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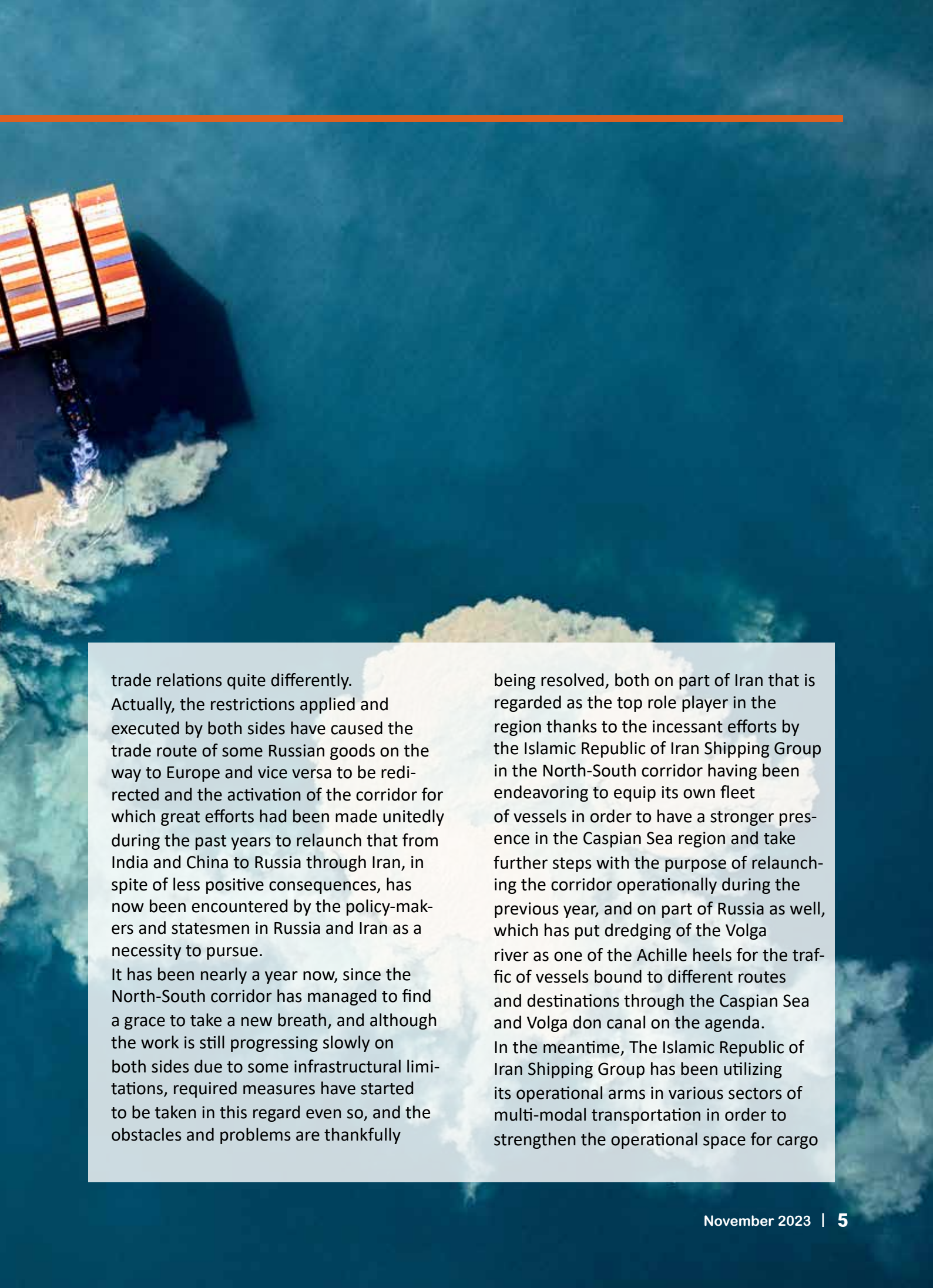
The path of development

By: Mahboubeh Fakouri, Editor in chief

The economies of Iran and Russia had never been approached to each other so much during the past decades.

Despite the fact that Russia had frequently undertaken to expand the bilateral trade relations with Iran, the dream of an interwoven trade between Iran and Russia had not been realized effectively each time, due to some reasons such as political and economic issues as well as the lack of any necessary infrastructure.

But now, the reigning tension and crisis between this country with Ukraine and some European and American countries have indeed converted the path of bilateral



trade relations quite differently. Actually, the restrictions applied and executed by both sides have caused the trade route of some Russian goods on the way to Europe and vice versa to be redirected and the activation of the corridor for which great efforts had been made unitedly during the past years to relaunch that from India and China to Russia through Iran, in spite of less positive consequences, has now been encountered by the policy-makers and statesmen in Russia and Iran as a necessity to pursue.

It has been nearly a year now, since the North-South corridor has managed to find a grace to take a new breath, and although the work is still progressing slowly on both sides due to some infrastructural limitations, required measures have started to be taken in this regard even so, and the obstacles and problems are thankfully

being resolved, both on part of Iran that is regarded as the top role player in the region thanks to the incessant efforts by the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group in the North-South corridor having been endeavoring to equip its own fleet of vessels in order to have a stronger presence in the Caspian Sea region and take further steps with the purpose of relaunching the corridor operationally during the previous year, and on part of Russia as well, which has put dredging of the Volga river as one of the Achille heels for the traffic of vessels bound to different routes and destinations through the Caspian Sea and Volga don canal on the agenda. In the meantime, The Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group has been utilizing its operational arms in various sectors of multi-modal transportation in order to strengthen the operational space for cargo

transportation from different countries as well as its southern ports in addition to buying vessels, wagons and containers and at the same time, to buy a shipping port in Astrakhan of Russia, so that the loading and unloading of the Iranian vessels would be carried out with more speed and facility inside the country. In fact, the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group is trying to provide a suitable background for further development and also offering optimal services to the Iranian traders and economic activists, while taking a far-sighted view of future, by purchasing Solyanka port and designing its developing projects which have recently led to buying of new lands for more expansion of this shipping port.

Here the most significant point which should be referred to is a prospective outlook towards even further development which is expected to be realized in the transfer of goods from the North-South corridor and the strategic path through Iran, should the war between Russia and Ukraine continue for at least ten years, and so this golden opportunity should be benefitted in the best way in order to launch the Iranian goods into the Russian markets on one hand, and increase the share of transit in such a manner on the other, particularly since the statistics indicate a 35% in the transmission of commodity during the year 2022 as compared to 2021 and the growth is forecast to continue even during the current seven months, in comparison to the same period during the previous year, and this while the huge progress and development having been made in the field also have proved to be undeniable. The statistics suggest that the movement of export goods at Russian ports during seven months in 2023 having an increase of 8.3% has nudged the mark of 415 million tons which is deemed as a record in turn.

Based on this, the handling of liquid bulk cargoes at Russian ports by an increase of 3.5% could reach the figure of 265.12 million tons.



Meanwhile, handlings of dry bulk cargoes have also approached about 264 million tons during the corresponding period, by an increase of 16.8%, of course.

Eventually, as the reports indicate; the container traffic at Russian ports has been experiencing an increase of 106% during the seven months of this year and the operational capacity has been reflecting an increase of 40% in the




the activation of the corridor for which great efforts had been made unitedly during the past years to relaunch that from India and China to Russia through Iran, in spite of less positive consequences, has now been encountered by the policy-makers and statesmen in Russia and Iran as a necessity to pursue

Caspian Sea region, 18% in Black and Azov seas basins, 7.4% in Far East, 5.3% in Baltic, and 2.2% in the Arctic region and all these are suggestive of the great significance of relaunching the North-South corridor and the far-sighted view of the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group towards developing optimal capacities as well as its fleet in the Caspian Sea region.

Opportunities for Maritime Cooperation between Iran and Russia

Mohammad Rastad, Former CEO of the Ports and Maritime Organization

An aerial photograph of a port area. In the foreground, there are several tall stacks of shipping containers in various colors, including orange, blue, and white. A crane is visible on the left side, positioned over one of the stacks. The background shows a large, flat area, possibly a paved yard or a body of water, with some infrastructure visible. The overall scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

Iran and Russia have very favorable conditions for improving and developing cooperation in the maritime sector in terms of geographical location, capacity of infrastructure and transport fleet, especially sea transport, size of economy, demand market, extensive political and economic relations, cooperation agreements, common interests.

In terms of geographical location, not only the neighborhood and proximity of the two countries through the Caspian Sea, but also their location on the path of very important transit corridors, including the North-South corridor, has paved the way for increasing the commercial exchanges and the transit of goods between the parties. The capacity and quality of Iran's commercial fleet and ports in the south and north and on the other hand, Russia's almost similar conditions despite the sanctions is considered a very important, positive and effective factor in the trade ties of the two sides.

The economies of Iran and Russia are among the largest economies in the world and the population of both countries has provided an ideal market. Of course, the scope of the market surrounding the two countries, which includes the Indian subcontinent, the southern countries of the Persian Gulf, Afghanistan, Central Asia and the Caucasus has added to the advantages of the two countries' markets. Iran and Russia are known as each other's strategic partners, and the result of such relations can be the expansion of economic and commercial cooperation. In addition, the two countries have had numerous bilateral and multilateral agreements in the field of economic, trade and transportation cooperation for a very long time.

The mentioned advantages and opportunities show the ideal conditions for the promotion of the economic partnership between Iran and Russia. Consequently, an increase of maritime cooperation is expected. It is

obvious that the current situation in terms of the volume of commercial exchanges and sea transportation between the two countries, considering the very good and suitable capacities described above, is insignificant and unacceptable. The amount of use of transit corridors by Iran and Russia, especially the North-South corridor is far from the expected conditions. On the other hand, the volume of movement of goods in the Caspian Sea is not proportional to the will of both sides and the existing potentials. A significant part of the capacity of Iranian and Russian ports in the Caspian Sea is unused and there is the same situation for the other three coastal countries of the Caspian Sea.

It seems that one of the measures that needs serious attention is the renovation and rejuvenation of the fleet of commercial ships in the Caspian Sea. Also, it is necessary to improve and develop Russian ports, especially the existing terminals in Astrakhan port. One of the facilitating factors in the improvement of the mentioned ports is the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines, which is the major shareholder of one of the most important port terminals in Astrakhan, Russia. In addition, the access depth to the ports also needs to be increased. From this point of view, the conditions of Iran's ports in the Caspian Sea are more favorable and in order to match the ports of both sides, it is necessary to pay attention to the dredging of the Volga River, which is the access route to Russian ports.

One of the important factors that should be considered for the development of maritime cooperation between the two countries is the creation of suitable incentives and facilities for private sector investors, including merchants, shipping companies and active operators in port terminals. Establishing effective implementation mechanisms, taking into account bilateral and multilateral memorandums and agreements, is one of the solutions that can provide the aforementioned facilities in the short term and make its effects evident. In terms of changing sea transportation condi-

tions, the establishment and development of regular container transportation lines in the Caspian Sea is considered one of the key and important measures.

It should not be ignored that today the remarkable volume of commercial goods transported by sea using containers and container ships, and the Caspian Sea cannot and should not have different conditions. Therefore, it is necessary to add container ships suitable for the depth and capacity of the Caspian Sea ports to the existing fleet, and the ports have the required infrastructure in terms of the having suitable container terminals. Fortunately, we can say that Iran's ports in the Caspian Sea, especially the Anzali and Amirabad ports have no deficiency in this regard.

In addition to the suitable fleet and ports for container transportation, the executive mechanisms and appropriate processes for container circulation in the Caspian Sea border ports should also be taken into consideration in such a way that container operations can be carried out in accordance with all standard and acceptable international norms. It is clear cut that this requires integrated logistics services so that the integrated and coordinated transport chain is covered in its various stages. Such a situation not only makes the commercial exchanges the two countries flourish, but it can also between in be a factor improving the transit of goods, especially in the North-South transit corridor that both Iran and Russia naturally want to take maximum advantage of.

Another area of development of maritime relations between Iran and Russia is participation and cooperation in the field of maritime industries, especially the shipbuilding industry. As mentioned earlier, the modernization of the fleet of commercial ships in the Caspian Sea is an important issue that should be considered. The infrastructural capacities, knowledge, expertise and manpower of the two sides in the field of maritime industries can cause the prosperity of the shipbuilding industry of the two countries if they are used appropriately in the

form of cooperation and partnership. Hence it can meet the needs of the two parties and other countries on the shores of the Caspian Sea in the area of the shipbuilding.

Furthermore, the creation of joint companies with the aim of contributing resources and synergies in the field of shipbuilding is considered an important step.

Providing facilitation incentives, especially easily accessible financial resources for shipbuilding applicants is one of the essential factors for the prosperity of the shipbuilding industry, which should not be overlooked.

The mentioned cases are only a few of the potential capacities and solutions to improve and promote maritime cooperation between Iran and Russia. Finally, if there is a serious determination and will for this strategic issue, it is necessary that in the short term all the key players and stakeholders of both sides such as state and private sectors gather in the form of a joint specialized commission and implement mechanisms and work towards the solutions for the development of cooperation and also identify the obstacles and problems and propose methods to solve them.

In the next step, the relevant officials of the two countries should be committed to implementing the outputs of the mentioned commission, so that its operational effects can be seen concretely. Such a process is one of the important and key necessities to take a fundamental step towards the promotion of maritime partnership and cooperation, which must be taken into consideration and put into practice.



the development of maritime cooperation between the two countries is the creation of suitable incentives and facilities for private sector investors, including merchants, shipping companies and active operators in port terminals





Business Development with Russia Requires Planning

Senior Official of Ports and Maritime Organization



The development of economic cooperation between Iran and Russia requires a serious and written plan. The two countries have had continuous relations in recent years in the political field despite ups and downs. At present, the opportunity to develop economic partnership is available more than ever as the North-South Corridor has turned into a path for the convergence of the economic interests of both countries, so it is necessary to have a plan for expanding ties. The development of hardware and software infrastructures, definition of new markets, continuous assessment, etc. could be some parts of the plan.

Payam Darya did an exclusive interview with Mohammad Hossein Allameh, Head of Planning, Management Development and Resources and Director General of the Bureau of Strategic Studies, Program, Budget and Administrative Transformation of the Ports and Maritime Organization, to examine some of the most important needs for the development of commercial relations between Iran and Russia.

What factors have led to the importance of identifying and strengthening our country's cooperation with Russia?

A review of commercial transportation developments in the region shows that after

the world got over the 2008 financial crisis, East Asian countries experienced rapid economic growth. This growth began with the jump in the volume of container trade in the East Asian region, especially China and spread to other European and North American countries. The development of the new Silk Road corridor called the OBOR corridor and the development of transit rail corridors such as the Trans-Siberian Corridor (TSR) and the new Eurasian connection bridge called NELB could make Russia's role in the transit of goods between East Asian countries and Europe outstanding.

The spread of the Corona pandemic and the series of events, including the disruption in global supply and logistics chains, the imbalance in the volume of exports and imports between different regions of the world, the change in the geographical pattern of maritime container trade, especially from China to other countries, etc. caused Russia to benefit them in 2020 and 2021 because of its location on the East-West trade route between East Asian countries and European countries.

Following the conflict between Russia and Ukraine in the last two years and its consequences, including restrictions on shipping in the Sea of Azov and the North of the Black Sea, in which Russian largest port, Novo-



rossiyskas Port, is located and embargoes on Russia's economy and ports by some European and American countries, Japan, South Korea, etc. not only caused a decrease in container sea trade at the global level, especially between East Asia, Europe and North America, but also caused a sharp decrease in the transit of goods passed through Russian corridors.

On the one hand, the global container trade faced a 20% drop in 2021 compared to the previous year, although it could overcome the crisis caused by the Corona pandemic to a large extent. On the other hand, transit containers passing through the Russian corridor encountered problems. This issue created challenges for Russia and those countries used Russia's ports and soil for their exports and imports. This issue provided an opportunity for alternative routes use, including corridors passing through Iran; therefore, it has strengthened trade relations and the transportation collaboration between Iran and Russia.

This is a very good opportunity to strengthen cooperation with Russia as a link between North-South and East-West for transiting a part of goods between China-Europe, India-CIS countries (especially Russia) and also Russia's commercial exchanges with other countries through common transit routes between Russia and Iran through the Caspian Sea and the ports located in it. Hence the cooperation of the northern ports of Iran with the southern ports of Russia in the Caspian Sea has formed various fields of collaboration between the two countries especially considering the empty capacity of the two nations in the Iranian ports and the ports in Astrakhan, Olya and Makhachkala provinces.

How has the trade trend between Russia and Iran been in recent years?

Currently, the trade flow between Russia and Iran is at a low level, but it has the ability to increase to much higher levels because of the geographical proximity and political relations between the two countries. During the last 20 years, Russian exports to Iran have had many

ups and downs. Before 2002, Russia's exports to Iran were below one billion dollars, while, it stood at over 3 billion dollars between 2007 and 2011.

It is worth mentioning that the main group of goods exported by Russia to Iran during those years was metal and in some years its share was about 80 percent. However, the metal exports from Russia to Iran decreased significantly to 1 and 2 billion dollars between 2012 and 2020. But In 2021, according to the statistics, the amount of Russian exports to Iran reached over 3 billion dollars again.

The latest statistics show that Russia's export to Iran was 1.5 billion dollars and the agricultural products, especially cereals (corn and barley), sunflower oil and livestock products, especially meat, had the largest share of Russian exports to Iran and their share was 75 percent in total. On the other hand, the investigation of trade between Iran and Russia shows that Iran's exports to Russia have never exceeded half a billion dollars and the trade balance has always been in Russia's favor. Iran's exports to Russia in recent years have been mainly agricultural products, especially fruits, vegetables, summer fruits and dried fruits.

Also, the examination of the road transport statistics from, to Russia through the northern border terminals of Iran as part of the commercial exchanges between Russia and the countries of the region in particular Iran in recent years shows that the majority of goods were transferred through the land border of Astara and the share of other borders is not significant. Therefore, the main volume of imports, exports and road transit from/to Russia takes place through the Astara border.

How is the situation in the ports?

Currently, most of the ports in the Caspian Sea have less performance than their capacity in terms of container and non-container sectors, and they do not use their maximum operating capacity which is 65-70 percent. This issue on the one hand, indicates the empty capacity of the ports located in the Caspian Sea and on the



other hand, their high potential for attracting part of the international trade market.

What are the cooperation capacities between the ports of Iran and Russia according to the aforementioned points?

From an economic point of view, the type of goods exchanged between two countries determines the commercial capacities. From the point of view of port logistics, facilitating and providing the infrastructure needed for exchanges is considered the basis of cooperation. The main export of Iran to Russia has been agricultural products and foodstuffs, especially vegetables, fruits and summer plants.

The trend of recent years also shows that Russia's export of agricultural and livestock products to Iran has always grown and can be considered as a reliable potential in the trade between the two countries. The continuation of the growing trend of exchanges can be predicted due to the conflict between Russia and



very good opportunity to strengthen cooperation with Russia as a link between North-South and East-West for transiting a part of goods between China-Europe, India-CIS countries (especially Russia) and also Russia's commercial exchanges with other countries through common transit routes between Russia and Iran through the Caspian Sea and the ports located in it

Ukraine. Petrochemicals could be another main Iranian export goods to Russia, which have the ability to increase significantly (the current amount is about 50 million dollars).

Agricultural products, especially grains (corn and barley), sunflower oil, and livestock products, especially meat have had the largest share of Russia's export goods to Iran.

Following the recent developments and according to the agreements made at the country's macro-management levels, the issue of importing basic goods, especially grains (wheat, barley, corn, oilseeds, oil and meat) from Russia to Iran, especially by the Government Trading Corporation of Iran (GTC) has become very prominent and turned into one of the priorities. The potential of the imports is estimated to be more than 1.4 billion dollars, which has the ability to increase remarkably. The export value of Russian board (timber and board), which is one of the important export items can increase to \$240 million from the current \$90 million.

What are the areas of cooperation in port logistics infrastructure between Iran and Russia?

Considering the pivotal role of the sea in mobilizing other activities, the areas of cooperation between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Russia by focusing on maritime transportation can be achieved through two main actions and their subactions as follows.

A: Mutual investment: Mutual investment in the completion and development of maritime and port infrastructure between Russia and the Islamic Republic of Iran requires a commitment to investing in Russian ports by the Iranian government or companies introduced by the government that have an executive guarantee, and also the Russian government needs to invest directly or introduces the approved companies in the northern and southern ports of Iran. The mutual investment shows the two parties' will to carry out this great economic event.

This investment is necessary to facilitate the admission of all types of ships and unloading and loading with the aim of harmonizing the

sea and port infrastructures in the ports of the two countries in the Caspian Sea . Having identical RORO berths for admitting Iranian and Russian RORO ships, including vessels that can be opened from the side and the end is one of the important issues of vessels moving in the ports of the two countries.

The joint investment of the two countries in providing up to date and safe infrastructure for the export and import products of the parties can guarantee the commitment and strong will of the each of countries to develop and strengthen exchanges and commercial prosperity. It also builds up the necessary confidence in the integration of the private sectors of the two economies. Construction and strengthening of investment infrastructure in oil tanks, mechanized warehouses and grain silos, liquid oil tanks and export cold storages could be some of the measures in port terminals.

Makhachkala port is the closest southern port of Russia to Iran, so the priority of the Iranian ports is that the Russian port to be active in all seasons for unloading and loading all kinds of goods.

B: Facilitating and smoothing the trade flow: It includes all the measures which are expected to be taken by the authorities of the two countries to facilitate trade and improve the business environment for Iranian and Russian businessmen and merchants, so that the process of goods transit, export and Import can be done within the least possible time, with a reasonable cost and complete safety. The following items are among the important ones that are not only the government's demand, but also they are in full harmony with the requests and interests of the private sector for business development.

1- Facilitation of regulations by the governing bodies of the two countries (quarantine, standard, military and disciplinary measures...) with the aim of increasing the speed and process of commercial exchanges and transportation in transit

2- The right of admission and equal passage in

waterways and ports for ships under the flags of the two countries

3- Strengthening the role of the Joint Committee on Trade facilitation to eliminate unnecessary regulations and reduce the time of legal formalities

4- Commitment to dredging and maintaining the permanent authorized inlet for the traffic of ships in ports and shipping waterways for both countries with continuous hydrographic monitoring of all target ports by a joint hydrographic team

5- Establishing an agency of the standard institution approved by both countries and opening its office in each country to speed up the transfer of goods to the consumer market

6- Having judicial cooperation in dealing with commercial disputes and possible violations of nationals of the two countries during the transfer of goods in the territory of the two countries within the shortest possible time.

7- Removing obstacles of road and rail transport fleets in the territory of the two countries (free passage)

8- Establishing a joint shipping company between Iran and Russia and sharing the logistics facilities of the two countries

9- Development of regular container shipping lines (liners) with the ability to transport refrigerated containers between the ports of the two countries



the trade flow between Russia and Iran it has the ability to increase to much higher levels because of the geographical proximity and political relations between the two countries

Saint-Petersburg

Moscow

Astrakhan

Aktau

Baku

Anzali

Amirabad

Sarakhs

Bandar Abbas

Jebel Ali

Chabahar

Solyanka is a Platform for Turning Iran into a Grain Hub

Mina Khanzadeh

Researcher at Islamic Parliament Research Center

Mombasa

Dar es Salaam

Ports facilitate the movement of goods and services between markets, reduce transportation costs and increase efficiency. Having shares from different ports in other countries can help to increase the volume of export products and integration in regional value chains. Therefore, governments are willing to invest in the ports of other countries and the investment is done with different motives.

One of the most important motivations is to increase trade and create deep economic connections. China, for example, has significantly increased its global investment, particularly in maritime infrastructure under the trillion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative announced in 2013 to boost trade and connectivity in Asia, Africa, Europe and beyond. Pioneering Chinese companies such as Cosco Shipping Ports and China Merchants Port Holdings are scrambling to acquire stakes or sign contracts to build terminals in overseas ports. In simpler terms, China is making strategic investments in various ports to complete the puzzle of its initiative and to do it as effectively as possible.



Iran has also invested in the ports of different countries. Solyanka Port is one of them, about 53% of which is owned by the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines. This port is located 50 kilometers north of the Caspian Sea and in the territory of Russia (Economic Zone of Astrakhan Province) and is connected to the Caspian Sea through the Volga River. Due to its location, Solyanka Port can play a valuable role in connecting Russia to India and other countries through Iran (strengthening the North-South Corridor) and connecting Iran to the Black Sea through Russia. Also the potentials of this port include a 750-meter wharf, the ability to unload and load 5 ships at the same time, the capacity of half a million tons of unloading and loading throughout the year, a railway line 4,000 meters long including six lines and wagons for carrying grain, warehouses and various silos. According to statistics, the goods imported from Russia to Iran through this port include grain, wood, oil and oilseeds, corn, red meat, equipment and services (in general, it can be said that the most important equipment in this port is suitable for exporting grain and wood) and the goods exported from Iran to Russia consist of fruits and dried fruits, vegetables, cement, processed food products, cloth and ceramics. With all this taken into account, the statistics show that the capacities and infrastructure of this port are currently being used more for importing products from Russia to Iran than exporting Iranian products to Russia, secondly, the share of this port compared to other export sources of Iranian products to Russia is less for now. Of course, the recent development of infrastructure by the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines is promising in helping the development of Iran's exports to Russia. Some questions are raised despite all these hopes, considering that the first transit cargo, two containers containing wood laminates, was exported from Russia to India (via Iran) as a trial.

Is Iran using this port in a strategic way to deepen trade relations with countries like Russia and India? How much can wood, as Russia's first export product to India through Iran, help to deepen relations? What is the best use of this

port in relation to Iran's needs and potentials? Does Iran have a plan to use this port to reach the Black Sea countries?

The answers to these questions can help to have a better understanding of the optimal use of this port. In response to these questions, it should be said that the trade relations between Russia and India have changed recently. India's exports to Russia have decreased but its oil imports from Russia have increased.

First of all, knowing that Russian oil exports to India are carried out from Vladivostok port and Iran is not involved in this matter, we can admit that exporting wood (despite the intrinsic value of wood) from Russia to India through Iran is not strategic. Second, by examining the statistics of wood exports and imports between India and Russia, it is easy to conclude that the transit of wood products from Russia to India cannot lead to significant incomes for Iran.

Third, countries invest in the ports of other countries with the aim of expanding regional value chains, while it seems that there is no plan available at the macro level (government) to expand the value chain through this port and Iran's connection to it, is just followed through transit look. Therefore, the income of Solyanka Port is limited to transit income. Although it generates revenue for the country, at least now, does not have much effect in achieving strategic goals in relations with Russia.

Also Iran should not look at this port only from the point of view of connecting Russia to India; therefore, Iran must first design an initiative regarding Russia; an initiative that maximizes Iran's interests and can create strategic depth by looking at creating added value and secondly targets more countries because it is not easy to predict the relations between Russia and India in the near future due to the recent geopolitical divisions (Ukraine war) . In addition, the priority in the initiative is probably not the imports of wood and the exports of vegetables, cement and ceramics, but diversity needs to be created and the import and export of those products building mutual interrelations and equal value should be considered.

In this regard, it is possible to increase the share of grain imports and, on the other hand, to raise the export of industrial goods in the export and import basket. The import of grains can pave the way for Iran to be a hub of grains (It can increase the basis of grain imports and improve food security in the country) and the export of industrial goods, not only can solve the problems of economies of scale in industries related to industrial goods but also it can create sustainable trade with Russia and create national and regional value chains.

Moreover, sustainable employment will be created through this plan. Using its geographical advantage, Iran can solve the food crisis of other countries caused by the war in Ukraine.

Therefore, it can be said that with a targeted scheme the potentials of Solyanka Port can be used in a better way to bring multilateral benefits to the country on a larger scale.



Due to its location, Solyanka Port can play a valuable role in connecting Russia to India and other countries through Iran (strengthening the North-South Corridor) and connecting Iran to the Black Sea through Russia



Containerization of transporting system at the Caspian Sea, a necessity for trading with Russia

The Corridor tends to pivot round container



The Caspian Sea is one of the main trade links between Iran and Russia in such a way that is considered a main part of the North-South corridor.

It's just for this reason that the Islamic Republic of Iran has a special view on the maritime transport issue at this sea.

The Caspian Sea Shipping company which is actually regarded as a main arm of the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group in the Caspian region, is presently increasing its own fleet capacity as the largest commercial fleet in the region so that it can provide the increasing needs required by the Russia for the passage of its goods through the mentioned corridor.

Meanwhile, the containerization of maritime transport in the Caspian region is presently carried out at a faster pace, as the fleet has managed to develop rapidly during the last three years as well.

Of course, displacement of the goods previously used to be implemented basically in bulk at the Caspian Sea. However, it seems now that transportation of the goods also is expected to be carried out in containerized manner at the sea as well, thanks to the great efforts as well as the precise planning's of the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group. The Group's container transportation company which specializes in the field has ever played a pivotal role in this respect, and is endeavoring to convert the popular method of transporting at the Caspian Sea towards utilizing Containerized System through continuous cooperation and synergy with CaspianSea Shipping company,

a matter which is also vital for development of activities in the North-South corridor. Based on this, we have arranged an interview with the head of Transit Dept. of the company and you'll read the respective report here below;

One of the most significant approaches of the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group during at least three years ago has been containerizing the transportation of goods at Caspian Sea. What contribution has been given to the process by the container transportation company, as the specialized sector of the Group involved in container transportation?

Some events occurred in the field of transportation, and the container sector in particular during the recent two years which coincided with the crisis in Ukraine.

It made the view of the transit route from inside of Iran as a direct main route to the North-South corridor to be greatly focused upon.

Of course, the background of this particular heed dates back to several years ago when India, Iran and Russia collectively signed a memorandum of understanding on the transportation of goods through Chabahar Port and the route inside Iran to CIS countries as well as Afghanistan as target markets for India. However, the issue of Ukraine gave more prominence to the role of Iran.

On the other hand, the 13th government which has a particular outlook towards the issues of the corridor, investment, acquisition of income, as well as having a great empha-

sis on the oil exports has taken office, and also considering the high capabilities and capacities of the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group in the container transportation sector, the important task of promoting the North-South corridor was entrusted to this Shipping Group. Among such capabilities which are under the management and superintendence of the Container Transportation company, as a specialized container transportation company of the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group, we can refer to the necessary infrastructure and facilities existing in the southern Open Seas (Persian Gulf and Oman Sea) being utilized in various ports, including small and large vessels with the capacities of up to 14000 TEU containers, tens of thousands of active containers as well as numerous agencies in domestic and foreign ports. Here, the Caspian Sea was actually the missing link, because most of the cargoes used to be moved in bulk and there was no necessity to move containers, and consequently the issue of container transportation was slightly heeded, but due to the present requirements in transportation of cargoes through the North-South corridor, a single company under the title of " Transit Department " has recently been established in order to superintend over the container transit process from the southern to northern ports, besides the ongoing situation at the Russian market, as well as the surroundings of CIS regions.

Therefore, the process of developing container transportation at the Caspian Sea has turned completely, and taken a new form.

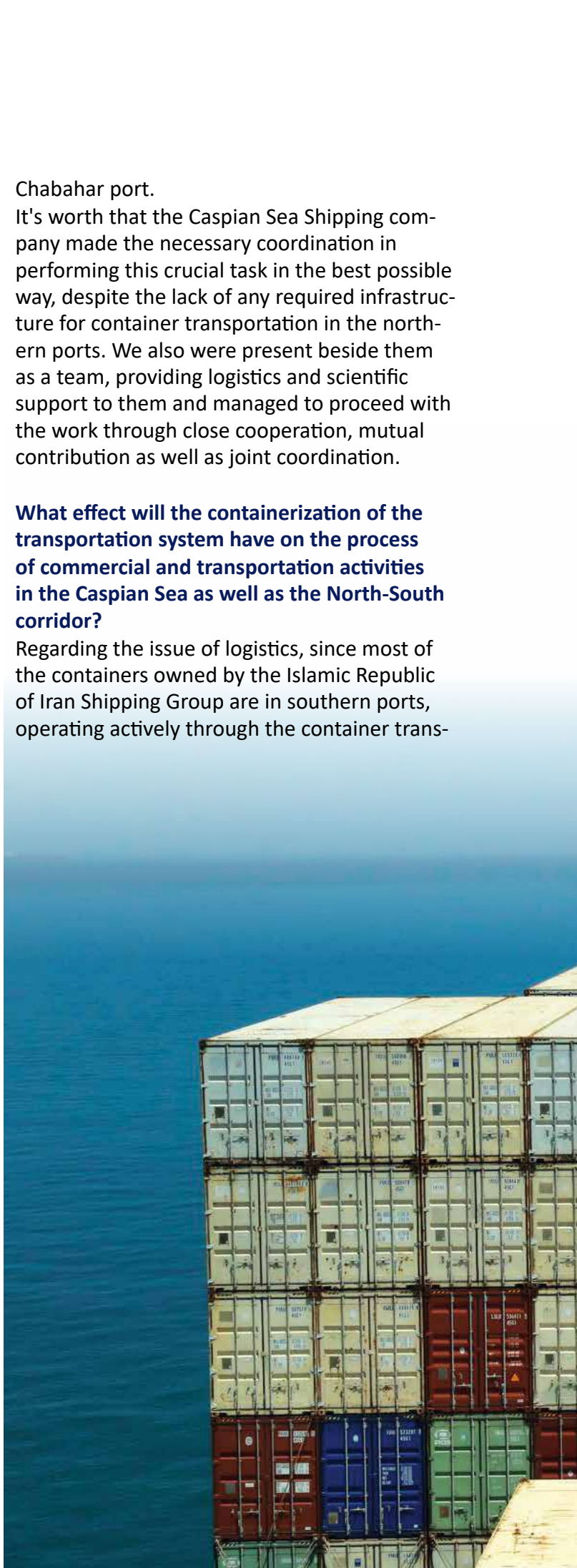
The Transit Department of the Group has a specialized outlook towards performing the operation works. At present, The Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group, as a main arm of the maritime industry provides extremely valuable services from origins across the world, from which the Container Shipping company can move vessels to the destination of northern ports in the country, particularly the mentioning port of Anzali, through Bandar Abbas and

Chabahar port.

It's worth that the Caspian Sea Shipping company made the necessary coordination in performing this crucial task in the best possible way, despite the lack of any required infrastructure for container transportation in the northern ports. We also were present beside them as a team, providing logistics and scientific support to them and managed to proceed with the work through close cooperation, mutual contribution as well as joint coordination.

What effect will the containerization of the transportation system have on the process of commercial and transportation activities in the Caspian Sea as well as the North-South corridor?

Regarding the issue of logistics, since most of the containers owned by the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group are in southern ports, operating actively through the container trans-



port system, it was decided, as per the assignments having been entrusted to the company by the senior management of the Group, that a major part of container transportation infrastructure system to be transferred to the Caspian Sea Shipping company assisted by close cooperation of Hoopad Darya company. Fortunately, the Caspian Sea Shipping company is also well aware of the great significance of the issue and is performing its duties in an optimal manner. Presently, a council in Anzali port which involves in the clearance of container goods is actively endeavoring in the field. It should be mentioned that the issue concerning container is different from that of, bulk transportation as well as General cargo shipping to some extent, and relies mostly on its own infrastructure as well as specialized software and we are making efforts in this field. For this purpose, the container transportation company has taken some measures in the

field of training staff working in the Caspian Sea Shipping company, particularly its representatives in Middle Asia and Russia. These measures include; The software required by the container sector, especially in the offices of Solyanka and Aktau ports which have been implemented accordingly in order to inform, accelerate and facilitate the clearance and delivery of containers based on the principles approved by the company, and subsequently activated to be utilized by the personnel and staff stationed at the offices at Caspian Sea region.

Presently all working forces at Solyanka port, which is the main port handled by the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group, located in the northern part of the country on the verge of Russia, have already undergone the necessary training on transportation. However, the necessary arrangements for containerizing the northern ports and also required coordina-



tion have been made by the Ports & Maritime organization regarding the clearance of goods for foreign transit.

The Caspian Sea Shipping company has the largest fleet of vessels in the Caspian region which carries out huge quantities of cargo transportation at a very high percentage.

What is the most important obstacle in the way of increasing the volume of transit in the North-South corridor? What measures have been taken by the Group to remove these obstacles and hindrances?

The Caspian Sea Shipping company is the largest commercial shipping fleet in the Caspian region and fortunately is seeking to increase capacity, while enjoying suitable conditions. But, the lack of any appropriate port infrastructure which can be mostly observed on the Russian side leads to halts and long delays of the vessels in the process of transporting containers. As you are well aware, most of the Russian ports are located on the banks of the Volga river and on that side, we practically don't have any port to be on the brim of Caspian Sea like our own ports. Because of this, most Russian ports have problem in terms of depth and the Russian side needs to do dredging in order to increase the watershed of Volga and remove this problem completely.

Also, there is a six-month freeze-up during the winter season at Volga. Solving such problems requires special facilities, and this would necessitate making the necessary arrangements and investments in advance.

In the meantime, due to a crisis in Ukraine and the prominence having been given to the issue of North-South corridor, the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group was obliged to provide a basis for the prosperity of this corridor.

Therefore, it was decided that a \$ 10- million investment to be made for equipping and developing Solyanka as the hub port of Volga region as well as Astrakhan province of Russia during which the number of berths and posts for berthing of container, bulk transportation,

oil-carrying as well as oil tanker vessels would increase.

Has Door-to-Door transportation means been realized in the North-South corridor in such a manner during the previous year?

I should refer to participation of the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group among the other prominent countries of the world at Trans-Rasha (International Exhibition of Transportation and Logistics Services, Equipment and Warehousing Technologies) of Russia.

The introduction of IRISL brand to the countries participating in the exhibition, as a dynamic Group involved in multi-modal, door-to-door, container, bulk as well as combined transportations, was one of the most significant achievements of this maritime exhibition.

In addition to above mentioned, consultations were conducted through the embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Russia, which resulted in mutual understanding with Russian officials as to the container shipping, and discussing the issue of the corridor door-to-door multi-modal transportation, in particular.

In other international markets, the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group has no problem with multi-modal shipping, due to having local representatives and also required facilities.

Since our agency in Russia is located at Solyanka port region, most of the requests for freight within Russia especially those for Moscow and St. Petersburg are led and directed through this Agency Office.

Fortunately, following the wind-up of Tans Russia exhibition, we managed to sign a memorandum of understanding with the Russian Railways (RZD) which is the largest forwarding company in Russia and this indicates an increase in our abilities to profit from the Russian railway facilities.

Moreover, Russia enjoys one of the most extensive railway networks in the world, having access to the whole of the country.

So, if we are capable enough to augment our interactions with Russia in the field of railways,

we can hopefully expect to absorb the maximum load and increase the speed of goods transportation.

Fortunately, we are not presently facing any problem regarding the running costs of transportation, because we enjoy all the facilities including vessels and containers in Logistics sector. Therefore, we can enter into competition with other countries, but the challenge existing here is the matter of providing services from the origin and to the destination of Russia, but due to the recent events, it is expected that we will face more volume of cargo in the North-South corridor, because most of our clients, particularly those who ship their own cargoes to Russia from the Southeast Asia and Far Asia require more services. For this reason, the container depot in the city is to be put at the disposal of the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group through an agreement with the Russian side, and this would provide a significant help to the process of shipping, especially in Door-to-Door means.

What is the status of transit of goods through the mentioned corridor now and what quantity of goods are transported in containers?

We have transferred the data to the logistics service project management so that more facilities and discounts can be provided, and more cargo would be absorbed.

Generally, it can be mentioned that the share of multi-modal transport in the form of Door-to-Door has been 2585 TEU containers.

During the 5-year plan suggested by the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group, We would be tasked to move 170000 TEU containers through the North-South corridor until the year 1405 and achieving this aim will necessitate strengthening the sectors involved in transit, including rail and road, beside strengthening the ports in the north and south regions.

Considering the trend, we are proceeding with and the profitable investments having already been made, we can expect the shipping statistics to improve day by day. On the other hand,



The issue concerning container is different from that of, bulk transportation as well as General cargo shipping to some extent, and relies mostly on its own infrastructure as well as specialized software and we are making efforts in this field

the company has a particular outlook towards the scope of transit of goods as well as transportation of goods to Russia and has incessantly announced in its plans that it would also include transportation of foreign containers among the list of new goals having been put on the agenda of this company. In the meantime, the combined shipping company of the Group has been present actively as one of the determining and key companies through the Corridor, since the Group practically commenced shipping activities.

We were required to have a special arrangement and stowing in order to transport cargo from south to the north of the country and the combined shipping company stepped in due to its strong capacities as well as long experiences in the field.

However, with regard to the pathology and the investigations made during the past year, it became clear to us that the majority of our delays were mainly pertaining to the road sector. To achieve this purpose, the senior management of the Shipping Group decided that a company involved in the field of road transportation which would be under absolute ownership of the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group should be established. In such a manner, the combined shipping company would naturally be focusing on the rail transport sector specifically, and the new specialized company as the operating arm, would activate the road transportation sector. Having implemented the plan, we can expect that the land transportation through the North-South corridor would be improved further and become more refurbished and while increasing the speed of moving costs, it would help the shipping costs to become more competitive as well.

At the same time, according to the statistics released by the Russian government, the transit capacity on the route of the North-South corridor, through Iran is about 9 to 10 million Tons per year.

Of course, the country's current transit transportation capacity is estimated to be slightly

more than 4 million Tons that indicates the need for huge investments to be made in the rail & road sectors.

The \$ 80 million investment by India at Chabahar port is one of the important links in the transit development of the country which seems to be resumed once again following the halt which had been caused in it as a result of the sanctions imposed.

Chabahar port is so significant in terms of geopolitical matters, both for Iran and the country's business partners. Also, it is the only port which has direct access to the Open Sea outside the Persian Gulf region.

If Chabahar port reaches the position it should, certainly not only the issue of import and export from India to Russia and vice versa will be facilitated, but also it will greatly reduce the transit time and cost of transportation.

Therefore, the Container Shipping company has announced its readiness to develop activities at this port with the main purpose of reviving the process of India's investment at Chabahar port. Considering the special view India has towards



Chabahar port and on the other hand, The Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group's readiness in order to equip and expand the port services and facilities provided by Chabahar port, it can be expected that the traffic pressure on Bandar Abbas will be decreased and the speed of transporting cargo will increase at the same time.

Where did the issue of container production inside the country come to?

Why cost of producing container is higher in Iran as compared to other parts of the world?

During the outbreak of Corona, the need for container production started to rise increasingly and was greatly focused, but unfortunately due to the sanctions imposed against the country and the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping we had encountered restrictions on the purchase and supply of container components.

While being so, one of the private companies announced to be geared up to produce a hundred containers a month based on modern standards, but unfortunately this volume of production would not suffice domestic



However, the necessary arrangements for containerizing the northern ports and also required coordination have been made by the Ports & Maritime organization regarding the clearance of goods for foreign transit





demands.

Besides, the cost of transporting containers until they are delivered at the port will be very high due to the long distance of production center from the southern ports.

The most rational decision-making and planning would be to produce containers in the vicinity of the ports.

In this regard; transfer of container - manufacturing industries to the Free Regions in south of the country would be greatly effective.

The price of containers having been domestically produced can be brought to a competitive level equal with the foreign models if the facilities of the Free Zones are benefitted and used. The targeting of the Shipping Group in the field of purchasing containers includes two categories of short-term and long-term needs. Sometimes, we need a certain number of containers

with respect to the events that may occur in the market, when referring to the short-term needs. Here, the best and most economical measure is to rent non-proprietary containers which are not owned.

The long-term needs also will be resolved by purchasing all kinds of containers. The Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group has always viewed on domestic capabilities, by which the least currency withdrawal in the country would occur.

However, it would be necessary to provide the transporting system in the country through purchasing containers, until the domestic industries are empowered in this regard.

We have been witnessing a decrease in freight rates during the year 2023, as compared to the previous year. How much has this reduc-

tion been? What effects will this reduction leave on the process of the fleet's activities?

According to the global daily and regularly published statistics, to which most of the world's container transport companies refer, the freight rate of a 40-ft container as a reference during the current year, has decreased by 79% as compared to the previous year. But it is expected that this downward trend, will come to a halt, which will eventually lead to a ten percent profit margin for the transportation industry.

Based on the above-mentioned statistics, the freight is currently at the lowest possible rate. That's why many of the major shipping companies have removed part of their containers from the circular trend in the market.

Our company also has contrived solutions in order to compensate for the sharp decline in the rates. In this regard, the stability of container operation during the previous year, increasing of container operation at the threshold of stepping into the new markets particularly, the Central America and Venezuela markets in the form of three monthly regular services, in addition to launching of a new line in North Africa, centered mostly on Libya, as well as establishing an agency office permanently for attracting cargo in East Africa, are enumerated as the most important plans and goals of the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group during the current year.

The Russian market has emerged as a golden opportunity for us, so if we can consider this issue collectively and take timely measures in order to expand and develop the required railway, road and other infrastructures, we will be able to strengthen our position firmly in the region and achieve our target plan of 150 to 160 thousand TEU per year and eventually grab up a major share of the economy interactions in the region.



Due to a crisis in Ukraine and the prominence having been given to the issue of North-South corridor, the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group was obliged to provide a basis for the prosperity of this corridor

Iran's ambassador to Russia takes part in an interview by Payam Darya

The development of Solyanka port was fulfilled thanks to 13th Government's tact

The relationship between Iran and Russia has gone through ups and downs in recent years, though, these mutual relationships might have been on friendly terms to some extent, as well. But pursuant to break-out of a crisis in Ukraine, these relations are now taking steps into a new stage of experience which has been unprecedented in the political- economic relations between the two countries, a certain stage or level of diplomatic relations that is referred to as "Strategic Relations".

Port of Solyanka is among the symbols of strategic relations between Iran and Russia and 53% of its shares are owned by the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group. The Group has renovated and made drastic changes at Solyanka port through investing more than \$10 million, in such a way that its performance during the previous year has been unprecedented since it was established, due to increase in operational capacity.

Therefore, we decided to have a formal interview in this respect with Kazem Jalali, the current ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the Republic of Russia Federation who's been setting background for the strengthening and



transforming of mutual relations since taking over the responsibility and here below you will read the outcome of this head to head;

Considering that Iran-Russia relations have entered a new phase, how do you evaluate the manner in which Russian businessmen have favored mutual business interactions with Iran through the North-South corridor?

The business relations between Iran and Russia are increasingly expanding and fortunately, we've been witnessing an excellent development in the commercial transactions between the two countries in recent years.

For example, in 2019, the total trade between Iran and Russia amounted to one billion and 650 million Dollars, but this figure as the statistics indicate, has nudged the amount of 5 billion Dollars in the year 2022.

Of course, the actual figure should definitely be higher, since some of the Iranian goods are imported to Russia from other places such as Kazakhstan. However, considering that the crisis in Ukraine has given rise to sudden disconnection of commercial relations between Russia and the West, it goes without saying that the North-South corridor as well as Iran can naturally play an effectual role in the mutual commercial transactions of this country.

The Russians admit that they have managed to export 300 million tons of goods to Europe and other parts of the world from port of St. Petersburg and other Russian ports having access to the sea annually, and presently they are planning to pass this large volume of goods through Turkey and Iran as well.

They presume to be able to pass at least 50 million Tons of goods through Iran, but with regard to the studies they have recently conducted, it seems that our country would have only the capacity to pass 7 to 8 million Tons of transit goods at least in such a short term. Therefore, we have a long way to go before we can pass this volume of goods in a year.

However, security and development are more closely linked today than ever before. The more developed a country is, more larger numbers

of countries will become reliant on it and consequently, its security factor will increase as the same.

If we can also utilize the North-South corridor to its full capacity, we have actually managed to create the second Suez Canal in the world.

Having a slight view over all sea routes such as this one today, we find that they all end up in Iran. Therefore, we are in a very sensitive and fateful era at the moment and should struggle and move about dynamically each day.

Here, Russia is not the only topic discussed, and despite the current crisis in Ukraine, our country can still turn into a hub for the exports and imports of Russia, but basically, the route of North-South corridor is a transit route for transferring goods from Europe to East Asia region and vice versa.

So, we firmly believe that we should foresee for a longer period of time and no matter how much we invest in the corridor project, it wouldn't be sufficient.

Regarding the key role The Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group has been playing, I extend my high appreciation to the Shipping Group, for my part, for the constructive role it has ever had in the field of the North-South corridor affairs.

We have three sections in the corridor; East, middle and west. The middle corridor crosses the Caspian Sea and this part has a huge advantage for us, because we can have access to Russia through the Caspian Sea without an intermediary.

Therefore, it would be a great job indeed, as much as we can strengthen our naval fleet and sea ports in Caspian Sea beside developing the railway connections to the northern ports. Of course, Russia's Maritime and Port sector also requires to be strengthened.

As you know, Russia has only one Caspian port called Makhachkala and its other ports in this region are on the Volga River. So, this Russian port also needs to be strengthened. Of course, presently, the development plan is being implemented at this port. On the other hand, Volga requires to be dredged as well, so that the

access to the ports surrounding this river would become easier.

It is expected that the dredging operation will be completed during the summer of this year.

How strategic do you deem the purchase of the Russian port of Solyanka by the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group?

The purchase of 53% shares of Solyanka Port from Russia was a great significant measure. In addition, this port is one of the dynamic ports in the north of the Caspian region and can be really effective in terms of import and export of goods.

First of all, of course, we should express our great appreciation to the respectful Russian president for solving the legal issue of the purchase of Solyanka port by the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group.

He was the one who solved the problem by his due considerations and provided a basis for the investment of the Shipping Group at this port. Presently, due to the serious efforts of the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group, we have been able to fulfill our obligations in Solyanka port, in such a way that the reports presented to us indicate effective steps have fortunately been taken by this port with the purpose of developing mutual business relations between Iran and Russia. Meanwhile, the Development plan will soon be launched with unsparing support of the Duma of Astrakhan province.

The recent reports imply that the port of Solyanka is in the process of more development and present conditions of this port are quite different from what we had seen in our previous visits.

Solyanka port is extremely active at the present due to the effective role the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group has played in developing its trading relations with Russia as well as carrying export cargoes to this country, and presently the necessary infrastructure for more effectual role by the Group in the upcoming commercial relations between the two countries is being provided as well.



If we can also utilize the North-South corridor to its full capacity, we have actually managed to create the second Suez Canal in the world

All the ports in the Caspian region and in addition, Solyanka play a significant role in making North-South corridor operational, and this is while the promising growth and development as well as increase in transfer of goods at Solyanka port also confirms serious role-playing being implemented at this strategic corridor.

What was the most impressive to you in your recent visit to Solyanka port?

The most impressive issue which sounded to be of great significance was the 35% growth in transfer of goods in 2022 as compared to the year 2021, as well as the growth in transfer of goods during the previous six months of the current year as compared to the corresponding period at this port during the previous year. The statistics show that there's a rapid and considerable progress and development in the field.

Meanwhile, during our meeting with Astrakhan port officials, the head of Duma of Astrakhan formally announced that considering good indicators presented by the authorities of Solyanka port as well as the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group, they would firmly protect the development and expansion of Solyanka port boundaries.

How serious is Russia in fulfilling the Rasht-Astara railway project? When and with what quality their practical actions in this field will commence?

As you know, the North-South Corridor Agreement was signed about 20 years ago and in spite of many close interactions the countries have had during the period, I dare to say that the countries on this route have never been so serious to complete and finalize this international crossing as they are these days. Of course, the Russian government has been seriously focusing on this issue for the past two years and eventually, the agreement to build a 162 km railway on the route of Rasht-Astara, financed by the loan of Russian government

was formally convened in the presence of the honorable presidents of the two countries and subsequently signed by the respective Transport Ministers in May of the current year in Tehran. The two countries have started their efforts through interacting by their own negotiating delegations in order to launch the implementing operation for constructing this route which is expected to kick off from the beginning of the next Christian year.

The North-South corridor needs some kind of legal coordination and facilities which are mainly related to customs affairs. How much has this coordination between the Iranian and Russian governments been already fulfilled and what other steps should be taken in order to strengthen that?

Customs issues are one of the main challenges in the development of business relations, not only concerning rail routes, but also road and sea routes as well.

Over the past few years, the two countries made great efforts to take effective and serious steps through exchanging of mutual customs delegations, aimed at removing customs hindrances.

Considering the great significance of this issue, we took even a longer stride, turned it from a bilateral cooperation, into a trilateral cooperation among Iran, Russia and Azerbaijan and followed it up in a tripartite manner, because Republic of Azerbaijan as an intermediary state, has a major role in two railway and road areas between these two countries. Therefore, we witnessed a meeting being held attended by the top heads of customs of three countries in Tehran last year during which the memorandum of understanding was signed in a bid to facilitate customs services, and these interactions will even increase when the transport cooperations, particularly in the railway sector intensify.

What measures have the delegation of the



Islamic Republic of Iran in Russia taken in order to facilitate the presence of Iranian businessmen and producers? What is the embassy's plan to extend their presence during the current year?

Beside the task of surveillance and also making efforts for the comprehensive development of the relations between the two countries , the embassies of the Islamic Republic of Iran abroad endeavor to provide for the significant presence of businessmen and economic activists in the country by taking some due measures and the Iranian embassy in Russia is not an exceptional, and exempt from this normal practice and in addition to holding the Iranian pavilion at the international exhibitions in Russia, strives hard in order to provide market knowledge for the traders in various fields

through the exchange of trading delegations, both nationwide and at the provincial levels. Holding consultations with the governmental organizations and bodies with the purpose of facilitating the presence of traders in the Russian markets is also one of the main tasks of the embassy, which emphatically was included in the agenda of the embassy during the recent years.

Measures in monetary, financial, banking, customs, logistics and transit areas, and such like are usually evaluated towards this purpose.

One of the obstacles in the way of the development of trade between the two countries is lack of dredging at Volga river? What plan is to be implemented in this regard? Will the Russian party accept to dredge this river?



One of the main obstacles hindering in the field of transit and maritime transport is lack of development of Russian ports, beside lack of dredging the Volga river.

As you know, the port of Makhachkala in the Republic of Dagestan is the only Caspian port in Russia which doesn't have enough capability of carrying the goods due to existing problems. Of course, the Russian government is struggling

hard to develop this port in the shortest possible time by investing in it, based on the capacities appropriate for the relations between the two countries.

The rest of the ports in Russia are on the route of rivers. For instance, the port of Astrakhan is situated on the route of a river, and due to the lack of dredging of the Volga river, there will not be possibility of passage and moor-

ing for vessels with the capacity of more than 4000 Tons, and so the Russian government announced that they will commence dredging operation at Volga by the end of this year, so that we would be witnessing sailing of vessels with higher capacities on this route.

Russia has recently put the strengthening of its ports at Caspian Sea on the agenda, what plans the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Russia has considered, particularly in order to help the investment made by the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group at Solyanka port be maintained intact and that the port would be allowed to stay included in the strategy procedures, aimed at strengthening Caspian ports of Russia?


Fortunately, thanks to the wisdom of the 13th government regarding significance and major role of the Caspian Sea in the development of relations with Russia, revolutionary movements with the purpose of making investments have started at Solyanka port which are proceeding rapidly towards the goals having already been determined.

The Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Russia has been incessantly in contact with the officials of the Ports & Maritime Organization as well as the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group from the first days of decision-making regarding activation of this Iranian port in Astrakhan region and really has struggled to resolve the legal challenges having arisen, through consulting at the highest level, and even formally negotiating with the Russian president, Mr. Putin himself, and fortunately all these measures finally worked out, and the legal and judicial problems were removed completely. Eventually, considering that this port is of great significance, it goes without saying that the embassy of Iran to Russia will continue cooperating with the port authorities in order to achieve the pre-determined goals directed towards developing Solyanka port.



The most impressive issue which sounded to be of great significance was the 35% growth in transfer of goods in 2022 as compared to the year 2021

An Iranian port in Russia **Solyanka sets a new record this year**



Solyanka is a Russian port, situated at northwest of the Caspian Sea, beside the other ports in the Astrakhan province at the mouth of the Volga river. The Islamic Republic of Iran currently holds the ownership of this port and having invested \$10 million dollars in it, is renovating that as well as increasing its throughput capacity.

At the moment, while Russia is involved in a conflict with Ukraine and has practically lost the import and export markets in the western part due to the embargo having been imposed by the Europe, is mostly playing a strategic role as one of the connecting links in the North-South corridor region and is expected to turn into one of the most significant docklands in this corridor.

Considering that this port has already gone through great developments due to the investments having been made in it by the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping



Group, its performance has been pushed up by 35% only during the previous year. With regard to the fact that the traffic from the North-South corridor has intensified and the crisis in Ukraine has also become deeper in the current year, it seems Russia's tendency to pass its goods through the corridor would naturally grow, as a result of which the performance of Solyanka port will improve as well. Therefore, we have arranged an interview with Solyanka port's management, asking questions about the latest developments of this strategic port:

Why did the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group make a decision to own a sea port in the North of the Caspian Sea? What were the strategic goals? What was the perspective of making a \$10 m investment for the purpose?

In the year 2020, The Caspian Sea Shipping Co, affiliated with the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group purchased 53% of Astrakhan Export company's shares from the owner of Solyanka port, aimed at providing a permit for the vessels of Caspian Sea Shipping Company to enter the Astrakhan ports in Russia.

The foreign vessels were not allowed to enter the Russian ports at the time, unless they had already been approved by a Russian port. So, the Caspian Sea Shipping's vessels were sometimes delayed for months so as to get permission for entry into the Russian ports in the Caspian region, but if they had a Russian port to berth at, moving the vessels into the ports and out of them would take at the shortest possible time.

Actually, the port's shareholder would confirm the vessels for entry into the ports.

But even so, things didn't go smoothly at the time and the Russian Antimonopoly organization invalidated the purchase contract.

Following a formal request for an appeal, the issue of investing and renovating the port was raised and it was determined that a figure equivalent to 10 million dollars should be invested at Salyanka port during a period of six years.

Upon renewal of the sanctions on the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group the investment was held over.

When the Russian government stepped in, negotiations commenced and it was decided that the Iranian side should determine the issue of investment at Solyanka port by 2022 or repudiate the strategic contract of the port altogether.

The court's verdict and the date of investing at Solyanka port by the Caspian Sea coincided with the launch of the North-South corridor, and from this time onwards, thanks to an opportunity that presented itself, revitalizing of Solyanka port started by the superintendence and management of a specialized team from the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group, aimed at providing the maximum of national benefits and then proceeded rapidly.

Having been developed almost 75%, the project is currently in good condition, while all concerning past legal issues have automatically and completely been resolved and it goes without saying that the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group holds the absolute ownership of this port.

The crisis in Ukraine and the \$10-million investment by the Group have turned Solyanka port into a strategic base on the route of the North-South corridor and on the other hand, provided the possibility of having a safe way to supply the production inputs as well as basic goods in case a serious problem occurs in the southern ports of the country. At the same time, the historical relations between Iran and Russia are expanding, while the parties have been enjoying a good growth and development in the field of mutual commercial exchanges in recent years.

Solyanka port has the most activity and cargo traffic among the 13 ports located in the Economic zone of Astrakhan of Russia, and is actually considered a strategic pole of maritime trade between this country and Iran.

In which sectors has the investment been spent? And what are the circumstances of this port at the moment, with regard to these expenses having been made? Another point to be questioned is; what special characteristics of Solyanka port



have prompted the authorities to decide to have the commercial communication line between Iran and Russia completed with it?

The expansion of the customs area for increasing the capacity of imported goods to Russia and the possibility of simultaneous berthing of several vessels carrying the country's export cargoes, are among various sectors having been developed. Also, the purchase and commissioning of a new 32-ton crane for loading and unloading the vessels carrying heavy containers, building of a suitable cold corridor for refrigerated containers, as well as the provision of sockets and power supply for keeping these containers at the port have been finalized.

Besides, the repairs of the docks, removing the seizure of two docks, repairs of the railway lines at the port, purchase of a 7100 ton vessel, technical and logistics equipping the port as well as purchase of several trucks, trailers and tractors, forklifts, loaders, locomotives, and machine cranes are among the other measures having been taken, directed at developing this port



further.

Consequently, we are now witnessing a 35% increase in the volumes of the port operation as compared to the previous year.

The legal problems and cases of the port were also resolved, in addition to the previously mentioned issues. Solyanka, having been extended in to an area of fifteen thousand hectares and also enjoying five berths is considered the biggest port in Astrakhan region.

Actually, there are thirteen ports in Astrakhan region, each having two or three wharves with an area less than Solyanka by far.

The new measure, having recently been taken and will be finalized soon is the increase of interland by three hectares. Meanwhile, planning for the increase of three more hectares has already been made.

The port has seen an increase of 35% in volumes of the operation due to the proper developments having been made in the fields of hardware and management. However, increasing the capacity of a port necessitates developing

of hinterland. So, we are developing this sector through buying and renting land.

It is expected that the total area of the port will nudge twenty-one hectares by the end of the current year, meaning that the capacity of hinterland will increase up to 40%.

Some questions:

How is this port supposed to play a role in Iran's commercial interaction with Russia? How is the situation of domestic markets in Russia? Do they have proper access to consumption, trade and industry centers inside Russia? Regarding that Russia has distinctly realized the slump in volumes and capacities of the operation in the Caspian Sea and North-South corridor due to the limitation of communicating lines in the West, how would communicating with Russian authorities concerning the issue of Solyanka port be possible?

How and at what level the Russians would cooperate with us at Solyanka port? How will our own cooperation proceed with Russian merchants and businessmen?

Solyanka port has the necessary conditions for developing trade relations between Russia and some countries abroad in terms of hardware capability.

This port also has an appropriate access into Russian territory with the present six railway lines in the country, in such a way that the railway lines inside the port itself extend to 4500 meters. This is while the road connection system of the port provides suitable facilities. Since Solyanka is situated at the mouth of Volga, it flows into the Volga Dan Canal, Dan River, and then the Black Sea, Mediterranean and finally, the Open Sea.

Astrakhan airport is also within striking distance of this port, although no freighter takes off from this airport at present. Generally, it can be mentioned that Solyanka port is connected with the Whole of Russia by road, rail and land and these hinterland facilities can be really beneficial in the field of moving, loading and discharging of container that is indeed fundamental basis of transferring goods through the North-South corridor. It should be mentioned that we are on good

terms with the Russian officials as well as businessmen, as a joint Russian-Iranian work team at this port.

Actually, an excellent cooperation has been generated between us and Russia. Solyanka port, apart from any exaggeration, is one of the best ports in Astrakhan region which is always visited by the Russian governmental officials.

How is the connection between Solyanka port and the Caspian Sea Shipping company? Do the Russian shipping lines' vessels call at this port as well?

According to the official statistics announced during the year 2022, the total cargo turnover of the Russian ports in the Caspian Sea has come to six million Tons, of which about 11 percent has been allocated as the share of Solyanka port.

This indicates that Solyanka port has managed to carry out most of the Russian port operation in the Caspian region on its own.

It is noteworthy to be mentioned that the entire Russian operation in the Caspian Sea has seen a fourteen percent decrease in 2022, as compared to the year before that, while Solyanka port is the only port in Russia having experienced a 35 percent increase in performance during the period, contrary to the general trend.

Therefore, we can say decisively that Solyanka port managed to set a new record in its total performance at the time when all the other ports had undergone a serious decline, thanks to an appropriate management, beside the good investment by the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group. It should be mentioned here that the Caspian Sea Shipping Company has proved to be a good support for Solyanka port. Meanwhile, the Caspian Sea Shipping Company has the priority of mooring the vessels as well as carrying out the operation this port.

In other words, great efforts are incessantly being made so the vessels belonging to the company would have the least delay when calling at this port.

The Caspian Sea Shipping company also in return, would give the top priority to the loading & unloading operation at this port.

At the same time any interaction with Russia at Solyanka port would certainly be on a bilateral basis and this is while, the mutual cooperation was developed as the customs area began to expand at the end of previous year. Of course, we faced restrictions in the Caspian basin on the verge of Russia due to an increase in the volumes of the export cargoes during the previous year, which had slowed down the work process to some extent, but later on as the customs area began to develop, the possibility of docking and berthing of several vessels simultaneously at the port could be provided.

It should be reminded that, in addition to Caspian Sea Shipping company's vessels, the other Shipping lines including those of the other Private Sector as well as the Russian vessels use Solyanka port, too.

In fact, it is an international port with the approach of prioritizing services which are to be offered to the Caspian Sea Shipping company.

How do you evaluate the horizon of the port's performance in the current year? What plans do you consider for the development of the activities at Solyanka port during the year 2023? And what changes should we expect to observe in the coming year?

The plans having been targeted for Solyanka port in the next year would include establishing a shipping company with the purpose of contributing to the sea transportation, particularly transportation of the cargoes destined to be carried through the corridor, by developing this new shipping company.

Considering that the main exports of the Russia, the upcoming plans would be launching and modernizing a grain silo of the port, the first phase of which has been implemented and it is expected that the second and third phases will be implemented as well by the end of this year. Besides, the capacity of silo number two of the port is supposed to increase from the current seven thousand Tons to twenty thousand Tons. Regarding the storage of edible oil which is one of the main necessities of our -country and is considered as one of Russia's main exports, con-

struction of a terminal for producing vegetable oil, having a capacity of fifteen thousand Tons, through attracting investment from Russia, itself has been put on the agenda.

Another issue is creating a quasi-dry port in the vicinity of Solyanka in order to handle the cargo support operation, including delivery, warehousing, packaging as well as road transportation in the scope of container and, having purchased three hectares of land around the port this main issue is currently underway.

Upon adding of this new precinct, the volume of the activities inside the port will definitely decrease and at the same time, the capacity of the port will increase and this would eventually lead to the development of the port operation.



Solyanka port has the most activity and cargo traffic among the 13 ports located in the Economic zone of Astrakhan of Russia, and is actually considered a strategic pole of maritime trade between this country and Iran



The boom in the purchase of domestically manufactured containers

Beginning of the birth of a Logistic Group





The Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group has entered a new phase of its activities during the recent two years, and still continues to be promoted as a Logistic Group in the International Transport market of the country, in the Region, and across the world in the near future.

Having completed the Transport chain through buying new wagons and trying to develop the road Transportation sector, along with administering and managing the development plan of the North-south corridor that is prospering these days, all herald that the Shipping Group enjoying a history of more than half a century would be ranked in a higher position than as a mere common shipping group in its new period of activity.

While addressing some of the most important achievements of this group during the year 2022 and the strategic plans of this company during the current year, Alireza Mohebi, Vice President of the Fleet Development of Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group implied some of the important measures which have led to the establishment of the first logistics company in the Iranian shipping profile.

Starting our discussion, please mention what do you consider to have been the most important achievement of Deputyship of the Fleet Development of the Shipping Group during the year 2022?

Perhaps the most important achievement of this Deputyship over the past year has been adding 12 vessels to the shipping fleet in the frame of a Purchase & Order contract. The majority of this quantity consisting of about ten vessels, is related to the Caspian Sea area as well as Caspian Shipping Company, which includes the order for building five vessels.

One of these vessels will be ready for delivery at the end of the first half of the current year and will be added to the Fleet subsequently.

Four other units will be delivered to the Caspian Sea in the next two years.

Of course, three other vessels have also been delivered in the Caspian Sea and are being put into operation at the moment.

Besides, two Domestically made second-hand vessels have joined the fleet in the south of the country. In addition to these, the contract for the construction of two service vessels have been convened with Arvandan shipbuilding company which is a subsidiary of the Shipping Group.

It should be mentioned that vessels sailing in the Caspian Sea area are specific to this zone, and are a combination of General cargo, Container and Ro-Ro types.

Due to certain conditions in the south of the country, two Landing Craft vessels have been purchased in 2021 and their major repairs are about to be completed.

One of the problems facing the fleet and consequently, domestic merchants at the time of reimposition of cruel sanctions was the lack of containers, though the deficiency was solved gradually thanks to the various measures which were taken. Has anything been done to strengthen container transportation in the fleet of the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group during the previous year?

During last year, 30,000 TEU containers joined the fleet, of which 1,000 TEU are domestically produced. Therefore, we don't have any shortage of containers at the moment thankfully.

Meanwhile, we are determined to add even more vessels to the fleet and have a purchase and construction plan on the agenda.

We would be so eager that the local manufacturers would provide these containers for us and have established a good relationship with the industry sector as well, but currently the internal capacity does not meet the demands and besides, there are also limitations in this field, which we hope they will be gradually removed with the ongoing negotiations.

Shall we be witnessing strengthening of the fleet, either in the form of purchasing or ordering the construction of a vessel in the current year?

Regarding increase in the production capacity inside the country, we have scheduled to have about 6 more vessels under construction in the inner yard of Arvandan and the other shipyards in the south of the country this year.

These vessels will include landing craft, offshore ASD, crew type services (Crew Carriers), along with small container vessels and medium-sized bulk carriers. Arvandan, Sadra and isoico are among shipbuilding companies we are negotiating with beside the Maritime Industry Organization for building these vessels.

We predict to be capable enough to put the contract for the construction of eight domestically built vessels on the agenda during the early months of the current year. Also, it is intended that construction of other vessels having been proposed for the development of the fleet, for which enough capacity is not available inside the country, to be ordered to the manufacturers abroad.

Unfortunately, one of the obstacles that has always made hindrances in the way of manufacturing large vessels inside the country is the lack of construction facilities that should naturally be expected to be provided by banks.

This is while the foreign shipbuilders are supported by the banking system and appropriate and cheap facilities are easily provided to those ordering for the construction. Therefore, in addition to the vessels having been ordered to the domestic manufacturers, contracts for construction of 11 larger size vessels with foreign manufacturers are also on the agenda as the first priority.

How does the process of preparation and delivery of domestic and foreign vessels proceed?

Eight domestically built vessels are routinely ready to be delivered in a period of 18 to 30 months, with respect to the potentials of the country's yards as well as the size and dimensions of vessels having already been prepared at the yard. But as for the 11 vessels, which are larger in size and ordered by the foreign manufacturers, we have provided specifications for them and the initial surveys have been made, and we are actually about to step into the negotiation phase with foreign yards. It is expected that these vessels will also be delivered within the next two years. Of course, sanction affairs would definitely have unfavorable effects in such a situation.

What is the age of the shipping fleet of the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group? Will the old vessels be scrapped upon joining of new vessels or they will be managed for repair and re-use?

The fleet of the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group consists of 139 vessels, all of which don't have an equal average age, because the vessels have quite different geographical and activity areas. In the Caspian Sea area, a ship can last up to 50 years and continue operating in a healthy and safe manner. Also, there is no need for service vessels that only operate in the ports of the country to be necessarily young vessels.

In general, the vessels of the shipping group are used as long as they can be healthy and safe. However, the total age of the fleet's ocean vessels and offshore vessels will not exceed sixteen years, which is less than the average age of the world fleet, that is twenty years. For this reason, both situations, i.e. leaving the fleet or overhauling older vessels, are always on the agenda. Our approach in the shipping group is fleet efficiency. We also have younger vessels that may have lower productivity according to the market. On the other hand, we have older vessels that may be in high demand at some point in the market and thus have higher



we are determined to add even more vessels to the fleet and have purchase and construction plan on the agenda



productivity. Therefore, the efficiency of each of these vessels is one of the approaches to fleet development in the shipping group.

During the recent period of its activity, the Shipping Group has developed and implemented strategic plans, which have been revised in accordance with the time and market conditions. Will we be witnessing changes in strategies this year as compared to the previous year?

A series of capacities such as those in the field of offshore vessels, LPG, LNG, In the North of the country, discussion revolving Ro-Ro vessels, and even the increase of container capacity in this region, are things that should be added to the fleet portfolio.

A number of ships are common, such as general cargo vessels, bulk carriers, and Container vessels, although they can be upgraded due to modern technologies, however, they are

considered as conventional and ordinary vessels, but there are a number of other vessels that are special and less common and will be launched into the market based on the demands of the market, such as Ro-Ro ships, LPG carriers, special offshore vessels, special service vessels for domestic ports which are dedicated to the Shipping Group itself, and have put on the agenda for the fleet development and are scheduled to be added to the shipping fleet of the Islamic Republic of Iran. As to the issue of adding new vessels to the fleet, first the market studies will be conducted, and following that, based on the surveys having been made, the Strategic Document of the Shipping Group, which is usually adjusted on periodic bases of every five years, will be included as well.

All the necessary requirements, from the technical and executive aspects, provision of the resources and facilities, payment methods as well

as sanctions discussions, beside other facilities and capacities which together constitute the basic cores of this document and plan, are duly addressed in them.

As previously, The Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group has started the development of its fleet, focusing on the energy and container fields, but with the purpose of improving and developing condition of vessels, especially in the condensate and gas liquids sector in the form of purchasing and ordering LPG vessels; Because according to the booming situation of the market outside and inside Iran, the number of vessels in this sector is still limited and they are generally worn out.

Does this mean the Shipping Group will turn to energy transportation?

The Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group does not enjoy a large fleet in the field of tankers and condensates and fluids in general. The shipping tanker fleet, including domestic refueling vessels and other refueling carriers on international waters are less than fifteen ships. However, considering the Group's current capacities in terms of management, presently we intend to develop the market of tanker vessels as a New market in the field of LPG, both with respect to the demands of the market and technical purposes, as well as the necessity of managing the vessels in the field of land and sea. The Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group holds vessels for condensates and gaseous fluids purposes in form of crude oil and products which are moving through domestic ports carrying gasoline.

Out of the ten vessels purchased over the past years, three are product carriers, in addition to several other existing vessels that are currently operating.

Based on the plans made for the development of the fleet, which include increasing of capacity of new fleet to about eighty vessels, along with scrapping of forty old vessels in the next five years, development plans for the Product



A series of capacities such as those in the field of offshore vessels, LPG, LNG, In the North of the country, discussion revolving Ro-Ro vessels, and even the increase of container capacity in this region, are things that should be added to the fleet portfolio

carriers, consisting of (Chemical tankers, LPG carriers and Crude Oil vessels) as well as normal development of the dry bulk and container fleet are now on the agenda.

In the year 2021, the Shipping Group managed to balk significant amount of foreign exchange leaving the country by providing the necessities and vital requirements of the fleet from internal market and domestic producers, which seems to have continued with the same intensity in the year after, as you kindly mentioned.

“ Fortunately, an appropriate mutual cooperation between the fleet development Dept. and knowledge-based companies was formed concerning the supply of fuel, paint and other necessities for the vessels in the year 2022.

The Shipping Group has also managed to make good developments and progresses in marine manpower sector and provision of training services, insurance, flags, beside periodical repairs, travel and a variety of other services and necessities including paint, oil and chemicals, general previsions and fuel by utilizing about thirteen percent of the domestic capabilities only in the first six months of the year 2022 as compared to the 2021 and altogether, taking into account the cost of fuel in the first six months of the 2022, approximately 91% of the requirements of the Fleet have been provided from the internal capacities.

It should be mentioned that the total expenses for the first six months have come to 294 million dollars, of which 266 million dollars were spent internally, which is a very large and significant figure. Total expenses of the second six months will be announced after the financial calculation process has been finalized. Of course, the year 2022 (the Iranian year of 1401) was quite different from the year 1400, the first difference was the increase in the activity of vessels in 1401, the second difference was the global increase of about forty percent in the price of fuel in this year. Although we managed to provide about 91% of fuel domestically, which led to a reduction in our bottom-line costs, we faced an increase in fuel prices

in the same proportion globally, on the other hand.

If we consider the total costs of the first six months to be 294 million dollars, and second six months to be regarded about the same figure as well, roughly 500 million dollars of the total have been consumed internally due to fuel supply.

During 1400 (2021) and 1401(2022), extensive communication and cooperation were created between the shipping group and knowledge-based companies. We also became aware that serious changes would be upcoming soon in the field of Artificial Intelligence. Where did these two categories end up?

Many knowledge-based companies involved in chemicals, paint and oil industries, irrespective of the financial support, enjoy the up-to-date technical knowledge offered by the Shipping Group as well as using the experimental opportunity of the vessels, taking into account the acceptance of any risk by the Shipping Group, while transferring the feedback to manufactur-



ers over a period of several years, were eventually able to make themselves recognized as the Industry of Mass Production in the market. Generally, there is comprehensive cooperation between the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group and knowledge-based companies. As to the discussion about Smartening the fleet, we carried out a large National project, which has no other parallel inside the country, and such a service is not provided abroad either, just with the help of the Vice President for Technology and Sharif University of Technology, together with the Shipping Complex, in such a way that conducting this project on board of the Group's vessels as a test became possible as well.

Currently, we are taking a series of considerations and actions on the contract of this project. This project is a system that reports many activities carried out on board of the vessel, including fuel consumption, resource monitoring and system performance in the field of Monitoring system and many other problems that may occur on a daily basis for the ship.



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The system is safer by far and includes a satellite communication and remote control system that create a “dynamic baseline” with respect to the same previous performance of the vessel itself, other similar ships in the world, and influencing environmental factors.

The dynamic baseline can be modified and its information can be entered on a daily basis. This baseline also shows increase and decrease in expenses and their reasons. The management and superintending engineer of the ship can simultaneously receive all the warnings in real time which marks as a very important achievement.

All these are the works being carried out with the help of the Shipping Group inside the country. In the field of smartening fuel consumption, which is the second part of this project, amount of fuel consumed is analyzed and provided online, in a comparative manner. In addition, previously we did not have any competent company in the field of knowledge-based energy management that could manage this scope of activity in the country and a foreign company was fully in charge of these. But in the year 1400 (2021), we were able to make one of the largest knowledge-based companies in the country, which was greatly interested in the field prepared, following several months of intensive work, and fortunately now half of the vessels in the field of energy management are actively providing respective services for this company.

How is the relationship between the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group and Scientific centers?

Actually, a very good and effective communication has been established.

Benefiting from the science of universities in the Shipping Group; There are joint topics of cooperation between the market Development Deputy and Shipping Technical Departments with Sharif Polytechnic and Industrial Universities in the field of smartening, shipbuilding,

market studies and other areas, and projects will be extracted from these topics.

Also, increasing communication between the educational institute of the Shipping Group and domestic universities despite the extensive sanctions inside the country, especially in connection with those abroad will help the academic sciences and the shipping industry to become more applicable.

The Shipping Group is not just an economic enterprise, but it is recognized as a full-fledged strategic economic enterprise due to providing most of the needs inside the country in such a way that it is actually a source of satisfaction in two ways. First, if you have domestic power, you can meet your needs in case you have any problem in relation to the affairs overseas, relying on the internal capabilities and powers which is indeed an economic and strategic procedure.

The second reason is that whoever has the best science background and technology in the modern world will be regarded as a winner, and fortunately, major universities inside the country have such capabilities and capacities.

Would you please mention the plans for Development of the Fleet in the Shipping Group on a case-by-case basis?

Realizing the continuity of services through existing working groups is among the plans of the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group.

Nineteen project headings are on the agenda in addition to the development issue regarding developing of the fleet and ship construction in the field of buildings, equipment, containers and things such as new technologies and university projects, among which implementation of the smart system on 31 vessels is worth to be mentioned.

The comprehensive ship management software “Sukan” similar to the Swiss software “MESPAS” is being produced by Tofad company after a few years, and is expected to be implemented within the next two years.

Twenty-four vessels of the Shipping Group are equipped with a Ballast water Treatment system, and thirty-two more vessels are also going to be equipped with this system this year. The rest will be done in the next two years as well. Also, the installation of three ballast water systems was done for the first time inside the country at Persia Hormuz Repair Company. In addition, we also plan to carry out this project in other places inside the country.

Wagons in multimodal transportation are one of the main features in our entry into the logistics transportation system.

In addition to sea transportation, the issue of rail and road inside the country is discussed. In this regard, we offered the order for building of 200 wagons to the domestic manufacturer in 1400 (2021), of which 36 units have been received, and another 35 units are to be delivered within the next two months. The purchase of 400 Type 2 refrigerated containers will also be performed in 1402, we have a plan to buy fifteen thousand containers, out of which five thousand units have been tendered.

The large project of creating a logistics yard at the port of Chabahar, the study phase of which has been completed after one year, and its summary report has been submitted to the Ports Organization. It is expected that the completion of this project would take three years and it can be used for seventeen years, which of course will have the possibility of being extended later on.

The refueling site system in Chabahar is also on the agenda and the studies in this field are ongoing. The completion of Caspian automatic silage system in Anzali port will be accomplished this year. The development and reconstruction of Arvandan yard is one of the other projects to be executed this year.

Also, renovation of the fleet equipment and the container tracking knowledge-based project which was supposed to be carried out on pilot is presently in the test phase on 38 containers which has been almost 70% successful. It is



The Shipping Group has also managed to make good developments and progresses in marine manpower sector and provision of training services, etc



expected that by the end of 1403 (2024), we will be able to take measures towards smartening of most of containers, God willing.

How will the issue of manpower proceed in the development of the Fleet?

The first issue to be focused on in a very serious way in the period of the current Management was the issue of Human Resources. During the past periods, due to the recession, embargo and other problematic matters, the issue of human capital was not addressed in a manner which was expected. But currently, Human capital is among the top priorities, and according to the latest statistics provided by the Shipping Group, about two thousand new employees have been recruited in the last two years. This is while the total sea & land forces of the shipping sector are less than seven thousands, and more than half of this number have joined the vessels in various fields. Also, there are a number of others who are working in Nowshahr, and Bushehr universities as well as educational institutes at different levels, all of which have become engaged thanks to the Direct Employment of the Shipping Group initiative. Moreover, some of these employees are also working in the land Support Department in sea-related matters due to their special expertise in the sea domain. In addition, elite forces have been recruited from the country's universities in the Development departments of shipbuilding and fleet construction in Hafez, Sepid, Valfajr, Arvandan and Caspian Sea companies.

Apart from all these, several hundred working forces are involved having been hired indirectly for the yards and other infrastructure projects. On the whole, about 99% of marine forces and employees, especially those pertaining to specific vessels including Tanker vessels are all regarded as internal forces.

In fact, it should be confessed that a wide network of internal human forces are directly

and indirectly serving the shipping industry of the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group.

You mentioned earlier that container manufacturing inside the country has encountered problems, while it seems that those in Technical Dept of the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group had already given serious technical advice to domestic manufacturers in this regard. Fundamentally, what is the main reason for failure in mass production in the field of containers?

Sea container was initially manufactured in Iran by the Shipping Group itself at Shahab Sanat factory in Isfahan with capacity of about 2000 containers in the year 1379 (2000).

But after that, it did not continue due to the price increase and competitive market. Following this period, The Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group entered the market, but neither container construction was in such dimensions as it used to be, nor its price was competitive.

In 2016, The Shipping Group entered this scope once again, and at the same time, a domestic company received facilities from the Ports and Maritime Organization and entered the field of container construction.

The private sector also ordered a limited number, and thus it caused a great step to be taken in this field. In the year 1400 (March 2022) The Shipping Group offered to order for 500 forty-foot containers with one thousand TEU to the manufacturing company and this really marked as a significant measure.

The facilities were abundant, but the need for marine knowledge and experience could be clearly sensed.

Therefore, the Shipping Group positioned its expert and experienced staff as consultants in the field, both in the Shipping Group itself and in that company as well.

There were dozens of major technical deficiencies, so the shipping consulting team decided to train the domestic manufacturer team in Bandar Abbas workshop and deploy a team of



The Shipping Group is now an integrated logistics complex operating based on Door to Door System

Bandar Abbas in the Shipping Group building in return. Carrying out these measures eventually led to the manufacturing of containers in accordance with global standards.

However, though we've solved the technical problems, we are facing another issue and that's high and non-competitive prices which hopefully expect that will be resolved soon as well.

Last year the senior management of the Shipping Group announced that this group was no longer merely a shipping company and is recognized as a Logistics Company, How is this matter supposed to be followed in the year 1402 (2023)?

The Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group has just entered the phase of Comprehensive Logistics System. Such a belief that the Shipping Group is only involved in shipping affairs no longer exists.

The Shipping Group is now an integrated logistics complex operating based on Door to Door System. From the day a person delivers goods at the farthest part of the world until they take delivery of them at their house doors, their goods are absolutely covered by Door-to-Door System.

Therefore, this chain must become completed in places where it has gaps and defects, either in Port Management or Container and Ship-building sectors. Combined Transport was the missing link in this discussion one part of this issue had previously been addressed, but the other one was missing and needed to be completed.

To make this discussion realized that Door-to-Door services should be offered to customers despite the North-South corridor route, network has been established in areas where such shortages existed, so that effectual steps would be taken towards improvement and expansion of intended goals.

Multimodal Transportation system in which rail

and road have been combined together is one of such goals in view.

We have 1,200 wagons in the rail section, and these wagons carry containers and bulk in one section, and in the other one condensate and fuel are transported.

Previously, only one thousand containers were in transit from the Caspian Sea region, but in the last one or two years, this number has risen



to eight thousands .

Currently, we expect they will reach up to about 30,000 containers in the coming years. This breakthrough will necessitate identifying the missing links first, so we should provide the necessary plans and actions needed for such improvement.



The Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group has just entered the phase of Comprehensive Logistics System



The Deputy head of the regional government of Astrakhan province;

We support the development of cooperations at Solyanka port





The investments having been made by the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group at Solyanka port, located in Astrakhan province of Russia in north of Caspian have caused the mutual business cooperations between the two countries to be expanded and transformed unprecedentedly.

Iran and Russia are located next to each other in a geographical point having strategic commercial and transportation value, superintending the area in common.

Perhaps there is an impression that this participation is one of the consequences of the crisis in Ukraine, but the fact is that the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group had started making efforts to invest at Solyanka port for the first time since a decade ago, and had managed to acquire more than half of the shares of this port before the crisis breaks out in Ukraine.

However, the crisis in Ukraine has made the port of Solyanka the focal point of the North-South Corridor in the Caspian Sea for transit of Russian goods. It should be mentioned that the management of Solyanka port by the Islamic Republic of Iran could not have been finalized, except with mutual cooperations of governments of the two countries.

Meanwhile, the regional government of Astrakhan province created some friendly relations with the Iranian side and managed to provide an appropriate ground so that the final stages of managing and controlling Solyanka port would be taken successfully in submission to direct orders of Vladimir Putin, the president of the Russian Federation, beside unsparing efforts of the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Russia.

For this reason, Payam Darya has conducted an interview with “Dennis Afanasyev “Deputy Head of Regional Government of Astrakhan province of Russia” the outcome of which has been provided here below;

One of the problems of the Iranian shipping companies hindering the development of activities on the Russian route is Volga dredging. What mea-

ures have been taken to solve this problem, i.e. increasing the intake and as a result, cargo circulation by the shipowners?

Can we be hopeful that this permanent problem will be resolved for ever in the year 2023?

As you know, about 90% of all cargoes passing through the Astrakhan hub, are directly shipped via Iran’s waters. This is while there is a significant potential for increased traffic.

We have increased logistics capabilities of Astrakhan region systematically for a long time. Meanwhile, currently the project of creating a Port special economic zone is being implemented. We are also developing commercial relations and cooperation with those countries on the Caspian border.

The throughput capacity of Volga-Caspian shipping canal (VKMSK) had remained problematic issue for a long time which no longer corresponded with modern shipping parameters, but thanks to the all-out support of the president of Russian Federation, Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin, the large-scale dredging of the draft last year, and consequently the draft has been planned to increase to 4.5 meters.

In 2022, 5 million cubic meters of sediments were removed from the bottom of the canal, and more



than twice this volume has also been planned to be separated during the current year. It is worth mentioning that 13 km of the total 50 km waterway that seemed to be problematic has been dredged until 20 June.

Meanwhile, the Iranian party has also expressed interest in participating in the dredging operation of the canal.

The Ports & Maritime Organization of Russia as well as representatives of the Iranian dredging companies are presently reviewing the ways of their cooperation.

At present 15 dredgers are working round the clock in the canal and it is expected their numbers to



thanks to the all-out support of the president of Russian Federation, Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin, the j large-scale dredging of the draft last year, and consequently the water intake has been planned to increase to 4.5 meters



increase to 18 units in the near future.

Such a volume of dredging has never been done in VKMSK before, but I believe if the planned goals are achieved, the number of traffic as well as volume of cargoes in the region will increase significantly.

During the visit of the Minister of Roads & Urban Development of Iran to Russia the issue of the water transport hub between three Russian ports at Caspian Sea was raised. Will the Astrakhan Port JSC be somehow involved in this issue? If yes, you are kindly requested to provide us with more details about the role of Astrakhan Port Public Joint Stock Company (Solyanka Port) in this project.

The Astrakhan maritime transport hub is divided into two strategic areas conditionally: Astrakhan Consolidated Port, located on borders of the center of the region, and Olya commercial seaport, which is located on the Volga-Caspian canal, about 100 km from Astrakhan.

Entry of the vessels bearing foreign flags into the ports is open. They operate cargo-passenger checkpoints across the state border.

The navigation is carried out in winter under the guidance of ice-breakers all year round.

Cargo terminals are equipped with appropriate spaces for warehousing of goods.

They are also furnished with loading & unloading equipment, and this is while most of these terminals enjoy intra-port railway lines. Astrakhan port which is located in suburbs of the city has the facility of 19 mooring complexes, 13 of which are specialized in the field of transporting commodities. This includes the facilities of Bandar Astrakhan JSC (Solyanka port) as well. The transportation capacity of the company is roughly 1500000 Tons. Meanwhile, the company's shares in total volume of cargo transportation through the consolidated port of Astrakhan had reached 27% in the year 2022.

Today, the transit potential of the region is growing more than ever before, so we are witnessing a



variety of new cargoes moving through the North-South corridor. Taking this issue into consideration and with regard to some plans Astrakhan Port Public Joint Stock Company has foreseen for the development and implementation of various investment projects and "Fleet Development" in particular, I believe that the value of this terminal will enhance in the Russian market as well as the global market in near future.

Regarding the development of cooperation between Iran and Russia in the North-South corridor, will the Russian side have any plan to provide the financial and customs preferences to the Iranian side? If yes, please explain.

Of course, once the cooperation between the two countries has been made in the framework of



North-South corridor and also having implemented fully the two common transportation and logistics projects, we are now ready to consider the possibility of providing priorities for our Iranian partners as well.

Applying preferences and benefits specifically, for port duties, would become possible at the time of establishing a shipping line between Russian ports on The Caspian and Iran. Therefore, I suggest to start implementing that once the agreement has been convened. Now, let's get back to the main topic.

The Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group has made a major investment in Solyanka port. What do you think about such an investment? What effect the progress of Astrakhan Port Public Joint



The Astrakhan maritime transport hub is divided into two strategic areas conditionally: Astrakhan Consolidated Port, located on borders of the center of the region, and Olya commercial seaport, which is located on the Volga-Caspian canal, about 100 km from Astrakhan

Stock Company (Solyanka Port) can leave on the region?

As you already pointed out properly, the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group has made a good investment in the development of a public joint-stock company at Astrakhan port. The Group has financed purchase of gantry cranes and other means of transportation, specialized vehicles, construction of warehouses, repair of docks by replacing bumpers (fenders), repair of railway rails and crane runways, repair of a gantry crane as well as a diesel locomotive with a total amount of about 450 million rubles. In addition to those mentioned above, Astrakhan port Public Joint Stock company has recently signed a contract for the purchase of a dry cargo vessel worth more than one billion rubles, the construction of which will be completed by the end of this year.

As I mentioned earlier, this port is one of the largest cargo terminals in Astrakhan region, and the volume of cargo exchanges has nudged to more than 780000 tons during the year 2022. As the outcomes during a period of 5 months in the year 2023 indicate, Astrakhan port has also experienced the 117% positive growth in transshipment of cargo as well. Of course, the regional government of Astrakhan, in turn, will support the issue of developing the port and such investments will definitely help the position of Solyanka port as the largest port of Astrakhan region to be maintained.

The region has the possibility to adapt to the increase in cargo traffic along the North-South corridor, thanks to continuous development and renovation of cargo terminals.

As a Russian statesman, how do you envision the vista of Solyanka port as well as cooperation in the North-South corridor project?

Astrakhan Port Public Joint Stock Company (Solyanka Port) is one of Cargo Terminals of Astrakhan Port, which is constantly seeking to modernize and develop its territory, investing not only the incomes earned by the investors, but also its own sources of income as well.

Besides, the port managers are actively participating in the development of the North-South corridor, establishing business connections, and attracting new partners and investors involved in the region.

All this makes it possible for us to rely on gradual expansion of the range of goods which are to be transported, increase in the port capacity and consequently a rise in number of cargo-transporting cases, of course thanks to unsparing support of the Federal government as well as the regional state.

The establishment of a joint shipping company between Iran and Russia in Caspian region is one of the economic relations development plans stated by the representatives of the two countries. What is your opinion on this issue?

Pursuant to the visit of representatives of Lotus Special Economic Zone Management Company to Iran in October 2022, negotiations were carried out with some representatives of the Iranian public and private organizations.

During this formal visit, main issues such as Cooperation in organizing Caspian shipping lines as well as the land routes which pass through Iran's territory, along with providing modern facilities for



storing and freezing products were discussed and investigated.

Detailed information will be permitted to be announced after specific agreements have been reached and the relevant contracts signed. This issue is being surveyed at the present.

The five-year plan of cooperation development measures having been co-signed by Babushkin Igor Yuryevich, the governor of Astrakhan region and Parviz Fattah, head of the Islamic Revolution Foundation will undoubtedly facilitate the issue of development of the economic relations.

This plan would prompt Measures for mutual and beneficial cooperation in the development of the North-South corridor, particularly regarding taking advantage of transit capacities in Astrakhan region for transportation of the products of Mustazafan Foundation (Foundation of the Oppressed and Disabled) as well as utilizing SEZ port territory for two logistics centers belonging to the Foundation.

Currently, the preliminaries for implementation of these activities are underway, but an apprehension had already been existing, that taking such measures would strengthen our partnership and definitely ensure the effectual development of the North-South corridor.



Of course, once the cooperation between the two countries has been made in the framework of North-South corridor and also having implemented fully the two common transportation and logistics projects, we are now ready to consider the possibility of providing priorities for our Iranian partners as well



Hoping to gain more income during the current year 1402 (2023)

The organization of Multi-modal Transportation has been put on the agenda of The Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group



The Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group's Deputy of the Market Development, cooperated with the Fleet Development Deputyship are two pivotal elements in determining the strategies in the Group, operating based on constant companionship and coordination with each other.

The Market Development Section, as indicated by its title, plays a vital role in determining the strategies with the purpose of increasing the income level of the Group in a permanent way. This role has led to new revenue records being set following a decrease in performance due to the spread of Corona disease as well as the intensification of cruel sanctions, at least during the recent years.

Therefore, we've carried out an interview with the Deputy of the Market Development of the Group and you'll read the full digest of that here below; We saw a sudden growth in the revenue of the Shipping industry once the pandemic restrictions imposed in the country were lifted. The Group had a good income



record registered during the year 1400 (2021) as well. Did it manage to continue keeping up the level of revenues still further?

The level of the Shipping Group's revenues stood at \$174 million during the year 2021 which indicated an appropriate growth registered during the period.

This was while the vessels were not previously allowed to enter the ports of our country's main partners due to the sanctions imposed, in addition to the problems concerning Corona break-out.

We had forecast an income of about one billion and seven hundred million Dollars for the year 1401, but it sounds as if we've nudged a record of 1 billion and nine hundred Dollars, thanks to the graces the Almighty God has granted.

The estimate is based on the information having been provided, but the exact amount has not been audited yet. This is an honor obtained due to the integrated efforts made by a seven strong group all together, and so the great coordination, and integration should be appreciated indeed.

I emphasize that the following mentioned achievement has been obtained in spite of the cruel sanctions imposed on the country. We should not forget that the knowledge of those having imposed sanctions on us is getting more advanced day by day and they are seeking to find a stratagem and block the way of transportation as well as money transfer.

The Shipping Group has implemented a dynamic five-year strategic plan. So, based on this measure, how do you evaluate the perspective and quantitative trend of the next five years?

"The revenue forecast for the year 1402 is one billion and eight hundred nineteen million Dollars, while this figure is expected to rise to over two billion Dollars within the next three years.

The income made by Hafez Darya Arya, as a

Container Transportation company among 28 subsidiaries of the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group has been highest by far. In other words, its income has been really fantastic during the last two years. Of course, the other companies of the Group also made a range of profits and some even exceeding the previous forecasts.

Sapid company, or the same Bulk Shipping of the Shipping Group, as well as Valfajr Shipping which is involved in the field of offshore and passenger vessels, along with Caspian Sea, all of which have been indicating good revenue records.

We hopefully expect that companies such as Kish Shipping which are on the verge of being transformed, would be able to join the ranks of the Group's revenue-generating companies during the current year, so that a favorable



income would be generated during the period once three more vessels join the company's owned vessels."

Considering that the Shipping Group is in charge of the North-South corridor, what measures should be taken in order to strengthen the transit through this route?

Targeting and forecasting multimodal logistics beside transportation projects are directed at attracting about 150000 TEU containers and include generating revenue of combined transportation of the export and import cargoes, domestic transit, East-West corridor and North-South corridor.

Therefore, a plan has been envisaged for the Multimodal Transportation Company in which a fair share of land transportation of Bulk Shipping company should be allocated to that



The level of the Shipping Group's revenues stood at \$174 million during the year 2021 which indicated an appropriate growth registered during the period

company. Meanwhile, the synergistic capacities of the other subsidiary companies of Social Security Investment company (Shasta) have also been put on the agenda.

Also, the promotion of an effectual role in the Corridor is to be implemented with the coordination of the Container Transportation company as well as the Transit Corridors Projects Management unit of the Shipping Group.

The Development plan for the annual increase of 200 units of all types of owned wagons in the Multimodal Transportation Company is another issue which should be followed until it is fulfilled and realized.

Establishing Road Transportation company is one of the strategies that will be definitely fulfilled within this year, so that the Combined & Multimodal transportation can be organized in an optimum manner more than ever before inside the Shipping Group.

As you mentioned earlier, the container shipping company has the largest share in the Shipping Group's revenues. What procedures will this company follow this year?

The revenue share of the container transportation company in 1401 was 73% of the total revenue of the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group during the period.

However, due to a drop in container shipping rates in 1402, we are presently considering an increase in productivity for this company.

Strengthening relationship with customers, strengthening the marketing department as well as identifying and attracting new customers can be enumerated as the other main topics that will be pursued in this company within the current year.

Improving the quality of services is also an important issue that will continue in this company. Such plans will be carried out in other companies such as Valfajr Shipping. The Feasibility of purchasing and ordering the construc-

tion of required vessels, launching some new international lines as well as using the refrigerated containers are the tasks having been planned for this company.

Playing an active role in transporting transit goods through the North-South corridor is the undertaking which is to be allocated to the Caspian Sea Shipping.

What plans have been considered in terms of technical perspectives?

Improving the processes for better carrying fuel from Shazand refinery in Arak to Bandar Abbas is the plan already put on the agenda regarding Qeshm Marine Services and the Shipping Engineering company (Khadoom).

Persia Hormuz Ship Repair Company also has plannings in order to equip the Shipyard, aimed at increasing the repair capacity so that it can cover the drydocks for all the vessels of the Shipping Group calling at the southern ports.

Reducing the time of periodical and voyage repairs of the vessels with the purpose of being qualified enough to reach the international standards and norms, are among the instructions and plans having been put on the agenda of Persia Hormuz Ship Repair company.

Studies on benchmarking with foreign shipyards, aimed at developing the activities as well as providing services and the feasibility of establishing a yard for repairing are the scheduled which are to be implemented in the southern ports of the country.

Setareh Qeshm Fuel Supplying company has the responsibility to review and complete the affairs of the Desulfurization & Extraction unit, and subsequently provide the relevant permits, with the ultimate intention of purchasing or building refueling tanker vessels.

The Marine Information Technology (Tofad) will take a maximum two-year period in order to execute and make practical the information technology development projects having been scheduled to be implemented at the Shipping

Group. Also, a Logistics Intelligence committee is to be set up in this company.

The fields of Human Resources and Education are the main pillars of the shipping industry. What plans have been considered in this respect?

The Shipping Group's Manpower Supply company will provide a database regarding the scoring of the selective employees. This company also bears the responsibility of providing and supplying the identical needs having been allocated to the Land sector and to the specialists in Maritime sector as well.

This company will also proceed with utilizing the training capacity of cadets on the vessels to the maximum level, beside evaluating job satisfaction of seafarers through a Contractor.

The Education Institute of the Shipping Group indeed completes the final concept of an Evaluation Model of faculty members considering their scientific and research activities, are directed at developing research activities.

Creating an Individual Development System (IDP) in order to improve and update the level of knowledge, skills, and scientific foundations of the faculty members of the educational institute in particular, as well as all the specialized staff in the Maritime & Land sectors in general, is one of the plans intended for

this year. Preparation and deployment of the Command Bridge Simulating system, optimal exploration of virtual training as well as cooperation with reputable institutes in the field of virtual training and implementation of knowledge management at the level of the Shipping Group is one of the strategic issues put on the agenda of this institute to be discussed subsequently.

All the companies in the Shipping Group basically have a specific strategy for their own activities in the field of offering services to customers, insurance, Currency exchange, etc., and will operate based on this strategy.

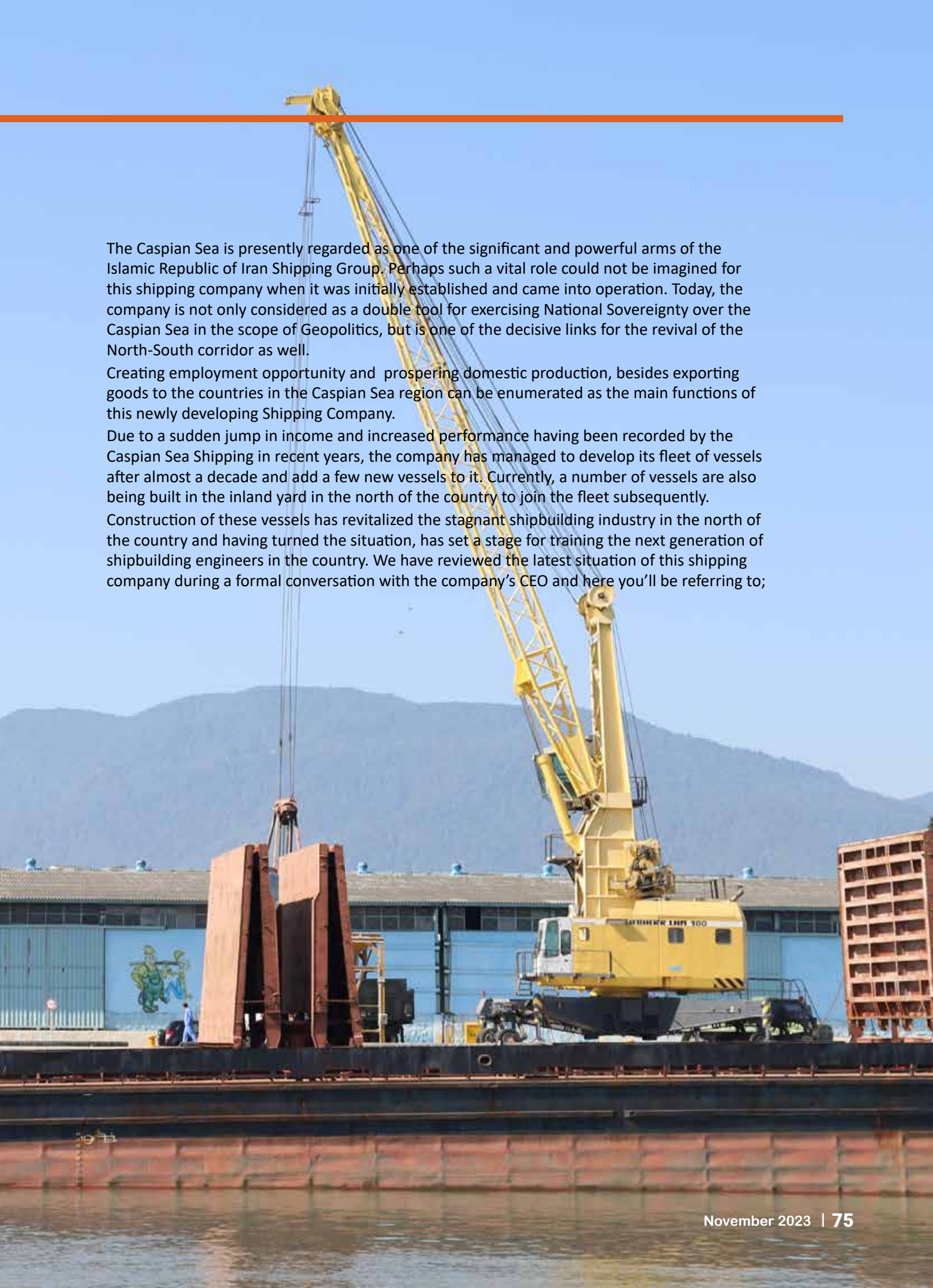


Establishing Road Transportation company is one of the strategies that will be definitely fulfilled within this year, so that the Combined & Multimodal transportation can be organized in an optimum manner more than ever before inside the Shipping Group

The Caspian Shipping Fleet breathes a New Life

Highest revenue in record the history of the Caspian Sea Shipping



A large yellow crane is positioned on a dark barge, lifting a massive, rust-colored metal structure. The crane's boom extends high into the clear blue sky. In the background, a long industrial building with a blue facade and a multi-story concrete structure are visible, with mountains in the distance.

The Caspian Sea is presently regarded as one of the significant and powerful arms of the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group. Perhaps such a vital role could not be imagined for this shipping company when it was initially established and came into operation. Today, the company is not only considered as a double tool for exercising National Sovereignty over the Caspian Sea in the scope of Geopolitics, but is one of the decisive links for the revival of the North-South corridor as well.

Creating employment opportunity and prospering domestic production, besides exporting goods to the countries in the Caspian Sea region can be enumerated as the main functions of this newly developing Shipping Company.

Due to a sudden jump in income and increased performance having been recorded by the Caspian Sea Shipping in recent years, the company has managed to develop its fleet of vessels after almost a decade and add a few new vessels to it. Currently, a number of vessels are also being built in the inland yard in the north of the country to join the fleet subsequently.

Construction of these vessels has revitalized the stagnant shipbuilding industry in the north of the country and having turned the situation, has set a stage for training the next generation of shipbuilding engineers in the country. We have reviewed the latest situation of this shipping company during a formal conversation with the company's CEO and here you'll be referring to;



What was the volume of cargo moved compared to the same period last year in the Caspian Sea Shipping Company?

Fortunately, in 1401, for the first time after several years, some achievements were fulfilled for the Caspian Sea Shipping Company which can be divided into two parts:

First, in revenue section, the highest income was obtained in form of foreign currency and rials with a difference compared to the previous years.

The Caspian Sea Shipping's revenue in the year 1400 amounted to \$ 32 million which caused productivity to increase and valuable goods to be attracted in the year 1401 and the revenue to rise to \$52 million as well.

In other words, the company's foreign currency income is 60% and with the exchange rate of rial, will be indicating a growth of more than 100% as compared to the year 1400.

The next achievement is in the Container sector; Thanks to the plans and measures carried out by the parent company (The Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group)

The Caspian Sea Shipping company was able to have access to the entire container network of the Group and this raised all the Caspian Sea Shipping company's previous restrictions regarding the number of containers.

The access is in such a way that The Caspian Sea Shipping Company, according to the memorandums of understanding concluded among this company and the other Companies of the Group shall be allowed to gain access to the containers belonging to other companies of the Group, in case it needed empty containers.

Based on this, we can proudly herald that the Caspian Sea Shipping Company, holding an eighty percent share in the Caspian container market in the year 1401 is reputed as the flagship of container shipping in the Caspian Sea region.

As we are well aware, while global transportation has moved towards the containerization system, there was no specific culture for container transportation in the Caspian Sea before the Caspian Sea Shipping company practically took serious measures in this respect.

How this type of transportation is presently treated in the northern ports of the country?

Yes, container shipping in the North of the country was not as common as it is, during the past years and owners of goods as well as shipowners were not inclined to carry containerized goods. Besides, the port did not have a proper infrastructure for loading and discharging containers either.

But gradually there was a leap concerning the issue of containers in the Caspian Sea Shipping company, especially during the year 1401, so we predict that this increasing trend will intensify in the current year.

Regarding the increase in the transit of goods concerning the matter of containerization, due to the issue of North-South corridor and naturally the increase in number of transit cases, a significant part of container transportation in the Caspian Sea Shipping was carried out by the Shipping Group's own fleet. Also, with respect to the measures taken by the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group in the year 1401, the shipping market of the Caspian Sea was practically linked to the international market and became so-called Trans-Caspian.

In this manner, the market shipping in the Caspian Sea will no longer be limited to the goods and cargoes on the edge of the Caspian Sea. So, we will be witnessing a considerable growth in container transportation in the northern ports soon.

What effect has the regional crisis between Russia and Ukraine had on the Caspian Sea transport market?

Presently, due to the geopolitical changes having occurred in the relations between Russia and some of its European neighbors, the position of the Caspian Sea has been turned inside out for Russia and as a result, Russia has changed its relations as well as strategic plans in such a way that it can use the capacity of Caspian Sea and the routes through Iran as a highway for transit of its required goods. The Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group, in return, took measures in the Caspian Sea region including establishing a centralized department in order to manage and promote the issue of transportation and transit of goods to Russia and vice versa. For example, due to these developments, the Caspian Sea Shipping has allocated a seventy percent share to itself in the field of car transit through the North-South corridor to the destinations of Kazakhstan and Russia in the year 1401 which is indeed a

400% increase as compared to the last year.

Considering the growing development of transportation in the North-South corridor, as one of the main links for carrying cargo in this corridor, what measures seem to be necessary to improve transportation operations through this corridor?

Of course, the links of the transportation chain greatly affect each other, and the transportation performance as well as transportation time. Sea is one of these rings, but the port infrastructure, logistics and customs as the other links also have direct effect on sea transportation, and so due measures should be taken towards developing these issues as well.

For instance, the Caspian Sea Shipping company now has the potential capacity of transporting in the maritime sector in order to transport 30000 containers per year through the corridor-transit axis. But the presence of this link in Supply chain is not enough other links including the country's port infrastructure and even Russian ports in the Volga basin are greatly required by this shipping company as well. Lack of dredging of the Volga can leave a negative effect on the productivity and cost of transportation of the Shipping fleet of the Caspian Sea.

Most of the vessels in the Caspian Sea region have drafts above four meters, while in Volga channel the draft is three and a half meters. Therefore, we have to load the ships with a draft of three and a half meters, that is, 60% of the real capacity of the vessel and this causes the fleet to suffer and so as a result, the productivity will also decrease and its possible that the transportation costs will increase for cargo owners because of not using the full capacity of the vessel and so, the desire for moving cargo in form of containers to drop to some extent. Facing such a situation, The Caspian Sea has pioneered to coordinate with the relevant institutions and bodies of the country in order to negotiate with many high-ranking officials of Russia directed at the issue of the Volga dredging and the increase of the draft from three and a half meters to four and a half meters during the current year (1402), taking its utmost efforts and capabilities in this regard. The Russian government has also taken a special look towards the Caspian issue in return, which shows that the increase in Russia's market share in the Caspian region would not be far from expecta-

tion. Nowadays, the Russians have become inclined towards the Caspian Sea due to the hindrances they have at the moment in accessing the Black Sea and the Baltic Sea.

Caspian Sea Shipping Company's concern these days is how to strengthen the infrastructure of the ports and docks of the Caspian border, both from the northern areas and Russian sea borders. At least currently, the ports on the Caspian border, especially on the Russian side, do not have the necessary preparation for the development of the naval fleet.

The perspective is generally a good perspective, but realization of that, to some extent depends on the level of cooperation between the two countries.

At present, no practical measures have been taken, but due planning and agreements have been made in this regard and will come into effect and be implemented within the current year.

Was it for this reason that the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group took over the management of the port of Solyanka in Russia?

That's just so.

In 1401, a particular investment of about 10 million dollars was made in Solyanka port under the management of The Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group which is expected to improve the performance and productivity of the shipping in the Caspian Sea region.

Among the most important achievements of shipping in the Caspian Sea was the development of the fleet. Explain more about this.

Discussion of the development of the fleet Caspian Sea shipping Company is so significant because it suddenly occurred after an eight-year suspension. Fortunately, the development of the fleet in the by building the vessels was realized in 1401, thanks to the support and the planning made by the mother company (The Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group) and the contract for the construction of four ships, two 3500-ton General Cargo ships and two Ro-Ro container vessels have been convened with Sadra Neka's domestic shipbuilding, aimed at supporting domestic production capacity.

The executive part of this contract has come into

effect officially in March 1401 presented by the Minister of Cooperation, Labor & Social Welfare.

The work process has been approved by reputable classification institutions. It is expected that two General Cargo vessels hopefully to be received from Sadra Shipbuilding by 1403.

What is the current capacity of the Caspian Sea Shipping Company's fleet?

The Caspian Sea shipping company hopes that we can be capable enough to transport about 180



thousand tons of cargo during the year 1402.

We expect that the contract for the purchase of a number of vessels would be put on the agenda as well during the year 1402.

Also, we should endeavor to play a greater role in the field of the corridor issues and in some way, act more professionally in the field of container shipping and then witness a remarkable increase in the revenues and incomes as well as development of the fleet.



Caspian Sea Shipping Company, holding an eighty percent share in the Caspian container market in the year 1401 is reputed as the flagship of container shipping in the Caspian Sea region





North-South corridor and the major role, Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group plays in it



Due to its strategic, geopolitical and geoeconomic position, Iran has always been the focus of major countries in the world, and continues to be. The dynamic potentials of developing rail & road routes and the country's access to long beaches in the Persian Gulf, Oman Sea as well as the shores of the Caspian Sea have become so popular with the world's major economic producers in recent years. Therefore, Iran is regarded as a country that constitutes the main section of the International North-South Corridor (INSTC). This corridor actually connects the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf to Russia and Northern Europe through Iran. This is while Chabahar port, as the only Iranian port in South is the sole oceanic port in the country, having direct access to the Indian Ocean and on the other hand, to Bandar Abbas is greatly considered a Strategic point along this sea route. Apart from the privileged position of transit, Iran enjoys good relations with some influential countries (especially India and Russia) which certainly leave profitable effects on the performance of the corridor as well as the stability and internal security of our country.



India is one of Iran's trading partners, and as it has favorable economic conditions, is highly interested in taking advantage of the North-South corridor in order to supply goods and offer its products to Russia and European markets cheaper and with competitive prices. The Investments having been made in Chabahar port can contribute to solving this problem to some extent and set the ground for direct connection of India to the target countries through Iran.

India is ready to receive oil, coal, coke and any other goods from Russia, and willing to deliver electrical appliances, machinery, industrial equipment, chemical products, textiles, food products as well as medicines to Russia in return.

The North-South International Transport Corridor Agreement was initially signed by the Transport Ministers of the countries Iran, India and Russia unanimously in September 2000 in Saint Petersburg, and later came into effect in the year 2002, with common approval of these three countries.

This corridor is a multifaceted transport network covering Sea, Road and Rail transportation routes and is 40% shorter in terms of distance and time and up to 30% cheaper in terms of cost, as compared to the previously-used routes.

This corridor has been developed in order to facilitate the transfer and replacement of cargo flow from the Suez Canal and Strait of Gibraltar routes to multimodal routes in Eurasia



region and there is capacity for three to five percent of the goods passing through the Suez Canal to become transited via North-South corridor.

Enumerating the benefits of the North-South international transport corridor, beyond the issue of bilateral trade & transit growth, strengthening the potential of the exports from all countries, including Iran should be specifically pointed out.

The development and expansion of the North-South corridor can transform global transportation, and according to Russia's forecast, it is expected that the carrying capacity of this corridor to increase to 32 million Tons by the year 2030.

Pursuant to Russia's attack on Ukraine and the



This corridor is a multifaceted transport network covering Sea, Road and Rail transportation routes and is 40% shorter in terms of distance and time and up to 30% cheaper in terms of cost, as compared to the previously-used routes





imposition of extensive sanctions by European countries and the United States against Russia, the North-South Corridor has gained in more significance as compared to the past, and currently Russia requires this corridor more than ever before for the exchange of goods and trading with India as well as South and East Asian countries.

Therefore, Russia also has to take necessary measures such as providing equipment for the sea ports in Caspian Sea region as well as dredging Volga, in order to create appropriate infrastructure with the purpose of facilitating the processes underway in this corridor.

Having created a new structure for the corridor management in 1401, the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group made a firm determination so that the issue of Door-to-Door transportation which was one of the long-standing aspirations of the the country's transportation system as well as the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group would come to the fore, and managed to fulfill direct transportation of the goods from Russia to India and vice versa, and even international transportation from China to Russia successfully through creating the necessary integration in its subsidiary companies including; Container transportation, combined transportation, Caspian Sea Shipping, Hoopad Darya shipping agency Services as well as regional offices and port of Solyanka in Astrakhan. This Shipping Group also was able to implement this significant task practically by issuing a nationwide bill of lading and creating the necessary infrastructure, including equipping about 1200 wagons and 138 types of various floating vehicles with the total capacity of 5 million tons, beside 291,000 TEU containers in the Persian Gulf and Caspian Sea in the year 2022.

The total cargo carried in the North-South corridor at the beginning of the activity had been 1500 TEU containers from which significant incomes had also been obtained, and presently the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group intends to expand this activity even further by carrying 150.000 TEU having previously been

scheduled in the plan for the year 1402. Since Iran has the possibility of turning into as one of the most important routes for international transportation not only in the region, but also globally, its respected government may also take a particular and specific glance at the issue of this corridor and, while completing the project of the railway from Zahedan to Chabahar and Rasht to Anzali, take effective steps towards facilitating the processes being carried out through governmental bodies, including Customs and Ports & Maritime Organization, so that the business along this route would prosper. Of course, a few governmental proceedings, including consultation with Russian and Indian parties by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs can offer considerable help to this matter. The Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group is continuously improving the key and necessary infrastructure so that the customers can easily be connected to the Corridor Management system, register their own orders and have their shipments carried from a certain point to another through the corridor without any kind of trepidation or challenges.



the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Group made a firm determination so that the issue of Door-to-Door transportation



General pathology of the northern ports of Iran and an operational solution for their improvement

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1- Introduction

The northern ports of Iran include Astar port, Anzali port complex (Anzali port and Caspian port), Nowshahr port, Fereydunkenar port and Amirabad port, are located from west to east. Study and analyzing the operational situation of these ports shows that they are not in a appropriate condition and government and the relevant organizations should provide crucial solution to salvage them as soon as possible. This article tries to show the reality of problems and also suggest the codified plan solution to improve them in a specific period of time.

2- Capacity and Loading/Discharge of northern ports

The general specifications of the mentioned ports illustrated below are separated by the quantity of jetties. and port capacity (in marine section) are study by port planning references such as UNCTAD, PI-ANC, etc. [1],[2] and calculated by formula (1) and the result is shown as follows in table 1. right margin, e.g.:

$$C_b = P \times N \times nh_y \times m_b \quad (1)$$

C_b = productivity per berth (tonnes/year)

P = productivity per handling entity (e.g., crane) (tonnes/hour)

N = number of handling entities per ship (-)

nh_y = number of operational hours per year (hours/year)

m_b = berth occupancy factor (-)

Table 1. Nominal maritime capacity of northern ports.

Port name	Num. of jetties	Maritime (capacity (KT
Astara port	2	750000
Anzali port	15	10000000
Noshahr port	7	5000000
Ferydounkenar port	2	750000
Amirabad port	15	10000000

It's necessary to mention that the quantity of operational berths, their equipment, the hinterland capacity, the traffic volume by road received in to ports and many other items are involved in ports calculation capacity; but in this article only maritime capacity is approximately calculated. As a results, about 27 million tons of capacity has been prepared in the northern ports. Even though these ports have some faults in equipment and infrastructures in hinterland, but the main phase of development (marine structures) was done by PMO in recent last years. On the other hand, the table below shows the functional volumes of the northern port's throughputs in the last 10 years. [3] Unfortunately, during this period, we have witnessed a decrease of about 50% in cargo traffic in the Caspian Sea maritime trading and transportation, as shown in figure 1:

It is necessary to mention that, this decrease is also observed in the other ports of the Caspian Sea region. the main reason for this, is the substantial routes and alternative transportation ways, such as pipelines for the carrying of petroleum products and the internal rules changes (quieting oil products swap) and etc. but the main obvious subject is that in the past years, Iranian ports share of the total marine trading in the Caspian Sea region, is almost constant and it is about 20%.

3- Major problems and questions

A fundamental point to consider is, this key question "what is the share of northern ports in the total cargo traffic of the I.R of Iran ports?" According to the PMO data for 1400, the total share of

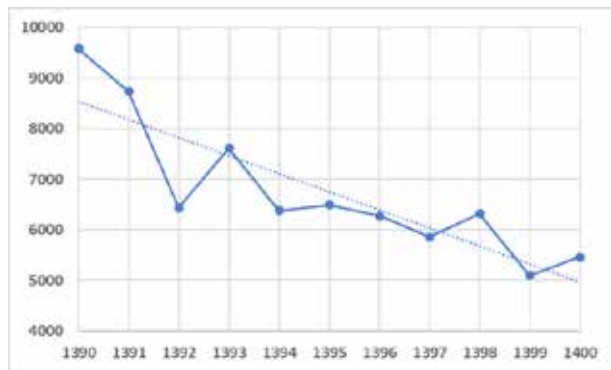


Figure 1. Cargo traffic volume in northern ports

northern ports is about 4% of the total combined load of the country's port throughputs (about 130 million tons), [3] which is unfortunately insignificant. Perhaps in the first stage, at a cost and benefit analysis, the unfeasibility of these ports is very obvious, but should these ports be completely ignored simply because they do not operate properly and they are unprofitable? The answer to this question is definitely NO.

the main reason is the 300-year-old ports and their strategic economic and entrepreneurial role in the northern part of our country. In spite of unfavorable operating conditions, due to a) territorial routes, b) defense and social planning, c) involving a working community of several thousand people and d) the economic dependence of some major northern cit-



ies on these ports; It is strategically very important and effective steps must be taken to strengthen these northern ports. [4] In addition, there is a very good market in the countries of the Eurasian region, one of the main ways of trade is the transit route through Iran for the countries located in this special geographical area. there are several organizations and conventions, which can play a major role in the cargo traffic situation of the Caspian Sea region, especially in I.R. of Iran.

4- The Eurasian Economic Union and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization

In this regard, by summery; only the last two cases are mentioned in this article, the Eurasian Economic Union and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Two which our country has recently joined as observer. The Eurasian Economic Union by itself has created a regional market of 180 million people, which has facilitated trade, created a common market in the CIS countries, phased out customs rules within the union, established a common foreign tariff and harmonized customs formalities. Regarding the Shanghai Cooperation Organiza-



one of the main ways of trade is the transit route through Iran for the countries located in this special geographical area



tion, the member and supervisor countries of this organization; Taken together, they are the largest producers and consumers of energy in the world. Among these countries are the four nuclear powers of China, Russia, India and Pakistan. Russia and China are also permanent members of the Security Council. The population of the organization's countries is about 43% of the world's population. Therefore, as can be seen, in addition to the fact that our country's current share of about 20% in maritime transportation can be increased. A very good market can be created with the new cooperation opportunity mentioned above and due to the existing maritime and port infrastructure capacity (about 27 million tons) can be used to increase the volume of maritime traffic in the northern ports of the country in a codified program in 4 years. The appropriate operational solution for this case is to compile a fundamental transformation document of the northern ports of I.R. of Iran under the following operational axls:

5- Fundamental transformation document of the northern ports of I.R. of Iran

Establishing a specialist working group for the fundamental transformation document of the northern ports with the central core of the PMO & IRISL and also using the extra-sectoral capacities of other internal organization. By carrying out the below-mentioned measures and in the form of a codified plan, we can reach the previous throughputs and operational volumes of about 10 million tons, in the next 4 years.

1-Carrying out complete maritime transportation marketing studies of the countries of the region, relying on the capacities of international organizations and treaties, especially Eurasia, Shanghai and transit, also Integrating the studies of the comprehensive plan of the northern ports.

2-Stopping development of hardware and infrastructures of the northern ports and focusing on soft development and redefining resources and facilities, especially in the equipment sector for peak operational situations. Modifying the manpower of the northern ports as a growing problem is so necessary.

3-Defining the revenue-cost model for each port and directing the ports to try to market new trade

opportunities by themselves.

4-Helping to increase export by creating special facilities for traders through export discounts, cooperation and interaction with shipping companies to stablish feeder lines, not receiving double port dues on multi-port trips, etc.

5- activation the transit routes of country especially with regard to the completion of the railway line between China and Kazakhstan (middle corridor), the new Silk Road and Nostrac corridor. Also amend rules to restore the previous transit routes, including pervious oil products swap and transit of petroleum products to Afghanistan and Iraq and also active the transit routes such as

6-Relocation of at least 25% of imports of crucial goods from southern ports to northern due to the presence of major suppliers in Russia and Kazakhstan and more strategic security of the Caspian Sea region than the Persian Gulf. Specially by the extraordinary opportunities of Russia-Ukraine war.

7-A fundamental change in the field of container transport in the Caspian Sea region and full mobilization of the country's maritime and facilities in order to strengthen combined transport.



8-Fully equipping the northern ports of the country with port and marine equipment such as hopper suction dredgers, which have their sediment became a very problematic in recent years as the Achilles heel of the northern ports.

9-To equate the tariffs for maritime and port services and increase them to be closer to other ports in the region in order to support investments made by the private sector.

10-Investment and increasing the vessels of IRISL in all kinds such as cargo vessels, container ships, Ro-Ro ships and tankers in the Caspian Sea.

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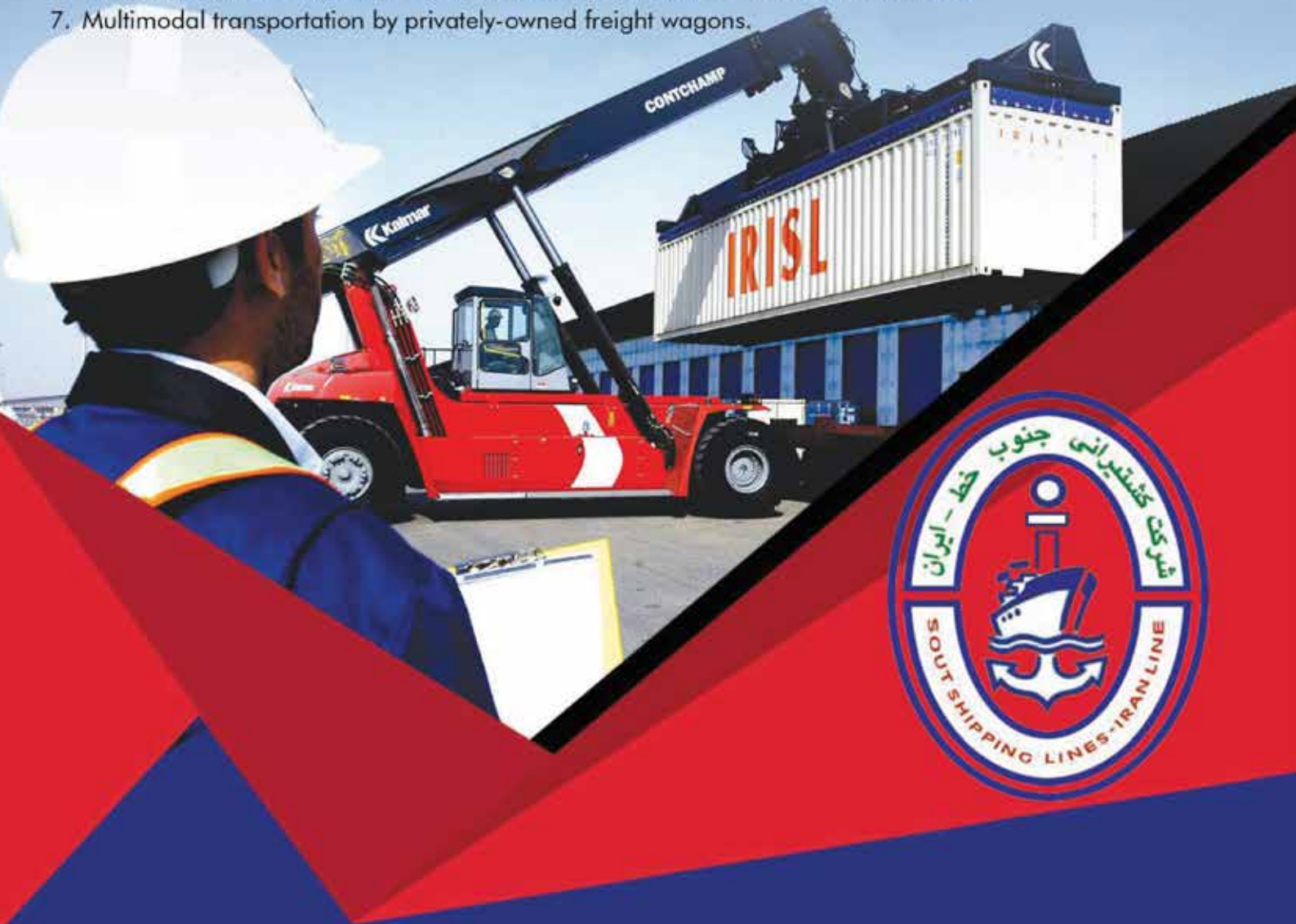


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