

Free trade zones record double-digit export growth

Economy Desk

Exports from Iran's free trade zones grew by 14%, according to the Supreme Council of Free Zones during the first eleven months of the current Persian calendar year of 1404 (started March 21, 2025). The council reported that exports from these zones reached \$1.322 billion, marking a 14% increase compared with the same period last year. According to IRNA, economic indicators for the country's free trade and industrial zones over the first eleven months of 1404 show a marked rise in both domestic and foreign investment, higher production value, and a continuing upward trend in exports — all of which point to expanding economic activity within these areas. Domestic investment attracted in the free zones over this period reached 8.479 billion rials (around \$33,270), representing a 125% increase compared with the same period last year. Realized domestic investment amounted to 1.869 billion rials (around \$1,270), registering 36% growth.

Foreign investment also showed notable progress. Attracted foreign investment totaled \$1.025 billion — an impressive 531% increase compared with the first eleven months of the previous calendar year. Realized foreign investment reached \$533 million, up 268% year-on-year. Exports from the free zones stood at \$1.322 billion dollars in the same eleven-month period, a 14% improvement from last year.

The total value of production in these zones surpassed 4.269 billion rials (around \$8,430), a 28% rise over the same period a year earlier, indicating significant progress toward production targets. The continued growth of investment — especially foreign investment — together with higher production and exports underscores the strengthening role of the free zones in the national economy and in promoting sustainable development. These results were achieved despite the challenges posed by the imposed 12-Day War, unrest in December, ongoing



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sanctions, activation of the "snapback" mechanism, and continued external pressure aimed at maintaining the threat of conflict. More recently, the US and the Israeli regime launched joint military aggression on Iran on February 28. The US-Israeli military aggression against Iran has driven international energy and commodity prices to new highs. Iran is responding to the aggression by attacking US military assets in oil-rich countries of the Persian Gulf. Iran has also blocked the Strait of Hormuz to oil and gas tankers affiliated with

the aggressor regimes and targeted some of the tankers that ignored warnings from the Iranian forces. The disruption of tanker traffic in the strategic waterway, lying between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman, has triggered a major surge in energy prices, disrupting the global economy. Yet, import data show that between February 28 (when the US-Israeli aggression started) and March 13, a total of 161,601 tons of basic goods entered the free trade-industrial zones of Iran's Qeshm, Arvand, Aras, Maku, Anzali, Chabahar, and Mazandaran.

Animal product output exceeds domestic needs

Economy Desk

The deputy minister of Agriculture and head of Iran's Veterinary Organization stated that by the end of the current Persian calendar month (started February 20), over one million tons of raw animal products, including chicken, red meat, and eggs, will be produced and supplied, much beyond the country's domestic demand.

Alireza Rafiei-Pour added Iran currently has a surplus of 20–30% in egg and milk production compared to domestic consumption, with these excess products being stored in cold storage facilities. Furthermore, he explained that imports are limited, with only 5–10% of the country's red meat needs (approximately 100,000 to 150,000 tons) being met through imports, which are currently available in cold storage. He emphasized that there are no concerns regarding the supply of protein-based foods, even in a wartime scenario, and that strategic food reserves are in a favorable condition. Rafiei-Pour assured the public that there is no cause for concern in the supply of meat, chicken, eggs, honey, milk, and dairy products. Providing statistics on an-



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imal slaughter under the organization's supervision since February 18th, he reported that over 600,000 head of small ruminants and approximately 73,000 head of large livestock have been slaughtered with veterinary health oversight. Moreover, 86 million chickens have been processed in the country's slaughterhouses and made available to consumers. Rafiei-Pour added that a special intensified health supervision plan has been implemented from February 18th to April 2nd, covering the special periods of Ramadan and Nowruz. "During this time, veterinary staff are present in production, storage, and distribution centers until late at night, in addition to their daily monitoring, to ensure product safety," he said. The deputy minister noted

Iran's significant progress over 47 years of sanctions and war, highlighting that in the production of chicken, eggs, honey, and milk, the country ranks among the top 1 to 10 countries globally. "We export between 3 to 4 million tons annually in this sector, and this food security is a source of pride about which our dear citizens can have complete peace of mind." Hamidreza Rastegar, head of Tehran Guilds' Union, also stressed the adequate supply of essential goods, stating that the relevant ministries promptly act to supply any depleted item. In a television interview, he added that there are no shortages of essential goods and urged the public to maintain normal purchasing habits and avoid panic buying.

Minister urges provinces to 'step up' cultural efforts for Nowruz to foster national unity

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Reza Salehi-Amiri urged provinces to roll out Nowruz (Persian New Year) programs that tap into local artistic and cultural assets to ease social stress, raise public satisfaction and reinforce national unity, a message delivered against the backdrop of the United States and Israel's military strike on Iran that began on February 28. Speaking to senior officials, including Deputy Tourism Minister Anoushirvan Mohseni-Bandpey, Salehi-Amiri outlined a strategic framework that positions the Persian New Year as a catalyst for social resilience.

"Nowruz can become a social container that absorbs psychological pressure and rebuilds our social capital," the minister said, emphasizing that the holiday's rituals should be leveraged to "step up" community well-being. The minister highlighted the need for provinces to lean on their unique cultural and artistic capacities, from traditional calligraphy and miniature painting to folk music ensembles, ceramic workshops and performing-arts festivals, to create inclusive public spaces. "When citizens take part in cultural, ritual and civic activities, they generate an inner sense of satisfaction that translates into collective contentment," Sale-

hi-Amiri explained. He stressed that tourism, when properly managed, can serve as a tool for "shaping the social landscape" and "fostering hope and calm." Provinces are therefore called upon to design and roll out Nowruz events that reflect local heritage while honoring the "First Martyrs' Nowruz" of the nation's revered heroes. The minister urged officials to "bring forward" programs that blend artistic performances with commemorative ceremonies in city squares and public parks, thereby "draining" negative emotions and "strengthening" social empathy. Salehi-Amiri also stressed the centrality of the concept of



Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Reza Salehi-Amiri (3rd l) speaks during a meeting in Tehran on March 15, 2026. ● ISNA

"Iran" as a unifying identity. "Iran must be the core theme of all cultural and social initiatives

during Nowruz; it is the common thread that binds every Iranian together," he said.

By focusing on this shared identity, the minister believes the country can "tighten" national unity and "boost" social solidarity. The remarks came as Iran grapples with the fallout from the joint US-Israeli offensive that began on February 28, an event that has heightened public anxiety and underscored the importance of domestic stability. In this context, the minister thanked the members of the travel-services task force for their dedication, noting that the ultimate goal is to "harness tourism, cultural and social capacities to raise public satisfaction, reinforce social hope and upgrade the nation's social capital."



Lights back on Iranian cinemas

Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian cinemas across the nation are gradually reopening, a move hailed as a symbol of national resilience and a commitment to maintaining normalcy despite heightened regional tensions. Bahman Sabz, an organization affiliated with the Culture and Islamic Guidance Ministry, has activated almost 60 cinemas in 40 cities since March 13, launching a campaign called "Cinema Stands with Iran," IRNA reported. Hadi Esmaeili, the managing

director of Bahman Sabz, emphasized the importance of cinemas as "cultural and media hubs" that can serve a purpose beyond entertainment. "Cinema is a vital point in every city," Esmaeili said. "Our cinema operators are standing alongside the people, just as they did during the 12-day conflict [in June]." Bahman Sabz cinemas previously launched the "Cinema in Solidarity with Iran" campaign during the recent conflict and are planning special programs for the month of Ramadan under the "Cinema Stands with Iran" initiative.

Esmaeili stressed the historical role of cinema in Iranian society, noting its influence during the Islamic Revolution and the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988). He expressed hope that new films will soon be added to the screening schedule, encouraging consistent attendance. The Iranian Film Distribution Guild has indicated that new releases will be introduced in the coming days. Meanwhile, Tasvir-e Shahr Institute, a prominent film organization, announced the reopening of five of its cinema,

Bagh-e Ketab, Mellat, Raga, Razi, and Tamasha, starting on March 15. Director General Maryam Pirkari described the move as "a national effort to inject vitality and enthusiasm into society" and a demonstration of the Iranian people's spirit in the face of adversity. Films screened will be pre-war titles, excluding comedies. "Reopening cinemas, alongside other everyday activities, is a clear sign of resistance and high morale," Pirkari stated. "It plays a vital role in invigorating the community."