Can rail transportation also help reduce some of these problems?
Certainly. The Iran-Turkey rail route has significant capacity. Turkish trains can enter Iran through the Razi border crossing and continue their journey. This route can ultimately connect to the country's rail network and transit routes toward Central Asia and even beyond the Caspian Sea.
In recent years, various facilities have also been developed for Iran's transit and road routes. In addition to direct transit revenues, these routes provide the country with numerous economic benefits.
Therefore, we should ask why some companies and trucks, despite the shorter length of certain routes through Iran, prefer to choose other routes. The answer must be sought in the combination of border problems, prolonged stoppages and logistical costs. These issues must be examined in bilateral negotiations because when Iran and Turkey are expected to function as two hosts to important international transit routes in the region, rules must be established that secure the interests of both sides.

To what extent do political and international pressures affect Iran-Turkey economic relations?
Throughout history, major powers have consistently sought to use their political and economic power. Today, colonialism no longer has its former form, and terms such as "neocolonialism" are used in economic discourse. In the past, a country might directly occupy a territory and take control of its resources, but today, influence may be created through investment, loans, infrastructure development or major economic projects, while long-term economic benefits are obtained in return.
Under such circumstances, countries should strive to ensure that their relations with one another are not affected by the influence of major powers and their policies, and should make maximum use of their geopolitical and transit capacities.

What impact have banking sanctions had on Iran-Turkey trade?
Banking pressures are one of the main problems facing Iran's foreign trade. In Turkey, we have had Iranian banks such as Bank Mellat and Bank Melli, and their branches and banking systems have been used to conduct transactions. If these banks come under pressure or their activities are restricted, a greater share of money transfers will shift toward exchange offices.
However, exchange offices cannot, on their own, meet all the requirements of foreign trade and ultimately depend on the banking network for transferring money. Therefore, the greater the pressure on banks, the higher the cost and complexity of transferring money.

Given these circumstances, to what extent can Turkey play the role that the UAE has played in Iran's foreign trade?
Turkey currently plays this role, to some extent. In the past, the Persian Gulf countries, particularly the UAE and Dubai, played an important role in Iran's commercial and financial connections with the world. A significant number of commercial offices and exchange offices were active there. However, Turkey has also stood alongside Iran, in different periods and particularly during periods of crisis. Of course, we must be realistic; Turkey, like any other country, pursues its own economic interests.
During the Iran-Iraq War, part of Iran's trade was also conducted through Turkey, and goods were transported through this route. Therefore, Turkey has a history of cooperation with Iran under difficult circumstances. Of course, this does not mean that there are no disagreements in any area. The two countries have differences of opinion in some areas, but overall, Iran-Turkey commercial and economic relations have considerable history and potential.

What is the state of trade between the two countries in terms of the volume of exchanges?
Regarding the figures, we must refer to the official statistics of the customs administration and the Trade Promotion Organization. Reaching the $30 billion trade target between the two countries is achievable, but these figures require careful examination, and it must be determined how much of this consists of exports, how much of imports and how much relates to direct trade with Turkey. Today, too, for an accurate assessment, the trade balance of the two countries must be examined alongside their total trade volume.
What matters is knowing how much goods are exported from Iran to Turkey and how much is imported from Turkey, as well as what the composition of these goods is.

What are the main goods exported by Iran to Turkey?
Turkey is now an industrial country and ranks among the world's major exporters. Therefore, Iran's exports to Turkey consist primarily of raw materials and goods such as dried fruits and nuts. Of course, petrochemical products, gas condensates and certain products related to the oil industries are also included, but part of this trade is state-based in nature, and it cannot all be assessed as non-oil exports by the private sector. In the non-oil export sector, we must strive to produce and export goods with higher added value.

Does a high volume of imports from Turkey necessarily harm Iran?
Imports, when a country requires goods and parts, can help meet production needs; however, the main issue is the final cost and structure of these imports.
When Iran is under sanctions, it may purchase a product through a Turkish trader, but it could have ideally purchased the same product directly from a European country at a lower price. The Turkish trader purchases the product from Germany or Belgium, adds his own profit and then sells it to Iran.
At the next stage, the Iranian trader may also add his own costs and profit. Therefore, a product that, for example, cost €3 may ultimately reach the Iranian consumer or producer at a price of €5 or more. Of course, this increase in costs is one of the direct consequences of sanctions pressure and banking and trade restrictions.

To what extent can restrictions on air transportation affect our trade?
Some goods and parts must reach the country quickly. Now that air transportation and access to aircraft, too, have come under sanctions, we are forced to transport these goods by land, which requires more time. When a factory requires a specific part to continue operating, it cannot wait several weeks or months. The absence of a single part may cause a production line to stop and create losses far greater than the price of the part itself.

Under conditions of maritime restrictions, how important is Turkey's capacity to Iran?
Any disruption to the main maritime routes can increase the cost of trade. When a ship waits for five days instead of three, or even for a considerably longer period, various costs are imposed on it. Customs costs, fuel, vessel detention, insurance and other logistical costs increase, and these costs are ultimately transferred to the final price of the goods.
Countries that are subject to restrictions and economic blockades are more vulnerable in this regard and must simultaneously have several alternative routes for their trade. From this perspective, the capacity for land trade with Turkey is extremely important to us. Iran enjoys major advantages; one such advantage is that it has access both to open waters and maritime routes and to extensive land borders.
The Persian Gulf has historically been one of the most important centers of global trade, and Iran's ports are also located along this route. However, when, for any reason, the maritime route faces restrictions, land routes become more important. Under such circumstances, Turkey can be one of Iran's important trade routes with Europe. Of course, using this capacity requires the resolution of border, logistical, banking and transportation problems.

Under such circumstances, what solution would you propose for developing land trade with Turkey?
We must adopt a long-term perspective and strengthen border and transit infrastructure. Increasing customs capacity, establishing suitable parking facilities, operating customs offices and laboratories around the clock, providing welfare facilities for drivers and resolving fuel-related problems are among the measures that can reduce the time required for goods to cross the border.
We must also take rail transportation more seriously and use the capacity of Iran-Turkey rail routes to connect with Europe and Central Asia.
Alongside these measures, the issue of money transfers must also be resolved. If banks are under pressure and exchange offices also face restrictions, trade with any country will become costly and difficult.

Is the problem solely related to sanctions and international restrictions, or do traders' practices also contribute to higher prices?
Sanctions certainly play an important role, but some of the problems are also related to the culture and conventions of trade. I recently wrote a book, analyzing the commercial letters of Qajar Era. In them, we can see how merchants used to deal with one another rationally, ethically and even on the basis of religious convictions.
Today, we sometimes observe that a trader purchased a product three months earlier at a specified price, but when the exchange rate or market price changes, he sells the same product at the current price, which may be 200% or 300% higher, generating an extremely high profit margin. In my view, one of the issues that has harmed trade today is precisely this; that is, ethics, trust and fairness in transactions must be strengthened once again. Trade is not merely a calculation of profit; if trust disappears, trade itself will also suffer in the long term.

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian (L) meets with his Turkish counterpart, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, on the sidelines of the 17th Summit of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) member states, in Khankendi, Azerbaijan, on July 4, 2025.
REUTERS

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Freight trucks queue near the Bazargan (Gurbulak) Border Gate in Agri province, eastern Turkey, on May 29, 2026.
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