

Iran, Russia sign 2025 transit roadmap, annex on Rasht-Astara railway

Economy Desk

In a major step toward strengthening transport ties, Iran and Russia signed the 2025 joint transit roadmap, as well as an annex of the supplementary studies of the Engineering Contract for the Rasht-Astara Railway Project, emphasizing the rapid completion of the railway. Iran's Minister of Roads and Urban Development Farzaneh Sadeq and Minister of Transport of the Russian Federation Vladimir Starovoyt signed the 2025 Joint Transport and Transit Cooperation Roadmap along with an annex on engineering studies for the Rasht-Astara railway project, marking a milestone in their strategic partnership. Sadeq expressed optimism that

the final construction contract for the railway would be signed by March 2025, once financial and technical details are finalized.

She confirmed that land acquisition for the Rasht-Astara railway is progressing rapidly, with completion expected within a year.

The minister welcomed the announcement by Russian President Vladimir Putin, who authorized the start of engineering studies even before finalizing the land acquisition timeline. "This decision by President Putin will significantly accelerate the Rasht-Astara railway project," she noted.

This key project will enhance the International North-South Transport Corridor, boosting trade and connectivity across



Iran's Minister of Roads and Urban Development Farzaneh Sadeq and Minister of Transport of the Russian Federation Vladimir Starovoyt sign the 2025 Joint Transport and Transit Cooperation Roadmap along with an annex on engineering studies for the Rasht-Astara railway project in Tehran on February 18, 2025.

● MEHR

Eurasia.

Starovoyt, for his part, endorsed Iran's proposals and suggested forming a Caspian transport consortium.

Iran's Minister welcomed the idea, stating that Iran and Russia should take the lead in implementing this initiative. She stated that regular meetings between the two nations are essential to accelerating the shared goals in completing the North-South Corridor.



Iran, Armenia highlight interactions in AI, traffic transit, space industry

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In a meeting with the Armenian ambassador in Tehran, Iranian Minister of Information and Communications Technology (ICT), Sattar Hashemi, highlighted Artificial Intelligence (AI), traffic transit and space industry as suitable fields for cooperation with Yerevan, stressing that both countries are committed to enhancing relations across all sectors.

During the meeting with Grigor Hakobian on Wednesday, Hashemi pointed to technology diplomacy as a key initiative of his ministry, underlining that neighboring countries surrounding Iran are prioritized in the plan.

"In this regard, we have a special focus on the relations between Iran and Armenia, which share common civilizational and historical roots," he added.

Referring to the country's plan for developing communication infrastructure and traffic transit from west to east and north to south, he mentioned the "Iran Corridor 2025" conference held in Dubai on February 4 on this topic. The minister added that the conference would present opportunities for traffic transit services at any point along the border, which has been greatly welcomed by regional countries, and expressed hope for similar interactions with Armenia.

Hashemi touched on several cooperation opportunities



between the two countries, including the establishment of data centers, collaboration in IT and communications technology parks, cybersecurity, smart government initiatives, the space industry, postal services, and e-commerce, as well as leveraging the capabilities of Payam Airport in Alborz Province.

He also pointed out the limited time window for progress in the global field of Artificial Intelligence and stated, "We will specifically pursue joint interactions in this area."

The minister said that 25% of startup companies in Iran operate within the ICT sector and emphasized that the presence of these companies in the region is a priority for this administration.

The Armenian ambassador in Tehran, for his part, remarked on the high-level cooperation between the two countries, describing it as an excellent



Iranian Minister of Information and Communications Technology Sattar Hashemi (r) shakes hands with Armenian Ambassador in Tehran Grigor Hakobian on February 19, 2025.

● IRNA

opportunity to utilize the capacities of both sides in the field of communications and information technology.

He regarded the present time as particularly suitable for increasing mutual collaboration. Hakobian proposed the exchange of delegations from both sides to explore areas of collaboration and facilitate reciprocal meetings between the ministers of communications. The envoy identified cooperation between the two countries' communication operators, traffic transit, postal collaboration, joint research, and artificial intelligence as promising avenues for mutual cooperation in the ICT sector.

Iran-China oil flows post surge despite US bans: Kpler

Economy Desk

Oil shipments from Iran to China have significantly increased this month, as traders overcame logistical challenges stemming from tighter US restrictions, enabling a backlog of cargoes to reach the world's largest crude importer.

Iranian crude oil exports to China rebounded in February, reaching an estimated 1.74 million barrels per day, according to preliminary data from intelligence firm Kpler Ltd. This marks an 86% increase from January's daily rate and the highest level since October.

The surge was attributed to an uptick in ship-to-ship transfers and the use of alternative receiving terminals, market traders revealed, speaking anonymously due to the sensitivity of the issue. China, the largest consumer of Iranian oil, primarily channels these imports to independent refiners, often referred to as "teapots." The hotspots in China, including an independently-run berth in Yangshan, south of Shanghai, and a terminal in the southern port of Huizhou, received a shipment of Iranian oil last month.

Bloomberg reported on Tuesday that privately-run terminals in the country



have taken deliveries from US-sanctioned oil tankers, suggesting that a region that is home to the country's largest buyers of Iranian and Russian crude is finding ways to circumvent the reluctance of larger port operators.

Dongying, in the eastern Shandong Province, became a key receiving port after state-run Shandong Port Group sold at least one terminal to a private entity, according to traders familiar with the matter. They asked not to be named as the information is not public. Also, the Si He, a tanker sanctioned on January 10, discharged more than 744,000 barrels of Russian ESPO crude at Dongying last week, according to the traders and commodities-tracking platform Kpler.

Oil trade has faced mounting pressure from successive

rounds of US sanctions, with the incoming Trump administration also tightening curbs earlier this month.

US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent underscored the crackdown last week, stating that Washington's goal is to reduce Iran's oil exports to less than 10% of current levels. "Chinese, as well as perhaps Indians, were buying sanctioned oil, and that is unacceptable," Bessent told Fox Business.

Heightened scrutiny began during the latter months of the Biden administration, resulting in sanctions on dozens of tankers, traders, and shipping firms. While this prompted caution among buyers and logistics operators, traders reported that the supply chain adapted swiftly through unsanctioned tankers and newly formed shell companies.

Iran to raise daily natural gas output by 250 mcm in five years

Iran's natural gas production will increase by a fourth of its existing capacity in the next five years despite US sanctions targeting the country's energy sector, according to an Oil Ministry official.

Touraj Dehqani, who serves as the CEO of the Pars Oil and Gas Company (POGC), said that Iran needs to raise its gas output by 250 million cubic meters (mcm) per day until 2030 to respond to a growing demand for energy in the country's household and in-

dustry sectors, Mehr news agency reported.

Dehqani said his company, which is in charge of operations in South Pars, a vast gas field shared between Iran and Qatar in the Persian Gulf, will be responsible for a major part of the planned increase in gas production.

He said, however, that Iran will definitely meet a target of 150 mcm per day in new gas output in the coming years based on the plans, budgets, and investments

that the government has finalized.

"Relying on the know-how and experience of domestic experts, we are sure that we will materialize at least 150 mcm in new gas production capacity in the next four or five years," said the official in a news conference in Tehran.

Iran's current capacity for production of sour gas is just over 1 billion cubic meters per day of which more than 871 mcm is turned into sweet gas and inject-

ed into the country's nationwide gas pipeline network.

South Pars is responsible for 70% of the output with a current annual production of more than 2.6 billion cubic meters which is worth nearly \$100 billion. Dehqani said that Iran will invest \$17 billion in South Pars in the coming years to prevent a pressure drop that could cause major disruption to nationwide gas supplies.

He said that domestic companies like the POGC have been suc-



cessful in their projects in South Pars despite the sanctions and despite the fact that major inter-

national energy companies are active in the Qatari side of the giant gas field.