

Iran, India aim to shield Chabahar from third-country pressure: *Envoy*

Economy Desk

Iran and India are seeking practical solutions to continue developing Iran's strategic Chabahar Port and prevent it from becoming a "hostage to decisions of third countries," Iran's ambassador to India said, underscoring Tehran's readiness to accelerate joint infrastructure projects despite Western sanctions.

In his first interview with an Indian newspaper, Hindustan Times, Iranian ambassador Mohammad Fathali said Tehran and New Delhi were pursuing dialogue and close coordination to ensure the continued development of the port.

He said Iran was ready to advance joint infrastructure projects, particularly the southeastern port of Chabahar, at a faster pace.

"In trade, Iran emphasizes expanding cooperation in energy, petrochemicals, transportation, ports, agriculture, pharmaceuticals, technology, and knowledge-based companies," Fathali said. "Joint infrastructure projects – especially the Chabahar Port and its role in connecting India to Central Asia, Afghanistan, and Russia – remain one of the key pillars of bilateral cooperation, and Iran is ready to advance these projects at a faster pace."

Chabahar, Iran's only oceanic port and India's closest access point to Central Asian markets, has long been central to New Delhi's regional economic strategy. India views the port as a reliable corridor for expanding regional trade and has repeatedly called for the continuation of US sanctions exemptions for its operations.

In November, India secured a six-month US waiver to continue operating the port, easing concerns over its multimillion-dollar investment in the project and the risk of potential sanctions on entities involved. The move followed Washington's decision in September to revoke a sanctions waiver that had allowed India to operate Chabahar since 2018.

India has already provided equipment worth \$25 million, shipped food supplies through Iran's Chabahar Port. The country signed a 10-year agreement with Iran in May 2024 to develop and operate the port, pledging \$120 million in investment and offering an additional \$250 million credit line for infrastructure upgrades.

Iran has repeatedly criticized Washington's use of sanctions, with officials in Tehran describing the policy as an "addiction" since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, citing repeated targeting of Iranian entities under shifting pretexts.



IRNA

RAI reports hike in rail freight to Afghanistan, plans capacity expansion



Economy Desk

Rail freight transport from Iran's Shamtigh border crossing to Afghanistan has recorded an unprecedented surge, the head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Railways (RAI) said on Saturday, highlighting plans to further expand capacity

and deepen bilateral cooperation in rail transport and economic development with the neighboring country.

Speaking at a joint meeting in Kabul with Afghanistan's deputy prime minister for economic affairs and the minister of mines and petroleum, Jabar Ali Zakeri, Iran's

deputy roads and urban development minister, said, "Rail freight transport of goods from the Shamtigh border toward Afghanistan has seen an unprecedented jump."

The chief executive of the Islamic Republic of Iran Railways said rail cargo volumes at the beginning of last calendar year stood at around 5,000 tons per month, adding that through targeted planning and the railway company's role in facilitating exports and transit to Afghanistan, volumes had risen to more than 70,000 tons per month.

"Based on the technical and executive coordination carried out with Afghanistan's railways, this capacity will reach 100,000 tons per month in the near future," Zakeri said.

During the meeting, the two sides reviewed what they described as a new chapter of strategic cooperation between the two countries in the field of rail transport and economic development.

Zakeri said rail transport plays a key and infrastructural role in Afghanistan's economic develop-

ment and logistical stability. "The construction of the Herat-Mazar-e-Sharif railway line is the first phase of the strategic Iran-Afghanistan-China corridor and a decisive step toward turning Afghanistan into a strategic transit route in the East-West corridor," he said.

He also proposed the participation of private-sector rail operators from both countries in financing and implementing the major railway project, with a focus on using Afghanistan's mineral resources as financial backing for the plan.

In the same meeting, Afghanistan's deputy prime minister praised the strong and effective performance of the Khaf-Herat railway in ensuring the continuous supply of essential goods to Afghanistan and welcomed the proposal put forward by the head of Iran's railways.

At the end of the talks, both sides agreed to form joint working committees to draft the operational and executive framework for the project in the areas of railway construction, development, and mining cooperation.

Foreign trade hits \$85.39b in first nine months of calendar year: *IRICA*



IRNA

Economy Desk

The Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) said the country's foreign trade reached 148.226 million tons — worth \$85.394 billion — in the first nine months of the current Iranian year, which began on March 21.

According to the data, the value of Iran's total foreign trade in the nine-month period fell 10.92% compared with the same period last year, while trade volume rose 1.36%, IRNA reported.

Exports during the period totaled 118.901 million tons of goods valued at \$41.243 billion, IRICA said. Export volumes were up 1% year on year, while the value of exports declined 5.78%.

Imports amounted to 29.325 million tons worth \$44.151 billion over the same period. Compared with a year earlier, import volumes increased 2.75%, while their value dropped 15.23%, according to the customs administration.

US strike on ...

Within this framework, the United States would lean on market psychology, strategic petroleum reserves, and calibrated political messaging to prevent energy prices from turning into a domestic or electoral liability. For Donald Trump, high oil prices are not a tool of deterrence but a political vulnerability at home—effectively placing an unwritten cap on how much tension Washington is willing to absorb.

Should tensions escalate to the point where energy flows through the Strait

of Hormuz are seriously disrupted, the picture becomes far more complex. Prices would rise sharply, but the durability of that increase would depend on the US response. The Trump-style approach in such circumstances favors limited shows of force, targeted strikes, and maximum economic pressure over a costly and protracted war—designed to signal resolve without allowing energy markets to spiral out of control.

At the heart of this calculation lies US access to Venezuelan oil, which has raised Washington's tolerance for temporary

disruptions in the Persian Gulf. This does not render the Strait of Hormuz irrelevant. Rather, it reduces its immediate weight in America's economic calculations. In this context, the strait shifts from being primarily an instrument of economic deterrence to a security variable with broader political implications.

For Iran, this shift is particularly sensitive. Higher oil prices triggered by rising tensions may appear, at first glance, to offer an advantage. Yet if the United States can keep prices within a controlled range—or shift the burden onto

Asian consumers, especially China—that advantage is quickly neutralized. Pressure, in this framework, is exerted less through outright conflict and more through economic attrition and the gradual narrowing of options.

Ultimately, the Trump-era approach to the Persian Gulf rests on a core assumption: the United States should be able to generate tension without paying the principal cost. Influence over energy resources outside the Middle East—such as Venezuela—has become a key instrument in making that assumption work-

able. The result is an environment in which the risk of limited, miscalculated, and high-stakes confrontations increases, while full-scale war remains a costly and unattractive option.

Under these conditions, the central issue for Iran is not forecasting a specific oil price, but recognizing that energy prices have become a political variable—malleable and shaped by great-power rivalry. Any decision regarding the Strait of Hormuz or confrontation with the United States that fails to account for this reality risks serious miscalculation.