handicrafts, including jajim (a type of woven fabric), felt, neck scarves, rugs, and hand-woven carpets. The local cuisine is another highlight, featuring delicious offerings such as mountain honey, cheese, local butter, sugary bread, pomegranate paste, and torshi made from pomegranate seeds. These culinary delights provide visitors with a taste of the region's rich cultural heritage.

### Attractions

Izeh, where Sheyvand is

located, is renowned for its rich cultural heritage and historical significance. Visitors to Izeh can explore various archaeological sites, ancient ruins, and traditional crafts that reflect the area's storied past. The region is characterized by its unique architecture, traditional crafts, and proximity to other historical sites, making it an important destination for both tourism and archaeological research. The combination of natural beauty, historical intrigue, and cultural richness makes Izeh a captivating place for travelers and history enthusiasts alike.





# *Pezeshkian:* Iran after no war, seeks to 'live in peace and tranquility'

Trump hopes for striking nuclear deal with Tehran

**International Desk**

Positive signals are coming from Tehran and Washington as the two countries' presidents prioritize negotiations to settle their disputes, not least over Iran's peaceful nuclear program. Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian said on Thursday that Iran is not seeking war with any country but "we seek to live in peace and tranquility." In a meeting with elites in the southwestern province of Khuzestan, Pezeshkian said that he believes Iran should speak to the world with the language of peace. The Iranian president said China, which considers the United States as its number one enemy, tolerates the Washington's threats because it wants to gain maximum benefits from the relations with the US. The Iranian president, however, said threats and sanctions by the enemies cannot bring Iran to its knees. Since taking office in July, the new Iranian administration has repeatedly voiced its readiness to hold talks with the Western countries to resolve their disputes over the Islamic Republic's nuclear program. Ahmad Bakhsayesh, an Iranian lawmaker, recently said Pezeshkian favors direct negotiations with the United

States to put an end to long-standing differences, including Iran's nuclear issue. Deputy Foreign Minister for Legal and International Affairs Kazem Gharibabadi also said on Tuesday that Tehran is ready to start negotiations to lift "illegal and unilateral" sanctions imposed on Iran. In recent months, Iran and European parties to the nuclear deal - France, Germany and the UK - have held several rounds of talks on Iran's nuclear program and have agreed to resume the negotiations in the future. Meanwhile, US President Donald Trump said on Thursday that he would look to do a deal with Iran. When asked if he would support Israel striking Iran's nuclear facilities, he said, "It would really be nice if that could be worked out without having to go that further step." He added, "Iran hopefully, will make a deal." "The only thing I've said about Iran - and I want them to have a great country, they have great potential, the people are amazing - The only thing I said about Iran, is they can't have a nuclear weapon and they are religious zealots," Trump said during an interview with Fox News. People familiar with the matter also



Donald Trump



Masoud Pezeshkian

said Trump is to put his Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff in charge of managing Iran nuclear file, suggesting the US president is willing to test diplomacy before increasing the pressure on Tehran. In an interview with Fox News two weeks ago, Witkoff said Trump

wants to try and get a deal with Iran. Senior diplomats from France, Germany, the UK and the EU met with their Iranian counterparts in Geneva 10 days ago and discussed Iran's nuclear program. In 2015, Tehran 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.

## *Iran:* US blacklisting of Yemen's Ansarullah contravenes int'l law



Esmail Baqaei

**International Desk**

Iran's Foreign Ministry condemned the United States for re-designating Yemen's Ansarullah resistance movement as a "terrorist" organization, casting the move as "contrary to international law." Foreign Ministry's spokesman Esmail Baqaei said on Thursday that designation of the resistance movement as a "terrorist" organization is only an excuse to impose "anti-human sanctions against the Yemeni people."

"Such arbitrary, unilateral, and baseless actions further undermine the rule of law in international relations and pose a threat to regional peace and stability," Baqaei said. US President Donald Trump on Wednesday officially re-designated Ansarullah as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO), returning the movement to the same status it held at the end of his first administration. "The Houthis' activities threaten the security of American civilians and personnel in the Middle East, the safety of our closest regional partners, and the stability of global maritime trade," an order said. The Houthis said the move targeted Yemen's "entire population" over their sup-

port for the Palestinians. "The US designation reflects the extent of the current administration's bias toward the usurping Zionist entity," a statement by the resistance movement said, referring to Israel. Former US President Joe Biden had lifted the Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) designation in 2021, citing the need to mitigate one of the world's worst humanitarian crises. Since November 2023, the Yemeni movement has targeted dozens of Israeli-bound ships with missiles, drones and small boat attacks in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. They say they are acting in support of the Palestinians in the war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza.

## UN concerned by Israel's 'war fighting' methods in West Bank

The United Nations voiced serious concerns Friday over the Israeli military's use of force during its raid this week in the West Bank, including methods "developed for war fighting." The Israeli military this week launched a raid in the Jenin area, days into a cease-fire in its war in the Gaza Strip, AFP reported. "We are deeply concerned by the use of unlawful lethal force in Jenin, in the occupied West Bank," UN human rights office spokesman Thameen Al-Kheetan told a media briefing in Geneva. "The deadly Israeli operations in recent days raise serious concerns about unnecessary or disproportionate use of force, including methods and means developed for war fighting, in violation of international human rights law, norms and standards applicable to law enforcement operations. "This includes multiple airstrikes and apparently random shooting at unarmed residents attempting

to flee or find safety." UN human rights chief Volker Turk has called for Israel to adopt and enforce rules of engagement that are fully in line with applicable human rights norms. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has claimed the objective of the operation, dubbed "Iron Wall", was to "eradicate terrorism" in the area. Kheetan said the UN rights office had verified that at least 12 Palestinians had been killed and 40 injured by Israeli security forces since Tuesday, adding that most of them were reportedly unarmed. He called for all killings in a law enforcement context to be thoroughly and independently investigated. "Those responsible for unlawful killings must be held to account," the spokesman added. Kheetan said that following the Gaza cease-fire announcement, Israeli settlers in the West Bank had been "attacking Palestinian villages and stoning vehicles", with



AFP

houses and cars torched. "We are also concerned by repeated comments from some Israeli officials about plans to expand settlements further still, in a fresh breach of international law. We recall again that the transfer by Israel of its own civilian population into territories it occupies also amounts to a war crime," he said. "We call for an immediate end to the violence in the West Bank. We also call on all parties, including third States with influence, to do everything in their power to ensure peace is achieved in the region."

Mohammad Ali Rajabi  
Cartoonist



## Araghchi raps UN chief 'audacious' remarks on Iran's nuclear program

**International Desk**

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi reacted to recent remarks by UN chief on Iran's nuclear activities, describing them as "audacious." Araghchi took to the X on Thursday, saying that Iran has shown its long-standing commitment to the global nonproliferation regime to the world. He blasted UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres for preaching the Islamic Republic, which is pursuing a civilian nuclear program as a signatory to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the US-abandoned 2015 nuclear deal, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). "Here, my hope is that the Iranians understand that it is important to

once and for all make it clear that they will renounce to have nuclear weapons, at the same time that they engage constructively with the other countries of the region," Guterres said on Wednesday while addressing a meeting at the World Economic Forum in Davos. The Iranian foreign minister also highlighted a fatwa (religious decree) by Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei that bans the production, possession and stockpiling of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). "It is audacious to preach that Iranians must once and for all make it clear that they will renounce to have nuclear weapons." The top Iranian diplomat also noted that the most relevant question in the



Abbas Araghchi

region is Israel's genocidal war on the Gaza Strip, as well as the regime's occupation of Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese territory. He further warned of the threat posed by Israel's actual nuclear arsenal and refusal to join the NPT. Israel is estimated to possess 200 to 400 nuclear warheads in its arsenal, making it the sole possessor of non-conventional arms in West Asia.



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# Minister: Theater catalyst for national unity, educational growth

## Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Abbas Salehi, emphasized the role of theater as a dialogue-driven art form that fosters national unity. "Unity is fundamentally based on dialogue, and theater embodies this very essence," he made the remarks on the sidelines of the 43rd Fajr Theater Festival and after attending a performance of 'Border', directed by Neda Ghorbaniyan. The minister elaborated on the interconnectedness of performers and audiences, stating, "Those on stage and those watching are engaged in a dialogue. Sometimes, these conversations manifest verbally, while

internal dialogues unfold within the audience, linking with the on-stage interactions." He underscored that national cohesion is grounded in collective discourse, asserting that the performing arts, particularly theater, can significantly contribute to this goal. Salehi also highlighted the educational potential of theater, stating, "The art of theater creates numerous opportunities within the educational sector, enhancing students' confidence and fostering contemplation and dialogue." He acknowledged past periods when the ties between the education system and theater were stronger, expressing hope for a renewed partnership. "If we

critique the educational system today, theater can assist from multiple angles," he added. He called on educational professionals to leverage such cultural gatherings, emphasizing that student performances serve as valuable opportunities for learning and growth. "We at the ministry strive to facilitate this pathway and hope our colleagues in the educational sector respond positively to our invitation." **Iran country of cultural fusion** In a separate meeting on the sidelines of the festival, Atabak Naderi, head of the General Directorate of Dramatic Arts, welcomed the Kyrgyz theater group, highlighting Iran's rich cultural

tapestry. "Iran is a country of cultural fusion," Naderi stated, referencing the diverse ethnicities that enrich the nation from the Persian Gulf to the Caspian Sea. Naderi pointed out Kyrgyzstan's notable participation in recent festivals, praising the Iranian government's commitment to cultural diplomacy even amidst political challenges. "The festival is one of the largest in the region, and we take pride in hosting theater figures from various countries," he remarked. Kyrgyz representatives expressed gratitude for their invitation to the festival, noting their positive reception among Iranian audiences and their interest in future collaborations.



They highlighted the significance of their 24-year-old state theater and expressed hopes of inviting Iranian artists to their own biennial international festival.

The exchange underscores a growing cultural dialogue between Iran and Kyrgyzstan, reflecting a shared commitment to the arts and fostering mutual understanding through theater.

## Iranian animation 'In the Shadow of the Cypress' receives Oscar nomination

The nominations for the 2025 Oscars were unveiled, showcasing a diverse array of films, among which the animated short film 'In the Shadow of the Cypress' by Iranian filmmakers Hossein Mollayemi and Shirin Sohani stands out with its nomination for Best Animated Short Film. The lineup includes six that were presented at the Venice International Film Festival, which collectively garnered 17 nominations, IRNA reported. In addition to 'In the Shadow of the Cypress', the animated short 'Wander to Wonder' by Nina Gantz was also nominated in the Best Animated Short Film

category. Both films were part of the Orizzonti Short Film section at the 80th Venice International Film Festival 2023. In a notable achievement, 'Emilia Perez', a musical drama by Jacques Audiard about a Mexican drug lord, has garnered 13 nominations, setting a record for a non-English-language film. It is nominated for Best Picture, Best Director, and Best International Feature Film, among others, with leading actress Karla Sofia Gascon up for Best Actress in a Leading Role. 'The Brutalist', directed by Brady Corbet, also received ten nods, including Best Picture, Best Director, and Best Actor

for Adrien Brody. This film, which won the Silver Lion for Best Director at the 81st Venice International Film Festival, has also been recognized for its writing, supporting performances, and technical achievements. Walter Salles's 'I'm Still Here', which secured the award for Best Screenplay at the same festival, received three nominations: Best Picture, Best Actress for Fernanda Torres, and Best International Feature Film. Meanwhile, Pablo Larraín's 'Maria' garnered a nomination for Best Cinematography, and Tim Fehlbaum's 'September 5', which opened the Orizzonti Extra section at the festival, was nomi-

nated for Best International Feature Film. In addition, Gints Zilbalodis's 'Flow', which participated in the Venice Gap Financing Market at the 79th festival in 2022, has received nominations for both Best Animated Feature Film and Best International Feature Film. La Biennale di Venezia has extended its congratulations to all nominees and particularly to Isabella Rossellini, who is nominated for Best Actress in a Supporting Role for her performance in the film 'Conclave'. From the Middle East, the Palestinian-Israeli documentary 'No Other Land', which chronicles journalist Basel Adra's efforts

to safeguard his village from encroaching Israeli settlers, is nominated for Best Documentary Feature Film. This film has received significant acclaim since its premiere at the Berlin International Film Festival last year. The Oscar nominations, initially scheduled for announcement on January 17, were postponed due to the impact of the Los Angeles wildfires, prompting the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences to extend its voting period. The 97th Academy Awards are slated for March 2 at the Dolby Theatre in Hollywood, with comedian Conan O'Brien set to host the event.

## Envoy: Tourism begets peace, economic growth, and global understanding

### Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Ambassador to Spain, Reza Zabib, announced the launch of Iran's pavilion at the 45th International Tourism Fair (FITUR 2025) in Madrid, which showcases authentic Iranian architecture. This initiative, he noted, aims to promote tourism as a means of fostering peace, countering Iranophobia, and bolstering the nation's economy, as reported by dolat.ir. Zabib highlighted the significant efforts of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts in designing and executing the pavilion, which has drawn considerable attention from visitors. He added, "This pavilion not only reflects the rich architectural heritage of Iran but also serves as a gateway for international audiences to engage with our culture." The ambassador underscored the role of tourism in enhancing international relations and combating negative stereotypes about Iran. He asserted, "Tourism can significantly contribute to economic

growth and job creation, showcasing the true face of Iran to the world and opening new avenues for international cooperation." Zabib further emphasized that participation in international exhibitions like FITUR presents a unique opportunity to introduce Iran's historical, cultural, and natural attractions to a global audience. In concluding his remarks, Zabib stated, "As a multifaceted industry, tourism can play a crucial role in sustainable development, creating jobs and increasing national income, thereby contributing significantly to economic progress." He expressed hope that active participation in such prestigious events would pave the way for showcasing Iran's tourism potential effectively. The event, which runs from January 22 to January 26, 2025, was launched in the presence of Spain's King and Prime Minister, marking it as one of the most significant gatherings in the global tourism industry, ILNA reported. Represented by the Touring and Automobile Club of Iran, under the auspices of the Ministry of

Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, the Iranian pavilion aims to highlight the nation's tourism, cultural, and historical offerings. The pavilion features 16 booths designed with inspiration from Iranian-Islamic arts and architecture, showcasing Iran's potential in various tourism sectors, including cultural tourism, ecotourism, health tourism, and handicrafts. Mohammad Hossein Soofi, CEO of the Touring and Automobile Club of Iran, emphasized that the pavilion serves as a hub for interaction between Iranian tourism stakeholders and international investors. The club is set to conduct diverse meetings and programs aimed at fostering collaboration and presenting special tour packages that promote sustainable tourism practices. During his visit to the exhibition, Ahad Biouteh, a representative of Ardebil, Namin, and Sareyn at Iran's Parliament, highlighted the importance of such international platforms in combating negative stereotypes about Iran. He expressed gratitude to the organizers, acknowledging their

efforts in allowing the private sector to play a crucial role in advancing tourism objectives. "The design of the Iranian booths ensures that Iran has a significant presence among participating nations," he remarked. Biouteh noted the visible interest from visitors at the Iranian pavilion, stating, "The Iranian-Islamic civilization has adorned this exhibition, attracting numerous inquiries about travel to our beloved country," suggesting a positive trend in tourism. He emphasized the need for continued efforts to showcase Iran's tourist attractions, not only to enhance tourism goals but also to counteract misconceptions about the nation. He further asserted, "Tourism is a valuable opportunity that should not be overlooked. All tourism professionals must actively participate and not wait for directives." Biouteh concluded by stressing the importance of promoting Iranian culture and attracting tourists, which he believes is essential for revenue generation and cultural advancement.

## Diplomacy; pathway for ...

Trump has previously emphasized that his major concern about Iran is its potential pursuit of a nuclear bomb. However, contrary to some personal opinions in Iran, the Islamic Republic has not deviated from its nuclear doctrine and, within this framework, has no intention of obtaining nuclear weapons. Tehran's nuclear program has been under the watchful eye of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) for the past two decades. Given this backdrop, Trump's new stance can be seen as a step toward both sides' desire to manage or ease tensions between Tehran and Washington and, if possible, open up dialogue to forge a new deal. The specifics of such talks and a potential deal remain under wraps, but it seems that the noteworthy aspect is both sides' assessment of past experiences and the costs incurred due to the persistence and occasional flare-ups in tensions between Iran and the US. Iranian government officials have also signaled their readiness in recent months to engage in negotiations with the US in a dignified manner and based on mutual respect to safeguard their national interests. The back-channel messaging began well before

Trump's inauguration, with media outlets acting as intermediaries, publishing articles and opinions of Masoud Pezeshkian and his government's willingness to interact with the world, including the US. For instance, one can refer to the publication of an opinion by Iran's Vice President for Strategic Affairs Mohammad Javad Zarif in the prestigious American magazine Foreign Affairs. Ali Larijani, an advisor to Iran's Leader, also expressed Iran's readiness to negotiate a new nuclear deal with the incoming US administration in an interview with Ayatollah Khamenei's website weeks before Trump's inauguration. Trump has stated that he will confer with his cabinet members on Iran, indicating that, contrary to headline Iran opponents' beliefs, he does not have a pre-determined action plan against Iran without consulting his advisors. Such a stance, likely drawn from past experiences, has now set both sides on a new course. A course that seems to have diplomacy as its cornerstone. These assessments leading to a diplomatic route for easing tensions should be embraced, and it is worth recalling that a confrontational approach, in any form, will prove costly for both sides.

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