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Iran

Digest

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Parliament and Assembly of Expert Elections in Iran

On 1 March, elections were held in Iran for the 290-seat parliament called the Islamic Consultative Assembly and the 88-member Assembly of Experts that elects the Supreme Leader and oversees his performance. According to figures released by Iran's Interior Ministry, over 25 million people cast their votes with a [41 per cent turnout rate](#). The trend of Guardian Council disqualifying prominent reformist and moderate candidates which started with 2020 parliament vote continued. Among the 26 sitting members of the parliament disqualified by the Guardian Council, several belong to traditional conservative camps who served in prominent positions under Rouhani. Given the marginal participation of reformists and moderates, parliament elections were primarily a competition among the conservative factions. In Tehran, [hardline clerics](#), Mahmoud Nabavian and Hamid Rasaei clinched first and third places respectively, and Amirhossein Sabeti, a young hardliner activist and a former political show anchor came in second place. Successful candidates are required to get minimum of 20 percent of votes cast. Half of representatives in 30-seats Tehran district will be elected through runoff to be held in May. Former president Hassan Rouhani and Mahmoud Alavi, who served as his intelligence minister were among the prominent incumbents in the Assembly of Experts who were barred from running. [President Raisi](#) garnered 82 per cent votes in South Khorasan, where all rivals except one were disqualified by the Guardian Council.

Hamas Chief and the Secretary General of the Islamic Jihad in Palestine visit Iran

The Head of the Political Bureau of Hamas Ismail Haniyeh and the Secretary General of the Islamic Jihad in Palestine, Ziad Al-Nakhale visited Tehran. Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian stated that the visit of Palestinian Resistance leaders to Tehran on the eve of [World Quds Day](#),

which is commemorated on the last Friday of Ramadan, was an important message for the region and the world. Supreme Leader [Ayatollah Ali Khamenei](#), in his meeting with Haniyeh, stated that “the Palestinians’ historical patience honoured Islam and made the issue of Palestine the first issue of the world”. Haniyeh said that “the patience and resistance of the people of Gaza and the Resistance forces during the last six months has caused the Zionist enemy to not achieve any of its strategic goals in the Gaza war”. He also met with President Raisi, Foreign Minister Abdollahian, Parliament Speaker Bagher Ghalibaf and [Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Major General Mohammad Bagheri](#). [Raisi in his meeting](#) with Haniyeh stated that the Israeli regime is the root cause of insecurity in the region. Bagheri noted that the Quds Day will be marked much more magnificently, and emphasised that supporting the Palestinian cause has always been among the country's main strategies since the victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran. Ziyad Nakhalah also met with various Iranian officials, including Ayatollah Khamenei. In his press conference with Abdollahian, Nakhalah stated that “Iran’s active diplomacy played a significant role in explaining Palestinians’ position” to the world. While acknowledging the support to the Palestinian nation from the "Resistance movements in Lebanon, Yemen, Iraq, and Syria", he stressed that "the [Axis of Resistance](#) in the region has the most unity and cohesion than ever". Nakhalah was a distinguished guest at an event at Tehran's [Azadi Stadium](#), when one hundred thousand people gathered for a grand Quranic assembly and to express solidarity with the people of Palestine.

Iran’s Arms Exports grow by up to five times

Iran's Defence Minister Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Ashtiani stated in a press conference that Iran's [exports of defence equipment](#) have seen an increase of between four to five times over the past two years.

Ashtiani said there have been a series of discussions on military and defence cooperation with a number of regional countries, including Armenia and Qatar. He also noted that a similar approach is being pursued with Turkey and Russia. "Due to the innovations and the kind of weapons that are being manufactured, this amount will further increase in the future," he added. Emphasising the focus on self-sufficiency in the defence industry, he noted that Iran is now self-sufficient in making drone engines and is working on the production of heavy engines. In November 2023, Deputy Defence Minister Mahdi Farahi stated that [weapons worth US\\$1 billion](#) were exported from March 2022 to March 2023. Notably, these gains in defence exports have followed the expiry of several UN sanctions and restrictions. In October 2020, as per the five-year timetable set out in the Iran nuclear deal, and UN Security Council Resolution 2231(2015), a UN arms embargo that had been imposed on Iran for 13 years expired, freeing Tehran to buy and sell conventional weapons. In October 2023, UN sanctions on imports and exports of drones and missiles with a range of 300 km (186 miles) or more expired under the terms of the JCPOA.

Iran, Russia and China conduct 'Maritime Security Belt – 2024' Joint Naval Exercises

The navies of Iran, China and Russia conducted joint exercises called "Maritime Security Belt - 2024" near the Gulf of Oman from March 11 to 15. Naval forces from Oman, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Pakistan and South Africa sent observers. Rear Admiral Shahram Irani, Commander of the Iranian Navy, observed that what distinguished the latest joint-drills from the previous three editions was that the [warships entered the exercise stage](#), adding that the destroyers of the participating countries showed new capabilities. The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Navy sent ten heavy and light vessels including the recently commissioned '[Abu Mahdi al-](#)

[Muhandis warship](#)', two helicopters and 420 armed support personnel. Russia's Pacific Fleet, led by the guided missile cruiser 'Varyag', arrived at the Iranian port of Chabahar, while China sent the guided-missile destroyer 'Urumqi' and the guided-missile frigate 'Linyi' from the [PLA's 45th escort task force](#) in the Gulf of Aden. Key aims of the Exercise include enhancing the security of international maritime trade, countering piracy and maritime terrorism, facilitating humanitarian efforts, exchanging vital information on maritime rescue operations, and sharing operational and tactical expertise. Irani also noted the [expansion of the security mission](#) of the Iranian Navy beyond securing shipping lines in the Red Sea over the past four years, currently extending from the Gulf of Aden to the Suez Canal.

Iranian companies sign contract worth US\$ 20 billion in the South Pars Gas Field

On 10 March, a group of Iranian companies including Pars Oil and Gas Company (POGC), Petropars, Oil Industries Engineering and Construction (OIEC), the IRGC-linked Khatam al-Anbiya Construction Headquarters signed a contract to carry out a pressure-boosting project in the South Pars gas field, which is shared between Iran and Qatar. Based on the contracts, [US\\$ 20 billion will be invested](#) in the project to extract 90 trillion cubic feet of gas and two billion barrels of gas condensates, which will generate US\$ 900 billion in revenue. In August 2023, President Ebrahim Raisi [inaugurated the Phase 11](#) of the South Pars Gas Field after the project had been lagging for nearly 20 years due to sanctions. French TOTAL, CNPC of China had withdrawn from the consortium with Petropars after the Trump administration reimposed sanctions in 2018. Phase 11 entered into production last year after Iran was able to move a 3,200-tonne production platform, containing fifteen wells, from the discontinued Phase 12 with the help of a crane ship bought from Russia.