

VP says Iran eyes pioneering AI in region within three years

Economy Desk

First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref said on Tuesday that Iran must overcome delays in adopting emerging technologies and secure the top regional position in Artificial Intelligence (AI) within three years. Speaking at a meeting of the National Committee for the Development and Application of Artificial Intelligence, Aref said the country must set clear priorities and policies in AI, while ensuring that ethics, security, privacy and decentralization remain central to its strategy, fvpresident.ir reported. "The country's pace in advanced technologies must increase several times over the current situation. Our goal is to achieve the targets of the 20-year national vision plan in emerging technologies, which means we should reach the number one position in

the region within three years," he said. Aref acknowledged that Iran has fallen behind schedule in applying emerging technologies across various sectors, calling for stronger focus on putting them into practice. He added that Iran has significant potential in the field, with a pool of educated and motivated youth. "We must give them the space to drive the country toward progress," he said. The vice president urged the full use of universities and research centers, saying the nation's scientific capacity must be directed toward addressing people's needs.

"Our nation is grateful, and we must ensure that emerging technologies serve the welfare of the people," he added. At the meeting, Aref urged faster coordination among government bodies on AI policy and called for clear rules on data sharing to support national platforms.



First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref chairs a meeting of the National Committee for the Development and Application of Artificial Intelligence in Tehran on October 1, 2025. ● fvpresident.ir

Tehran greenlights conditional entry into FATF's CFT convention

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Iran's Expediency Council has approved the country's conditional accession to the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism (CFT), a council spokesperson said on Wednesday. Mohsen Dehnavi announced on social media platform X that, after four full sessions and joint committee meetings, the council approved Iran's conditional accession to the CFT in Wednesday's session, IRNA reported. The ratification is a key step toward improving Iran's position with the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) as accession to the CFT remains the final requirement for the country's membership in the taskforce. Expert reviews of the conventions had already been completed, leaving only the final session and vote. The council said the meeting was attended by the heads of Iran's three branches of government, some members of the Guardian Council, and the ministers of economy and foreign affairs. The majority of council members voted in favor of an amendment to Parliament's proposed terms, granting conditional approval for Iran to accede to the convention.

IRISL transports 27m tons per annum despite sanctions, CEO says



Economy Desk

The chief executive of the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines (IRISL) said on Wednesday that the maritime organization had managed to transport about 27 million tons of cargo annually in recent years despite heavy international sanctions, underscoring the company's role in global trade. "Although the circle of sanctions against IRISL has tightened over the past decade, the company has been able to secure a considerable share in importing goods needed by

factories and production lines, as well as exporting Iranian products to target markets," Mohammad Reza Modarres Khiabani told ISNA. Iran has been subject to Western sanctions for its peaceful nuclear program for decades. Last year, the European Union and the United Kingdom imposed new measures against IRISL, citing Tehran's alleged support for Russia in its war with Ukraine. The company has also been under US State Department sanctions since June 2020, with Washington calling it the pre-

ferred shipping line for "Iranian proliferators and procurement agents." Modarres Khiabani also said, "IRISL has played a significant role in global trade," highlighting Iran's geographical advantage of proximity to open waters and major ports. To expand its reach, the company has adopted a five-year strategic plan that is reviewed annually, aimed at modernizing its fleet, acquiring new vessels, and leveraging its pool of skilled Iranian seafarers. According to Modarres Khiabani, IRISL currently operates 143 vessels under the Iranian flag in international waters. "The helm of IRISL's fleet is in the hands of experienced Iranian seafarers, who are renowned worldwide for their skill, expertise and commitment, and are in demand by many foreign shipping companies," he added.

ECO aims for common currency to boost regional trade, secretary-general says

Economy Desk

The Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) is exploring the idea of a common currency to ease trade among member states, particularly those facing international sanctions, Secretary-General Asad Majid Khan said in an interview with Tasnim News Agency on Wednesday. "Finding a reliable way to trade without concern is essential," Majid Khan said. Iran is the only country among the ECO's 10 member states currently facing international sanctions. "Deep dialogues among financial experts are one of our most important needs. So far, we have not had enough of these discussions, while mechanisms for joint payments could emerge from such consultations and help expand regional trade," he said. The official added that reducing trade costs and transit times is another priority. "If we cannot shorten border crossing times, we will not achieve progress in trade. It is essential to work on harmonizing trade mechanisms among countries." The organization, which include Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Turkey, and Uzbekistan, has also outlined long-term strategic goals for 2035, aimed at reducing customs barriers and strengthening economic



ECO Secretary-General Asad Majid Khan ● TASNIM

cooperation, he said. "ECO, with a population of over half a billion and vast energy and mineral resources, has the capacity to become one of the world's economic hubs, yet its share of global trade remains below 5% and intra-regional trade is only about 8%, far lower than the European Union or ASEAN," the ECO head said. "According to ECO statistics for 2023-2024, the region's total trade was about \$1.16 trillion, equivalent to 4-5% of global trade. Intra-regional trade accounted for only around \$110 billion, roughly 8-9% of member countries' total trade," Majid Khan stressed the need to review strategies, facilitate trade, reduce customs barriers, leverage technology, and even consider a common currency to improve economic collaboration. In agriculture, he highlighted the need to raise standards for products to obtain internationally recognized certifications, which would facilitate trade and improve global market access.

Majid Khan also noted the region's vulnerability to natural disasters, citing floods, severe droughts, forest fires, and melting glaciers. "These realities show that ECO member states need cooperation and synergy more than ever to face these threats," he said. At the same time, he called the region's abundant energy and natural resources both a major opportunity and a challenge that must be managed with a circular economy approach. The ECO Energy Center in Baku has been established to assist countries in addressing climate change and mitigating the impacts of natural disasters, the secretary-general said. Responding to a question about ECO's position relative to other regional organizations, Majid Khan said while groups such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization create a sense of competition, many members overlap and ECO has always focused on economic and trade issues, whereas Shanghai concentrates more on security and counter-terrorism. "These organizations can complement each other rather than compete," he said. He emphasized that no region matches ECO's long history, shared languages and cultures, and deep ties among peoples, which strengthen the motivation for cooperation. "Despite all technical obstacles that slow us down, the path of collaboration is ongoing and will not stop."

Trump-Netanyahu's plan ...

But in practice that is a misreading. Neither Netanyahu nor Trump has any intention of acting in favor of Palestinian rights. Both have shown the fiercest enmity; it is unthinkable that such hostility could suddenly turn into neutrality, let alone friendship. To believe otherwise would be naïve.

Do you think the plan could alter the stance of resistance

groups such as Hamas or Islamic Jihad, or will it fuel further escalation?

The Palestinian groups are on the right path. They may make use of the plan tactically — to underscore their demands, demonstrate their legitimacy and prevent extended pressure. But they will never accept it. Their path, sanctified by countless martyrs, will not be abandoned because of hollow promises made by two sworn

enemies.

In your view, what would be the consequences of the plan's failure for Gaza and the wider region?

The plan will change nothing. It's just talk out of Washington — no more than words on paper, with no practical effect. Everyone remembers Trump himself once declared, "We will turn Gaza into hell." Netanyahu said, "We will flatten Gaza."

And the current war is exactly that policy in action. How could this suddenly align with a state-building agenda? No one takes their words at face value, nor do they carry weight in practice. Its failure is guaranteed. The real balance of power is being determined elsewhere — inside the homes of ordinary people who continue to resist and lay down their lives day after day. Meanwhile, deeper shifts are al-

ready under way beyond their control. They failed to stop Palestine's recognition as a UN member state. They failed to clamp down on global protests. Now more than 50 ships of the Global Sumud Flotilla, involving activists, European politicians, artists, and other public figures, are sailing toward Gaza [carrying humanitarian aid and aiming to break Israel's naval blockade]. So the behind-the-scenes reality is this; Netanyahu and Trump

sought to prevent a grassroots Palestinian statehood drive and to lay the groundwork for a "dignified ceasefire." They will not succeed. Any ceasefire at this point is tantamount to acknowledging Israeli defeat, and the world can already see that Israel has failed. It remains stuck exactly where it began; demanding the release of hostages — a goal it still has not achieved, despite all the devastation wrought.