

Air Force ferrying NEET question papers by aircraft

Bundles flown to more than 20 locations across the country; papers delivered to several northern States on Tuesday, while dry runs were conducted at selected locations across southern India

Saurabh Trivedi

NEW DELHI

The Indian Air Force (IAF) started ferrying National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) question papers by its aircraft on Tuesday to more than 20 locations across the country for the re-test on Sunday. The operation will continue on Wednesday, official sources said.

The Air Force has been deployed to ensure the secure and timely delivery of confidential examination material. More than 22 lakh candidates took the undergraduate medical entrance test held on May 3 which was cancelled following a large-scale paper leak.

According to official sources, the IAF used its transport aircraft, with Mi-17 helicopters being deployed for onward movement to remote and difficult-to-access areas.



An Indian Air Force Mi-17 helicopter does a trial run in Tirunelveli on Tuesday prior to delivery of NEET question papers. PTI

A senior official confirmed that question papers were delivered to several northern States on Tuesday, while dry runs were conducted at selected locations in southern India to validate security and logistics arrangements.

An Indian Air Force helicopter did a trial landing at the Tirunelveli Armed Reserve Ground in Tamil Nadu as part of the preparations, the official added.

The confidential packets are being transported under stringent security protocols and will be distributed to designated examination centres under close surveillance after reaching their respective destinations.

Central Reserve Police Force and Central Industrial Security Force personnel have been deployed to secure the transportation chain at every stage.

The Defence Ministry, Home Ministry, Postal Department, and State governments are coordinating under a framework overseen by the Education Ministry.

Stringent security

The deployment of military assets comes as the government and the National Testing Agency (NTA) implement a multi-layered security framework to ensure the integrity of one of India's largest competitive examinations.

Officials said additional safeguards had been introduced, including strict isolation of paper setters, enhanced monitoring mechanisms, real-time tracking of question paper movement, and coordinated security deployment at examination centres.

The re-test will be conducted under heightened vigilance, with nearly five lakh security personnel.

150 MILLION USERS PUNISHED: TELEGRAM FOUNDER

Govt bans Telegram until June 22 in bid to 'secure' NEET retest

Platform told to disable editing of messages posted until June 30

Soumyendra Barik & Abhinaya Harigovind
New Delhi, June 16

THE GOVERNMENT Tuesday temporarily blocked Telegram, a popular messaging application, until June 22, after the platform's "non-responsiveness" in aiding the ongoing probe into the May 3 NEET-UG paper leak and for curbing the spread of fraudulent claims of access to the June 21 re-examination paper by handles on the platform, *The Indian Express* has learnt.

Telegram is among the most popular personal messaging applications in the country, with an estimated 150 million users, behind only Meta's WhatsApp, which has over 500 million users.

Pavel Durov, founder of the Telegram messaging app, said that by temporarily banning Telegram in the country, the Indian authorities have "punished" over 150 million ordinary users in India.

The ban has not stopped
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Kota is the hub for NEET preparations. PARUL KULSHRESTHA

BJP and Cong face off ahead of Rahul visit, Kota wants to be left alone

Parul Kulshreshtha
Kota, June 16

A DAY before senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi arrives in Kota to kick off his campaign on issues plaguing the education sector, hoping to tap into public anger sparked by the NEET paper leak, the coaching hub has other things on its mind. Like, ironically, the NEET retest, scheduled for June 21.

As Congress leaders approached students as well as

coaching institutes, urging owners to send their members for the meeting Gandhi will address Wednesday, there was more than a little consternation over the timing of the Congress leader's public engagement.

By mid-Tuesday, the BJP had seized on this to mount protests in Kota against Gandhi's interaction, accusing him of inconveniencing students.

Gandhi, who dropped his plans to take a train from Delhi

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Telegram

anything and the leaks moved to other apps”, Durov said.

The Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY) carried out the action under Section 69A of the IT Act at the behest of the National Testing Agency. It also directed the company to disable, in India, its message-editing feature in respect of messages already posted on the platform until June 30, to address “the specific structural feature through which the platform has been used to fabricate after-the-event ‘paper leak’ evidence in respect of national examinations”.

The Telegram app can, however, be used through a connection over a virtual private network (VPN).

A senior government official said that in conversations with Telegram representatives in India, it was conveyed that the company should support ongoing probes into the paper leak, and subsequent claims, by providing metadata and other logs related to messages sent on the platform. Logs are information about messages and who sent them, and can include details like timestamp of a message, IP address, phone number, and device details, among others.

On why action was necessitated against only Telegram, NTA Director General Abhishek Singh told *The Indian Express* the platform was not taking any “proactive action” to deal with channels claiming to provide access to the question paper. “We were playing cat-and-mouse,” he said about NTA’s efforts to report channels claiming to have access to the NEET-UG question paper.

“They (the Telegram officials) told us that Telegram does not store logs and other related information related to messages, so they were unable to share any information with us. We also conveyed to their local representatives to involve their higher-ups abroad in the discussions, but they were non-responsive,” another official said on condition of anonymity.

According to Telegram’s privacy policy, if the company receives a “valid order,” from relevant judicial authorities confirming that a particular user is a suspect in a case involving criminal activities that violate the platform’s terms of service, it will “perform a legal analysis of the request and may disclose (the user’s) IP address and phone number to the relevant authorities”.

However, Telegram also offers a service called ‘secret chats,’ which are essentially end-to-end-encrypted conversa-

tions, and the company does not keep any logs for messages sent under the feature, and as a result does not know “who or when you messaged via secret chats,” its privacy policy states. Such messages, according to the company, can only be accessed from the device they were sent to or from. Queries sent to the IT Ministry and Telegram did not elicit a response until publication.

A second government official said the government had to resort to collating channels and accounts that investigative agencies believed were involved in either the initial leak, or were making subsequent claims about having access to the re-exam paper, and were issuing takedown orders. “But that became an overwhelming task as such channels and accounts kept resurfacing,” this official said.

There is acknowledgement within a section of the government that blocking an entire application may not prove to be a popular decision, and allegations of overreach could be made, especially given that the Centre, on a number of occasions in the past, has been criticised for its overtly sensitive stance on blocking of online content.

In a statement, the NTA said over the last few weeks, Telegram channels operating openly on the platform demanded sums ranging from a few thou-

sand to several lakhs of rupees from candidates and their families, in exchange for purported access to the re-examination paper. As per the NTA, some of these channels were openly advertising their purpose through their names: “PAPER LEAKED NEET”, “Re-NEET 2026”, “Private Mafia”, and “REE NEET MAFIAA”. It clarified that no such papers were available “outside the secured examination chain,” it added.

According to the NTA, the message-editing feature on Telegram, in its present form, permits a channel administrator to edit the content of a previously posted message – including the substitution of attached files such as PDFs – while the original send-time stamp is retained. “This capability has been used, in respect of multiple recent examinations, to fabricate after-the-event ‘paper leak’ artefacts: a channel administrator edits an older, innocuous message to insert the actual question paper after the examination has been conducted, and the resulting chat is then circulated as purported ‘evidence’ that the paper was in circulation before the examination. The MeitY direction closes this avenue of fabrication for the post-examination window in which such artefacts have historically been deployed,” the NTA said.

Speaker asks Mamata faction to 'present its case' amid party split

Meet timing coincided with Abhishek's ED interrogation; he had written to Om Birla urging him not to grant separate status to any rebel faction

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

Amid a petition by the Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar-led faction of 20 rebel Trinamool Congress MPs to merge with the Nationalist Citizen Party of India (NCPI), Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on Monday invited the group of Trinamool MPs led by Mamata Banerjee to "present their case".

The Speaker's office was responding to a June 10 letter of Trinamool national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee.

'Can't be separated'

The letter urged the Speaker not to recognise or grant separate status to any rebel Trinamool faction in the Lok Sabha. Mr. Banerjee said the Trinamool was a "single, indivisible political party" and that the legislature party cannot be separated from the parent or-



Ongoing issue: Trinamool Congress leader Abhishek Banerjee was questioned by the ED for 11 hours in Kolkata on Monday. PTI

ganisation and that no breakaway group based on signatures can claim recognition.

According to the Mamata Banerjee faction, the invitation from the Speaker's office addressed to Mr. Banerjee came at 2 p.m., asking him to meet the Speaker at 4 p.m on Monday. On the same day, Mr. Banerjee

was questioned by the Enforcement Directorate for 11 hours in Kolkata.

Party Lok Sabha member Kirti Azad informed the Speaker's office that since Mr. Banerjee did not have access to his email, he would be informed once the interrogation concluded. Meanwhile, Mr. Azad met Mr. Birla.

Modi holds talks with Carney at G7; hopeful of trade deal

New Delhi and Ottawa have been negotiating a free trade agreement, with Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal visiting Canada last month with a delegation of over 100 industry representatives

Sriram Lakshman

LONDON

Prime Minister Narendra Modi held bilateral talks with his Canadian counterpart Mark Carney on the fringes of the G7 Summit in Evian, France. Discussions covered trade, economy, energy, technology and people-to-people ties, according to Mr. Modi. Prior to the meeting, Mr. Modi said he hoped to accept Mr. Carney's invitation to visit Canada before the year ends, and to complete an India-Canada Free Trade Agreement (FTA) before then.

"In less than a year, it is our fourth meeting, indicating our commitment to strong India-Canada ties. We reviewed the full range of relations between our nations, notably the ground covered since we last met," Mr. Modi said on X. The other three meetings occurred in June last year at the G7 Summit in Kananaskis, Canada and



Prime Minister Narendra Modi meets his Canadian counterpart Mark Carney on the sidelines of the G7 Summit on Tuesday. ANI

then the G20 Summit in November in Johannesburg.

'Significant progress'

"We have been openly exchanging views on bilateral relations and international developments, and we are making significant progress as friendly countries," Mr. Modi told Mr Carney on Tuesday, stressing the desire of India to advance technologically. Canada could be a major

partner in energy security, Mr. Modi said. Canada is one of the top energy exporters in the world. New Delhi and Ottawa decided to progress their Security Energy Partnership in March this year, under which Canada's Cameco and the Department of Atomic Energy in India signed a CAD \$2.6 billion commercial agreement for the long term supply (2027-2035) of uranium.

In 2024, India had been

accused by Canadian authorities of orchestrating acts of violence and extortion in Canada, with Mr. Trudeau alleging that Indian agents were behind the killing of a pro-Khalistan individual, Hardeep Singh Nijjar, in British Columbia in three years prior. New Delhi had accused the Canadian government of being soft on anti-India extremism including not adequately protecting its diplomatic personnel and assets.

The two countries have been negotiating a free trade agreement, with Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal visiting Canada last month with a delegation of over 100 industry representatives. Faced with U.S. tariffs and multiple jokes about annexation from U.S. President Donald Trump, Mr. Carney has sought to diversify Canada's strategic and economic partnerships, deepening ties with China, India, Australia and Europe.

Modi holds bilateral talks with leaders of U.K. and UAE

Sriram Lakshman

LONDON

Prime Minister Narendra Modi held a bilateral meeting with U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer on the fringes of the G7 Summit in Evian, on Tuesday.

“Had a wonderful meeting with PM Starmer in Evian. The last year has been outstanding as far as India-U.K. relations are concerned. The trade deal has opened many avenues of economic cooperation,” Mr. Modi said, adding that the conversation focused on further adding momentum to U.K.-India ties.

The deal, while signed, has not yet been operationalised.

The meeting comes as Mr. Starmer’s political future is in question - with a byelection on Thursday that could put a potential contender for his post, Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham, back in the U.K. Parliament. Under Mr. Starmer, the Labour Party underwent a reset and renewal of its ties with the Indian government (especially the Modi govern-

Conversation with Starmer focused on further adding momentum to U.K.-India ties: PM

ment) and Hindu Britons, among whom it was losing traction.

The Starmer government also finalised and signed a Free Trade Agreement with India in July 2025, after years of negotiations.

PM thanks UAE

Mr. Modi also met with the ruler and Prime Minister of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan (MbZ). The discussions involved ways to strengthen the partnership, as per Mr. Modi.

The Prime Minister said he thanked the UAE for taking care of the Indian expatriate community. The UAE has been hit multiple times by Iran in recent months since the West Asia conflict began at the end of February, with one Indian killed in March.

World suffers from shortage of trust, PM tells G7 leaders

Sriram Lakshman

LONDON

With a message that trust was in short supply globally, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday participated in a session with the Group of Seven (G7) countries and others on “Forging New Partnerships and Rebuilding International Solidarity”.

In addition to the G7 and India, other partner countries – Brazil, Egypt, Kenya, South Korea – participated in the talks along with the World Bank and African Development Bank. Mr. Modi met U.S. President Donald Trump for the first time since February 2025 at the session.

Mr. Modi summarised his messages to the gathering on social media. “Mutual trust is the most important strategic asset today. But, sadly, today, the world does not suffer from a shortage of resources... it suffers from a shortage of trust,” he wrote on X.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with leaders of G7 members and other countries in Evian, eastern France, on Tuesday. AFP

India has, in recent years, sought to play a leadership role for middle income and poorer countries – the Global South. “Emphasised that the Global South has immense expectations from the world. More than support, it seeks partnership,” Mr. Modi wrote, adding that he had highlighted India’s efforts in Africa during the G7 session, including its focus on training, water, agriculture, energy and capacity building.

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Modi holds talks with leaders of Canada, U.K., UAE

LONDON

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday held bilateral meetings with Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney, U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer, and the ruler of the UAE, Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, on the sidelines of the G7 summit in Evian, France. Mr. Modi said he hoped to accept Mr. Carney’s invitation to visit Canada before the year ends, and complete a trade deal before then. » **PAGE 12**

INTERIM U.S. -IRAN ACCORD COULD BE SIGNED ON FRIDAY AT BURGENSTOCK RESORT IN SWITZERLAND

Trump: Iran deal to be public soon, it'll rule out n-weapons for Tehran

Deal allows Tehran to immediately begin selling oil and fuel: US official

Reuters

Evian, (France) Dubai, Jerusalem, June 16

DETAILS BEGAN to emerge on Tuesday of the US and Iran's interim deal to end the war in West Asia, with President Donald Trump saying it will rule out a nuclear weapon for Tehran and a US official saying it allows Iran to sell oil upon signing.

The interim deal is set to extend a tenuous ceasefire announced in April by another 60 days and reopen the Strait of Hormuz, which Iran has effectively blocked since the US and Israel attacked Iran in February.

The US President said the text of the deal states clearly that Tehran will not have a nuclear weapon, and the full agreement would be made public in a formal setting in a few days. Speaking at the G7 meetings in France, Trump added that he liked the idea of sending the Iran deal to Congress for review, a request by some Republican lawmakers.

A senior US official said the deal allows Iran to immediately begin selling oil and fuel, and included banking, transportation and insurance services to facilitate the sales.

The official added the agreement has conditions. "Iran can only access any benefits of the MoU if they abide by all of the points they agreed to - including no nuclear weapon, neutralizing its enriched material, and not interfering with the free flow of navigation in the Strait."

Negotiators will address difficult issues like the future of

Iran's nuclear programme during the next phase of talks, which Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said would start in Switzerland on Friday after the signing of the framework deal.

Two other issues that Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu used to justify the war - ending Iran's support for regional armed proxies and curbing its missile programme - are not thought to be on the agenda for those negotiations.

"Iran wants to get it done," Trump told reporters about the next phase of negotiations with Iran. "They have to get back to business, and the relationship is now normalized, so I think it's going to go pretty quickly." Earlier he described the deal as "a wall to a nuclear weapon" for Iran. US Vice President JD Vance and Iran's top negotiator Mohammad Baqer Ghalibafare expected to attend Friday's formal signing.

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian wrote on social media on Monday that the interim agreement was an "important step" toward stopping the fighting, but noted a final deal for a lasting truce "has yet to take shape". Vance told CNN that the signed memorandum was a "very general document".

Both sides say the Strait of Hormuz will be open from Friday. On Tuesday, Iranian state television reported operations to lift its maritime blockade, while stressing that vessels must still coordinate with Iran's Revolutionary Guards.



A man flashes a victory sign as he rides a motorcycle past a banner that reads "Thank You Iran" following a deal between the US and Iran, in the southern suburbs of Beirut, Lebanon, on Tuesday. REUTERS

Hidden naval mines might still stymie Gulf shipping after war

John Ismay & Nicholas Kulish
June 16

THE DEAL to reopen the Strait of Hormuz has raised hopes that "oil will flow on both ends," as President Donald Trump said Sunday, quickly easing an impending energy crisis.

But it might not be that simple. To restart ship traffic in the strait, one of the most important questions will be whether the Iranians laid naval mines and, if so, how quickly they can be found and neutralized.

It is not even clear that the Iranians laid any mines at all; scores of ships have passed through the strait during the war without hitting mines. In March, United States Central

Command said that it had attacked 16 Iranian mine-laying vessels near the Strait of Hormuz, but the impact of those efforts is uncertain.

On Monday, Trump said that the strait was "already partially opened" and that "they're doing a little hunting for a couple of mines." He is also expected to ask European leaders to provide help clearing mines, saying it would not hurt to have "a ship or two up from a few countries."

Britain said last month that it could deploy mine-hunting drones as part of a multinational mission to secure the Strait. On Monday, President Emmanuel Macron said France was prepared to dispatch mine-clearing vessels if peace deal was confirmed. NYT

A \$300-billion 'fund' for Iran

Dubai: A \$300 billion private fund designed to trigger investment into Iran is outlined in the US-Iran framework agreement and more than half that sum has already been committed, a source told Reuters.

The new fund is a private investment vehicle, not a reconstruction or reparations program and will not include any government money or grants, the source said, adding that companies based in the US, the Gulf Arab states, Asia, South America and Africa have agreed to commit financing.

REUTERS

LNG ships may headline Strait of Hormuz exits

M. Kalyanaraman

CHENNAI

The U.S. Vice President told a news channel that though Iran's nuclear programme would need substantial talks, there was an understanding between the two countries the Strait of Hormuz would reopen "in a toll-free way for the long term, and that's the sort of thing that we're going to figure out in these technical talks." Earlier, President Donald Trump said the area was being demined and traffic would return to pre-war levels over the next two weeks.

While details of the pact would aid global shippers decide on transits, a focus areas is Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) shipping.

On Tuesday, Qatari officials reportedly told investors output can rise to 83% of original capacity within weeks. 17% was damaged in war attacks. Shipping observers report those that try to exit first in numbers may well be LNG ships, which is good news for India as they are critical for local fertilizer making needed for kharif season.

On Monday, the Centre said 16 fertilizer-laden vessels were awaiting passage via the Strait.

Through May, LNG ship transit began happening on the sly with many switching off the Automatic Identification System and taking the Oman route, indicating they were not explicitly permitted by Iran. LNG carrier Umm Al Ashtan, which left Dahej,



A focus area of transit is liquefied natural gas.

Gujarat after unloading cargo there, headed to the Strait beginning of May.

India's Disha crossed on Monday. Junlin Wang, gas and LNG researcher, Rystad Energy says as of Tuesday, about 13 LNG vessels had crossed the Strait.

"Since last week, the main new confirmed movements were Al Daayen, Lebrethah, Rasheeda and Marigold. Al Daayen, Lebrethah and Rasheeda were Qatar-related/Ras Laffan-loaded cargoes, while Marigold was UAE/ADNOC-related, loaded from Das Island. Their destinations are mainly Asia, including China, Pakistan, Southeast Asia and India," she said, and added, "We expect the recovery to be gradual."

Qatar and the UAE LNG exports are a key part of global LNG supply, together reaching about 86.5 MT in 2025, equivalent to about 7.2 MT per month, representing about 19.5% of global LNG exports.

"The destination exposure is heavily Asia-oriented," said Ms. Wang.

Xi backs Myanmar's Min, seeks advancing strategic projects

Press Trust of India

BEIJING

Chinese President Xi Jinping has expressed support for the recently elected Myanmar counterpart Min Aung Hlaing, who is battling rebels at home, and called for advancing safe construction of various China-funded strategic projects.

China places ties with Myanmar as a priority in neighbourhood diplomacy, Mr. Xi told Mr. Min during their talks on Tuesday. Mr. Min arrived here on Monday for a five-day visit.

China supports the new Myanmar government in coordinating development and security imperatives to



Xi Jinping

find a correct path of development that suits its national conditions and wins popular support, Mr. Xi told Mr. Min after a guard honour ceremony.

As Myanmar's neighbour with the longest shared border, China is a trustworthy friend and partner, Mr. Xi said.

'Rupee slide aided textile exporters in 2025-2026'

The industry is hoping for a revival of the market in the coming weeks with the Free Trade Agreements and end of the U.S.-Iran war; AEPC to organise buyer-seller meets to boost offtake

M. Soundariya Preetha
COIMBATORE

Textiles and apparel, which are among India's top merchandise exports, saw a 2% y-o-y decline in shipments in FY2025-2026.

Exports in FY26 were worth \$35.80 billion against \$36.61 billion in FY25.

The Union Commerce Ministry data points to a 1.78% CAGR of textile and apparel exports from 2014-2015 (\$29.47 billion) to FY 26. It peaked to \$37.54 billion in 2021-2022. And then, growth declined by 2% last financial year.

According to data compiled by the Southern India Mills Association (SIMA) based on government statistics, exports were \$37 billion in FY15, This crossed \$40 billion in FY22, but fell to \$36.44 billion in FY25 and closed FY26 at \$35.78 billion.

There are multiple factors affecting exports in the last 12 years and mainly in the last two years, say industry sources.

Exchange rate

"We need to take into consideration the exchange rate in 2024-2025 and 2025-2026. The rupee was at 86.60 on April 2, 2025 and ended 2025-2026 at 94.83 on March 31 this year," said an export promotion council official, who did not want to be identified.



Glimmer of hope: Suppliers to the United States are expecting to get tariff refunds at least to some extent. AFP

"When the U.S. orders fell in 2025-2026, demand from China, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka improved. There was a regional balance to some extent.

"In terms of volume, exports may have grown marginally between 2024-2025 and 2025-2026 though there were severe supply chain disruptions," said Siddhartha Rajagopal, executive director of the Cotton Textiles Export Promotion Council.

"Though exports to Africa shot up for a few months last fiscal, it was one of the most uncertain periods for the textile and garment exporters," said K. Sakthivel, chairman of the Powerloom Development Export Promotion Council. "We are in Japan now and talking to buyers.

We will get a better picture in the coming days," he said.

Exports to the U.S.

Chairman of the Apparel Export Promotion Council (AEPC) A. Sakthivel said that though orders from the U.S., which are among the top three markets for Indian exporters, saw several challenges in 2025-2026, because of the tariff threat. Buyers did not vanish totally. Some of them reduced the prices, some of them shifted a part of the orders, and some waited. So, there were still orders going to the U.S. last year. Now, the suppliers are expecting to get tariff refunds at least to some extent," he said.

AEPC plans to organise buyer-seller meets from

September in the EU countries to tap the opportunities that will come with the implementation of the Free Trade Agreement, A. Sakthivel added.

Regarding long-term export performance, industry officials said when the rupee was about 65 per dollar in FY15, annual textile and garment exports were almost \$30 billion, going by Commerce Ministry statistics. With the Indian rupee at almost 95 in 2025-2026, exports are at \$35 billion. Basically, exports are not growing and apparel shipments have witnessed a major impact, especially in the last couple of years. This is felt more by the MSME exporters, they said.

Likely drop

There are some in the industry who feel that in terms of volume of exports between 2014-2015 and 2025-2026, there could have been a one-third drop. Indian Chamber of Commerce, National Export Committee on Textiles head Sanjay K. Jain said that apparel exports contraction in May (12.98%) is partly due to West Asia slowing down and also because of the higher base of 2024-2025 because of the rush in orders to meet the tariff deadline.

The industry is hoping for a revival of the market in the coming weeks with the FTAs and end of the U.S.-Iran war.