

Iran urges expansion of AI cooperation among Muslim nations

Economy Desk

Iran's Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref called for the establishment of a high-level steering committee for Artificial Intelligence (AI) development within the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) at the second Ministerial Meeting of the OIC-15 Dialogue Platform in Tehran on Monday.

The second meeting of higher education ministers from member states of the OIC Dialogue Platform opened in Tehran on Sunday and continued on Monday at the level of science ministers from Islamic countries, IRNA reported.

Highlighting Iran's strategic focus on AI, Aref stressed, "The Islamic Republic of Iran firmly believes in advancing science and technology in this field," IRNA quoted Aref as saying.

The establishment of the 'Headquarters for AI Technology Development and Applications' underscores the government's commitment to progress in the high-tech domain, he said.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran has prioritized multiple measures to develop

infrastructure, provide intelligent support, and foster an innovation ecosystem in AI," Aref added.

"Iran believes the future of AI development in the Islamic world must rest on three pillars: multilateral cooperation, scientific synergy, and shared infrastructure," he said, adding that the country "suggests forming a high-level steering committee for AI development within the OIC to establish a sustainable framework for deliberation, policymaking, monitoring global AI trends, and drafting mid- to long-term roadmaps for scientific and technological collaboration in this field."

The vice president reiterated Iran's readiness to play an active role in advancing AI technology among Islamic nations, stating, "AI is not merely a technology — it has comprehensive impacts on industry, economy, and human societies. If Muslim nations move forward with collective will, knowledge, and cooperation, they can jointly create a future where AI serves businesses, governments, humanity, development, and dignity."

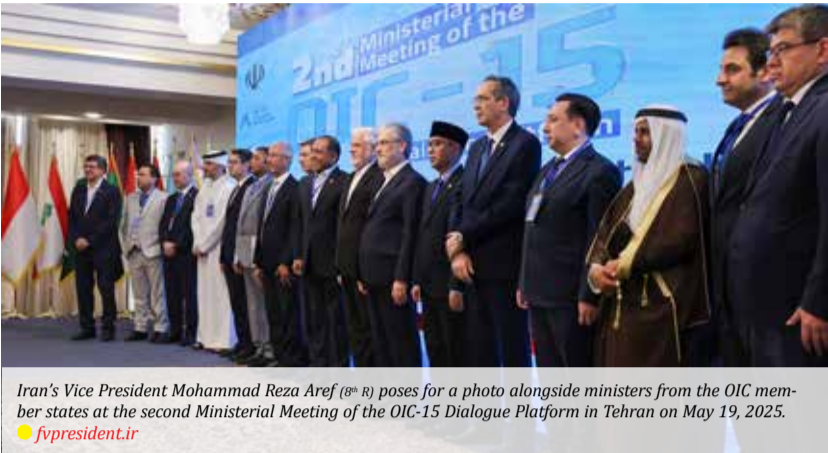
Aref also noted that members of the OIC-15 Dialogue Platform have agreed to issue a statement at the conclusion of this meeting as the first joint AI document of Islamic countries — "a document that reflects our collective determination to advance convergent policies."

"The establishment of centers, creation of an inter-Islamic network of young ambassadors for science, technology, and innovation, and the launch of low-cost or free platforms in emerging technologies such as AI, blockchain, and nanotechnology must be prioritized by Islamic nations," he added.

Islamic world's AI share less than 5%

According to the Iranian vice president, the Islamic world's share in AI-related scientific production, technological development, and economic value creation is estimated at less than 5 percent.

"This figure starkly contrasts with the vast potential and capabilities of Islamic countries. Formulating an intergov-



ernmental program and fostering active collaboration among Islamic nations to increase their share in the global AI market is imperative," he said.

"According to credible estimates, AI will impact 40 to 60 percent of jobs worldwide. While approximately 83 million jobs may be lost over the next four years, at least 69 million new AI-dependent jobs will emerge," he said.

He further noted, "The young and tech-enthusiast population, a dynamic and growing human capital in fields like basic sciences, engineering, and related disciplines, the large domestic markets of Islamic countries — home to over 1.8 billion Muslims worldwide — and the rising demand for AI products and services are among the significant assets of Islamic nations for advancing AI."

Minister offers roadmap to boost Tehran-Ashgabat trade to \$3b by 2028

Turkmenistan determined to expand gas ties with Iran



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Iran's Minister of Roads and Urban Development, Farzaneh Sadegh, proposed drafting a three-year cooperation roadmap to increase trade between Tehran and Ashgabat to \$3 billion by 2028, while Turkmenistan's Foreign Minister Rashid Meredov emphasized the need to strengthen bilateral gas collaboration.

Speaking at the 18th session of the Iran-Turkmenistan Joint Economic Cooperation Commission on Monday, Sadegh stated, "Last year (began on March 20, 2024), bilateral trade reached \$600 million, reflecting growth compared to the previous year."

"Cooperation with Turkmenistan is a priority in the Islamic Republic of Iran's policies. The presence of high-ranking officials from both nations, the establishment of joint commissions, and working committees demonstrate the shared resolve to achieve mutual goals," she emphasized.

Referring to the 17th Joint Cooperation Meeting held in Ashgabat on November 17-18, 2023, Sadegh noted, "Since then, bilateral agreements have been diligently pursued, and their implementation remains satisfactory."

"Between the 17th Commission session and today, we reached a strategic agreement in transport and transit, setting a target of 20 million tons of goods transiting through both countries by 2028," she added.

However, Turkmenistan's deputy prime minister and foreign minister, addressing the \$460.99 million trade volume between Tehran and Ashgabat in the past

year, said, "This figure is unsatisfactory for two friendly, brotherly nations. We must explore solutions to enhance relations."

"Bilateral trade has grown by just 1% compared to 2003, despite aiming for \$5 billion a decade ago — a target we once achieved," Meredov noted.

He urged, "We must define new pathways and mechanisms to develop bilateral ties, resolving existing border trade issues."

Detailing the breakdown, the Iranian minister said, "The allocation for each transport mode is as follows: 6 million tons via rail, 7 million tons via road, 2.5 million tons via combined transport, and 500,000 tons via maritime. Sustaining this trajectory until 2028 will unlock new horizons for both nations' regional transit roles."

Rail cooperation

On rail cooperation, Sadegh said, "The agreement to exchange 400 railcars daily at the Sarakhs border and 100 at the Incheh Borun border marks a critical milestone. Efforts by both nations' railway authorities are underway to operationalize this goal."

Regarding customs collaboration, she stated, "Both sides have taken effective measures, including six-monthly meetings between customs chiefs and the signing of a Joint Action Plan to deepen customs cooperation starting in 2024."

Expanding gas ties

Speaking at the same session, Meredov declared, "We are committed to expanding gas cooperation with Iran. Pursuing long-term gas exports to Iran and

transiting Turkmen gas via Iran to third countries are among our priorities."

"We possess all necessary capacities and resources to advance gas exports to Iran. Several issues are under review, and we hope to finalize measures to strengthen these exports," he stressed.

On petrochemical collaboration, Meredov said, "the two sides, over the past 15 years, have achieved strong cooperation in petrochemicals and gas-to-petrochemicals. We stand ready to exchange expertise in this field."

"Iranians possess valuable expertise in the petrochemical and gas-to-petrochemical sectors. Iranian companies, like those from other countries such as Japan and South Korea, can operate in this field in Turkmenistan," he said.

Meredov further outlined plans, "We aim to produce fertilizers, establish synthetic gasoline plants, and other projects in Turkmenistan, initially through cooperation with Iran, to boost our industrial capacity."

During his address at the Tehran Dialogue Forum, the Turkmen foreign minister also stated that his country supports the full implementation of projects such as a highway from Ashgabat to the Iranian border.

"We support the comprehensive implementation of projects like a highway from Ashgabat to the Iranian border. At the same time, it is essential to coordinate efforts among Turkmenistan, Pakistan, and other regional countries to establish a regional transportation network extending beyond Central Asia to the East, West, and South," he added.

NIOC to offer gas field development to steelmakers to produce own energy

Iran plans to hand over the development rights of three untapped gas fields to the country's steel manufacturers in a move designed to ensure energy supplies for the struggling sector, Deputy Oil Minister Hamid Bovard said on Monday.

The initiative aims to bring energy-hungry industries into the fold, allowing them to take part in production and in turn, alleviate the perennial shortages that have dogged their operations.

Iran's heavy industries, including steel, petrochemicals, and mining, have borne the brunt of rolling power and gas cuts in recent years, as the government has prioritized household consumption during peak demand periods. The policy has inflicted billions of dollars in loss annually to their production.

"A plan was devised to allocate two or three gas fields to them so that they can also take part in production and help address some of their energy-related challenges," Bovard told reporters in remarks carried by Mehr News Agency.

Although the official did not name any specific fields, he hinted that they were likely among Iran's smaller reserves.

According to Bovard, the daily gas consumption of steel companies fell below 50



million cubic meters (mcm), a figure that makes it unlikely they would be tapping into the country's major deposits. The daily energy demand accounts for 6% of Iran's total daily gas production, which stands at around 880 mcm.

The announcement came on the heels of a push by the National Iranian Oil Co. (NIOC), also headed by Bovard, to drum up private-sector interest in its upstream gas assets. Last month, the energy giant unveiled investment packages for 49 gas fields, aiming to ratchet up daily output capacity by as much as 500 mcm.

Of those, 35 onshore projects would require an injection of over \$13 billion, while the 14 offshore fields — largely untapped — would need an estimated \$27 billion in capital. Bovard stressed on Mon-

day that the NIOC was open about financing models for these ventures. "We are even prepared to fully hand over certain fields to the private sector, to ensure maximum participation in investment and production," he said.

The flexibility signals a departure from Iran's traditionally state-heavy approach to energy development, and underscores the urgency with which Tehran is trying to close the gap in domestic gas supply — a shortfall that at times reaches 300 mcm per day.

Iran, home to the world's second-largest natural gas reserves after Russia, is trying to boost extraction. Under a four-year roadmap, the country plans to ramp up unprocessed gas output from 1.1 billion cubic meters to 1.33 bcm per day.

Sanctions removal top ...

Whether via a nuclear consortium or by scaling back specific nuclear activities as done before, the current talks should be underpinned by strategic thinking.

Iran's enrichment activities were already kept in check and monitored by the IAEA under the JCPOA. That arrangement held water. Today, Tehran is once again sitting

down at the table with Washington. As stated by Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, Iran is also eager to loop in the European troika. These players had been part of earlier negotiations, and the previous framework had indeed borne fruit.

For new talks to succeed, the US must climb down from maximalist positions. While it is common to enter nego-

tiations with big asks, meaningful progress requires each side to act in good faith and meet halfway. Iran's current approach appears to be just that while keep its nuclear red line intact.

With mutual flexibility and staying the course, this diplomatic path could pave the way to removing sanctions and unlocking economic potential.