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Iran

Digest

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Iranian President and Foreign Minister killed in a Helicopter crash

On 20 May, Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi, Foreign Minister Hossein Abdollahian, Governor of East Azerbaijan Province Malek Rahmati, and Ayatollah Mohammad Ali Ale-Hashem, and the representative of Iran's Leader Khamenei to the same province were killed in a [helicopter crash](#) in the mountainous terrain in East Azerbaijan province bordering Azerbaijan. Raisi was returning home after him and his counterpart from Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev had inaugurated a jointly constructed Qiz-Qalasi dam on the Aras River at the shared border. The visit marked thawing of tensions with Baku, which had closed its embassy in Tehran in January 2023 after an armed assault by an Iranian man left the head of the security service of the embassy dead. As per [Article 131](#) of the Iranian Constitution, the first vice president Mohammad Mokhber assumed the charge as the acting president for the next 50 days. During this period, a council comprising the first vice president himself, the speaker of the parliament, and the chief of the judiciary will be holding fresh presidential elections. [Ali Bagheri Kani](#), who had been deputy foreign minister for political affairs and chief nuclear negotiator was appointed as the Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs by Mokhber. President of Tunisia Kais Saïd, Qatar's Emir, Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani, President of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow, National Leader of Turkmenistan, Prime Minister of Iraq Mohammed Shia' Al Sudani, Prime Minister of Pakistan Shehbaz Sharif were among the head of the governments who attended [memorial ceremony](#) in Tehran. Vice President of India, Prime Minister of Azerbaijan, Syria and foreign Ministers of Saudi Arabia, UAE, Turkey, Bahrain and notably Egypt were also present.

India and Iran sign a long-term contract on Chabahar Port

On 13 May, India and Iran signed a 10-year bilateral contract concerning operations of Chabahar Port in the presence of India's ports and shipping minister [Sarbananda Sonowal](#) and his Iranian counterpart Mehrdad Bazrpash in Tehran. Under the agreement, Indian Ports Global Ltd (IPGL), an investment arm of the shipping ministry formed for the special purpose of participation in Chabahar project, will invest [\\$120 million](#) in Chabahar port and a credit line of \$250 million equivalent has been offered for projects aimed at Chabahar-related infrastructure. Sonowal said that the contract will have a multiplier effect on the viability and visibility of Chabahar port. Bazarpash noted that since March 2024, there has been a direct line of container shipping between Iran, India and China and that a [Iran-India joint shipping company](#) will be launched soon. He further noted that after the completion of the Chabahar-Zahedan railway section by the end of the year, Chabahar will play a strategic role in the eastern branch of our north-south corridor. The Indian side will [procure equipment](#) such as mobile harbour cranes, rail mounted quay cranes, rubber tyred gantry cranes, reach stackers, forklifts and pneumatic uploaders.

President of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq visits Iran

On 6 May, President of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, Nechirvan Barzani led a high-level delegation including his two vice presidents, Jaafar Sheikh Mustafa and Mustafa Said Qadir, as well as key advisors and ministers to Tehran. The Iraqi government, which has had differences with Kurdistan Region over issues of oil exports, budget allocation and civil servant salaries payments, voiced support for Barzani's visit to Iran. Foreign Minister Abdollahian in his meeting with Barzani, noted that Iran is seriously seeking a bigger role for the

Kurdish region within the framework of the Iraqi Constitution. Barzani maintained that “since we believe Iran’s security is tied to the security of Iraq and the Kurdistan Region, the Kurdish region will never be a point of threat against the Islamic Republic of Iran.” Some of the key issues on the bilateral agenda included security issues, especially limiting the movement of the Iranian Kurdish opposition groups in Iraqi Kurdistan, Israel and Turkey's interests in the region, trade, and Iraqi [Kurdistan domestic political](#) issues. Supreme Leader [Ayatollah Khamenei](#) in his meeting with Barzani told him “we consider the relations between us and the Kurdish community –be it in Iran or in Iraq- to be closer than those with any other nation.”

3rd round of the Arab-Iranian Dialogue held in Tehran

On 12 May, the third round of the Arab-Iranian Dialogue jointly organised by the Strategic Council on Foreign Relations (SCFR) of Iran and Al Jazeera Centre for Studies was held in Tehran. Foreign Minister Abdollahian, proposing a shift in the conference’s title from “Arab-Iranian Dialogue” to “Dialogue and Regional Cooperation”, noted that “we have progressed from mere [Arab-Iranian dialogue](#) to a phase of broader regional cooperation.” He emphasised that the current dynamic is not one of confrontation but of mutual alignment. Abdollahian emphasised the necessity of cooperation for achieving collective security in the region. On potential for collaboration between Iran and Saudi Arabia, he noted that both countries are still at the outset of their journey toward enhanced cooperation. Abdollahian also spoke of “extensive engagement between Iranian and Egyptian officials” and efficacy of dialogue in advancing bilateral relations. Seyed Kamal Kharrazi, President of the SCFR and advisor to Supreme Leader Khamenei, underscored the imperative of sustaining Arab-Iranian dialogue to bolster

cooperation across various domains among regional countries and people. Advocating for a [nuclear-free Middle East](#), he argued that Israel's possession of nuclear arms fuels a regional arms race. On Iran's nuclear posture, he noted “while Iran does not currently possess nuclear weapons, existential threats from Israel could prompt a shift in our nuclear doctrine.”

15th Meeting of Heads of ECO Railway Authorities organised in Tehran

On 19-20 May, 15th Meeting of Heads of Railway Authorities of Economic Cooperation Organisation, and 9th Meeting of Railway Committee of the ECO Transit Transport Coordination Council was held in Tehran. It was attended by senior railway officials of Turkey, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Republic of Azerbaijan. [Miad Salehi](#), the head of the Railways of the Islamic Republic of Iran, noted that Iran is the shortest route connecting the countries of Central Asia with international waters and Europe and several international rail corridors of the ECO region passing through Iran include the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), Almaty-Istanbul-Tehran transport corridor, Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul corridor, Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran (KTI) transport corridor, Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Iran corridor. To increase the capacity of transit and international transportation, he spoke of better coordination in facilitating border transit operations and strengthening the logistics centres and border terminals. Abbas Khatibi, deputy head of the country’s Construction and Development of Transportation Infrastructures Company, noted Chabahar-Zahedan railway, being funded by the National Development Fund, is the major project underway in the East-West corridor, while Rasht-Caspian and Rasht-Astara railways are the major projects underway in the North-South corridor in Iran.