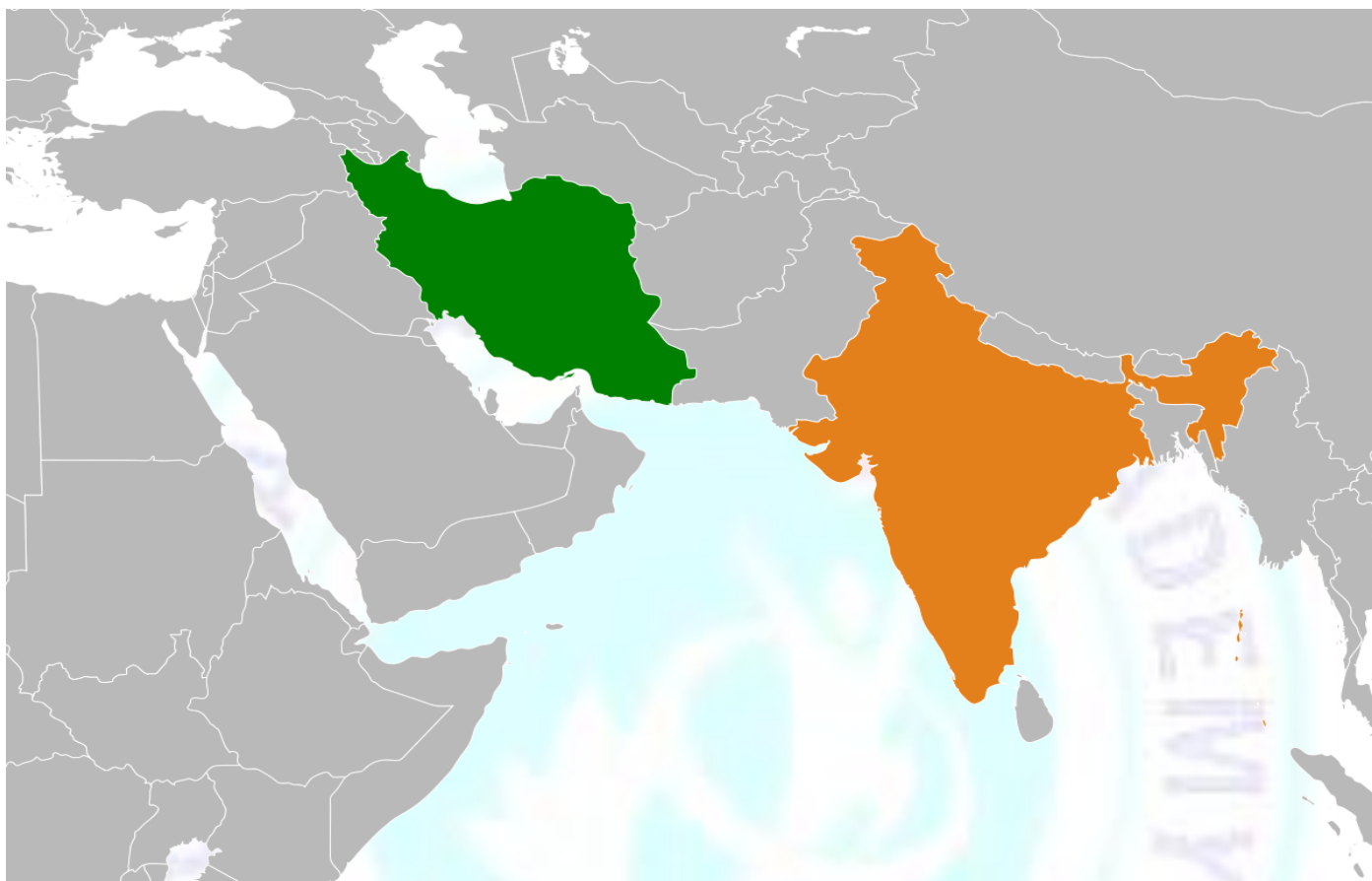


5. India And Iran 75th Anniversary of Bilateral Ties – International Relation

India–Iran relations, established on 15 March 1950 through a Treaty of Friendship, entered their 75th year in 2026. The January 2026 visit of Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi to India inaugurated year-long anniversary celebrations.

Background of India–Iran Relations



1. Civilisational Foundations – Pre-1947 Phase

Deep Historical Roots – India–Iran relations predate the modern state system and are anchored in shared Indo–Iranian civilisation. Linguistic, religious, and cultural continuities demonstrate organic civilisational interaction, rather than transactional diplomacy.

Common Indo–Iranian Heritage – Both societies trace origins to Aryan civilisational streams. Strong similarities between

1. Rigveda (India)
2. Avesta (Iran)

These texts reflect

1. Shared cosmology
2. Linguistic affinity (Sanskrit–Avestan)
3. Early religious concepts

Persian Cultural Influence in India – For nearly eight centuries, Persian was

1. The language of administration
2. The language of courts and elite culture

Profound impacts

1. Development of Sabk-e-Hendi literary tradition
2. Enrichment of Urdu, Hindi, and Punjabi
3. Administrative vocabulary and court culture

Architectural and Artistic Exchange – Indo-Persian synthesis flourished under the Mughals. Persian aesthetics blended with Indian craftsmanship. Iconic example–

Taj Mahal – a symbol of Indo-Iranian cultural fusion.

Parsi (Zoroastrian) Link

The Parsi community, which migrated from Persia to India, remains a living civilisational bridge. Parsis have contributed disproportionately to

1. Indian industry
2. Philanthropy
3. Science and culture

They symbolise mutual tolerance and continuity.

2. Formal Diplomatic Phase (1950–1979)

Treaty of Friendship (1950) – Diplomatic relations formally established on 15 March 1950. Marked India–Iran transition from civilisational to modern state-to-state engagement.

Cold War Divergence – Iran joined the Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO), aligned with the US. India adopted non-alignment with close ties to the Soviet Union.

Result

1. Strategic distance
2. Limited political convergence

Pakistan Factor – Iran's proximity to Pakistan during this phase periodically strained relations with India. However, Iran never fully endorsed Pakistan's anti-India positions.

Early Economic Cooperation – Despite ideological differences, economic engagement continued. Indira Gandhi's 1974 visit laid groundwork for

1. Energy cooperation
2. Pragmatic engagement beyond Cold War binaries

3. Post-Revolution Reset (1979–2000s)

Impact of the 1979 Islamic Revolution – The revolution transformed Iran's internal and external orientation. India was among the first countries to recognise the new Iranian government. This early recognition preserved diplomatic goodwill.

Convergence on Afghanistan – In the 1990s

1. Both India and Iran opposed the Pakistan-backed Taliban.
2. Both supported the Northern Alliance.

This strategic convergence strengthened security cooperation.

Strategic Agreements

Tehran Declaration (2001)

1. Signed during PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee's visit.
2. Defined the relationship as a Strategic Partnership.

New Delhi Declaration (2003)– Signed during President Mohammad Khatami's Republic Day visit. Expanded cooperation in

- a. Energy
- b. Trade
- c. Connectivity

Introduced the early vision of Chabahar Port.

4. Contemporary Phase – Strategic Pragmatism (21st Century)

Managing International Sanctions – Despite US sanctions, India pursued

1. Oil imports (until 2019)
Alternative payment mechanisms
2. Diplomatic balancing

Demonstrates India's issue-based diplomacy rather than alliance-driven foreign policy.

Connectivity and Trade

2016 Trilateral Agreement (India–Iran–Afghanistan) – Operationalised Chabahar as India's gateway to

1. Afghanistan
2. Central Asia
3. Eurasia

Chabahar allows India to bypass Pakistan, a critical strategic gain.

Multilateral Engagement – India supported Iran's entry into

1. Shanghai Cooperation Organisation
2. BRICS

Aligns with India's Act West Policy and Global South diplomacy.

Significance of India–Iran Bilateral Relations

1. Geostrategic Importance – Gateway to Eurasia

Chabahar Port – A 10-year operational agreement (May 2024) strengthened India's role. Functions as a strategic counterweight to CPEC.

By 2026– Serves as a hub for Indian exports to Afghanistan and Central Asia. Enhances India's continental presence.

International North–South Transport Corridor (INSTC) – Iran is the core node of the 7,200-km INSTC.

Connects Mumbai to Moscow via Iran. Reduces transit time by ~40% compared to the Suez route. Boosts India's competitiveness in Eurasian markets.

2. Strategic Depth in Afghanistan

Iran provides India

1. Alternative access routes
2. Humanitarian delivery channels

Prevents Afghanistan from becoming a terror safe haven.

3. Energy Security and Economic Resilience

Iran holds the world's second-largest natural gas reserves. Long-term interest in Farzad-B gas field.

Trade diversification

1. Indian exports– Basmati rice, tea, sugar, pharmaceuticals
2. Imports– Fertilisers, chemicals, dry fruits

Rupee–Rial trade and proposed UPI–Shetab linkage enhance sanction-resilient commerce.

4. Multilateral Cooperation & Global South Leadership

Cooperation in BRICS and SCO

- a. Advocacy for multipolarity
- b. De-dollarisation
- c. Reform of global institutions

Counter-terror coordination through SCO–RATS.

5. Strategic Autonomy and Diplomatic Balancing

India maintains

1. Strong ties with Iran
2. Strategic partnerships with the US, Israel, and Gulf states

Reflects India's independent foreign policy doctrine. India plays a stabilising role in-

1. Strait of Hormuz
2. Persian Gulf maritime security

Operation Sankalp safeguards energy routes (80% of India's crude passes through Hormuz).

Challenges in India-Iran Relations

US Sanctions ("Maximum Pressure" Policy) - Extraterritorial sanctions disrupt

1. Banking
2. Energy trade
3. Logistics

India's economic engagement remains constrained.

Energy Trade Decline - Iran's share in India's oil imports fell from 11% (2018-19) to near zero. Reduced economic interdependence.

Chabahar Uncertainty - Sanction waivers valid only till April 2026. Creates risk aversion among insurers and shipping companies.

China Factor - China-Iran 25-Year Strategic Agreement (\$400 billion). Iran's engagement with CPEC risks diluting India's bypass advantage. Gwadar-Chabahar proximity adds geopolitical complexity.

Implementation Gaps - India's exit from Chabahar-Zahedan railway raised credibility concerns. Slow project execution fuels Iranian frustration.

Domestic Instability in Iran - Economic crisis, inflation, protests. Operational disruptions at Shahid Beheshti Terminal. Adds unpredictability to long-term planning.

Areas of Cooperation

Energy & Resources - Oil, gas, fertilisers, petrochemicals. Joint ventures leveraging Iran's gas abundance.

Trade & Economy

1. Non-oil trade expansion.
2. Sanctions-resilient payment systems.
3. Private sector collaboration.

Connectivity & Infrastructure

1. Chabahar Port
2. INSTC
3. Rail and road projects
4. Alternative corridors via Armenia and Black Sea

Strategic & Defence

1. Maritime security
2. Counter-terrorism
3. Afghanistan stabilisation
4. Strategic dialogues

Science, Technology & Education

1. Pharmaceuticals
2. Space and IT
3. Academic exchanges

Cultural & Civilisational Diplomacy

1. Persian recognised as Classical Language (NEP 2020)
2. Parsi and Zoroastrian heritage
3. 75th anniversary of diplomatic ties (2026)

Way Forward

Sanctions-Resilient Trade

1. Strengthen Rupee-Rial and UPI-Shetab systems.
2. Create non-US-exposed trade entities.

Connectivity Acceleration

1. Complete Chabahar-Zahedan railway.
2. Fully integrate with INSTC.
3. Diversify transit routes.

Diplomatic Calibration

1. Quiet diplomacy amid regional tensions.
2. Multilateral advocacy through BRICS and SCO.

Partnership Deepening

1. Move into high-value sectors (biotech, pharma R&D).
2. Joint innovation and research platforms.

Cultural Soft Power

1. Expand Persian studies.
2. University and people-to-people exchanges.

Institutionalisation

1. Establish a bilateral Strategic Council.
2. Regular ministerial and working-group reviews.

Conclusion

India-Iran relations, anchored in civilisational continuity and strategic connectivity, remain indispensable despite sanctions, regional instability, and great-power rivalry. The relationship exemplifies India's strategic autonomy—balancing principles with pragmatism.

Sustained engagement, timely execution, and sanctions-proof mechanisms are essential to ensure that India-Iran ties evolve from resilient survival to strategic consolidation in a multipolar world.

Source- <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-and-iran-to-start-diplomatic-calendar-for-75th-anniversary-of-bilateral-ties/article70487901.ece>