

Western Pressure Drives Iran and Russia Closer

Two countries set to sign strategic cooperation agreement by end of January



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian (R) shakes hands with Russian Deputy Prime Minister for Transport Vitaly Savelyev in a Tehran meeting on December 23, 2024.

Iran never left the negotiating table: foreign ministry spokesperson on talks with West

TEHRAN – The spokesperson for Iranian Foreign Ministry has affirmed the country's commitment to diplomacy and dialogue, addressing Iran's readiness for nuclear talks.

Speaking on the weekly press conference on Monday, Esmail Baqaei stated: "Iran has never abandoned the negotiating table. For over two decades, we have consistently participated in dialogue to address concerns. When questioning Iran's willingness to continue negotiations, it's crucial to examine the historical context and determine who is truly at fault. Moving forward, our decisions will be based on the actions and behavior of other parties. Iran has never been the party to halt negotiations."

Iran, E3 prepare for mid-January nuclear talks

Baqaei confirmed that the next round of nuclear talks between Iran and Europe will take place in mid-January: "The discussions will continue based on the agreed framework from the previous session in December, with the nuclear issue being one of the primary topics." ▶ Page 2

Resistance robust and self-sufficient, IRGC insurmountable: Salami

TEHRAN – Major General Hossein Salami, the Commander-in-Chief of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC), emphasized the steadfast resilience and independence of the regional Axis of Resistance.

Speaking aboard the Shahid Roudaki warship in Bandar Abbas on Monday, Salami highlighted that these allies not only manufacture their own weapons but also develop unique military tactics, underscoring their strategic autonomy.

On Sunday, the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khomeini stressed that Iran does not have proxies, adding that the Resistance groups "are fighting because they have faith."

Moreover, Major General Salami stated that Iran's power "extends beyond its borders," urging the country's adversaries to reconsider their strategies.

He also warned that any miscalculation could have catastrophic consequences.

The IRGC chief praised the dedication and sacrifice of IRGC servicemen, stating, "No power in the world can conquer this strength—be it on land, sea, or air."

Additionally, he stressed the IRGC's commitment to promoting prayer and spiritual resilience. ▶ Page 2

Implications of Lebanese-Syrian ties after Jumblatt's visit

By Sondoss Al Asaad

BEIRUT – For the first time after 13 years of estrangement, Walid Jumblatt, Lebanon's Druze leader, visited Damascus on Sunday, December 22.

Jumblatt met Abu Muhammad al-Julani, currently known as "Ahmad al-Sharaa," with a delegation of political and religious figures affiliated with Lebanon's Progressive Socialist Party (PSP).

Sources close to the PSP stated that the priority of the visit was to reassure the concerns of Syria's Druze minority, as al-Sharaa assured him of his "concern for all Syrian components and partnership."

Al-Sharaa allegedly stated, "Islam does not mean the abolition of other sects, but on the contrary, we have a duty to protect them. Today, we are fulfilling the state's duty in protecting all components of Syrian society."

In light of the lack of clarity on the final formula of the ruling clique in Damascus, sources close to the PSP refused to consider that Jumblatt had been hasty, noting that he did not present himself as a representative of the Lebanese state.

Iraq rejects US demand to dismantle Popular Mobilization Forces

By Wesam Bahrani

TEHRAN – Iraq has firmly rejected efforts by the United States to dismantle the Hashd al-Shaabi, also known as the Popular Mobilization Forces (MPF) or the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU).

A senior official with the Iraqi Resistance Front has revealed that Ibrahim al-Sumaidaie, an advisor to the Iraqi Prime Minister, was forced to resign after publicly stating that the U.S. had requested the dissolution of all popular armed groups, warning that non-compliance could result in serious consequences for the government.

The pressure has intensified in recent weeks. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken toured the region and made an unexpected visit to Iraq on December 13.

In tandem, foreign parties have joined in the call to disband resistance groups in Iraq.

Notably, the United Nations representative in Iraq met with Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani to urge the dissolution of the PMU.

The influential Shia cleric firmly rejected the request.

From fatigues to fashion: Al-Sharaa's suit and tie cannot hide rebels' true nature

By Shahrokh Saei

TEHRAN – Syria's de facto leader Ahmed al-Sharaa has been dancing to the tune of his foreign backers, notably Turkey and the United States, since his armed men ousted the Syrian government earlier this month.

Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) rebel group led by al-Sharaa, previously known as Abu Mohammed al-Jolani, along with its allies took over Damascus on December 8 and announced the toppling of president Bashar Assad.

On Sunday, the HTS leader held his first public news conference since Assad's fall with visiting Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan.

The top Turkish diplomat vowed to continue to support Syria's new rulers and called for lifting international sanctions on the Arab nation.

Al-Sharaa echoed his guest's remarks.

"All the economic sanctions must be lifted, now the predator has gone and only the victims remain. The factors of injustice and oppression have gone. Now the time is opportune for these sanctions to be lifted." ▶ Page 5

Iranian women making headway in technology

TEHRAN – Having made great strides in manufacturing high-tech products and growing the knowledge-based economy, Iranian women are conveying to the world the message that they have the potential to shine in the field of 'technology', the same as other fields.

They have managed to shine brilliantly in different global events, featuring Iranian women's abilities to the world.

The percentage of female CEOs and chairpersons of the board of directors of knowledge-based companies has increased noticeably over the past three years.

The number of female managers has almost doubled, rising from 1,092 in the Iranian calendar year 1400 (2021-2022) to 2,250 by the end of the first nine months of the current Iranian year that started on March 20. ▶ Page 7



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Couples with disabilities celebrate wedding

TEHRAN – On the occasion of Mother's Day, 110 couples with disabilities celebrated their wedding in a ceremony in Tehran on Sunday.

There are around 400,000 persons with disabilities living in Tehran Province, of them some 300,000 are the breadwinners of their families.

The main purpose of such ceremonies is to provide the ground for the presence of people with disabilities in society and to hold special cultural and social programs for this group. The ceremony was held with the aim of promoting the culture of marriage and supporting people with disabilities and their families.

In addition, they are provided with training services, employment loans, and introduction to economic enterprises.

Veteran actress Zhaleh Olov passes away at 97



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TEHRAN PAPERS

In the following column, we take a look at some important contents and views in yesterday's Iranian newspapers.

The Islamic Republic of Iran does not need a proxy force

Siasat-e-Rooz devoted its editorial to the words of the Leader of the Revolution about the Axis of Resistance. The paper said: The Leader of the Revolution pointed to the issue of proxy forces that is always raised and emphasized by the media and Western and regional authorities, saying "The Islamic Republic of Iran does not need a proxy force." The forces that are members of the resistance front are the forces that existed even before the revolution and have been fighting against the Zionist regime. With the Islamic revolution in Iran, the forces of the resistance front gained strength and power, and Iran supported them because of their resistance against the common enemy, which is Israel, America, and their allies. The forces of the Resistance Front are not proxy forces of Iran. But proxy forces are obedient to America. They do not do anything without American's permission. Currently, complex changes are on the way, and these changes will be formed by strengthening the resistance front and its course will be changed, as predicted by the Leader of the Revolution.

Jam-e-Jam: Iran's fundamental role in West Asia

In an analysis, Jam-e-Jam dealt with the meeting of the American and European delegations with HTS leader al-Julani in Damascus and wrote: It must be said that America has always sought to expand its dominance and influence in the West Asia region and the countries member to the Axis of Resistance. This issue has two main reasons: one is to weaken the growing power of the Axis of Resistance centered on Iran, and the second is to secure the interests of arrogant countries through looting the property and natural resources of those countries, such as Syria. But another important point in these meetings and exchange of messages is that it shows special coordination in the West, America, and Israel to put pressure on Syria and public opinion to prevent the presence of Iran in Syria, and this only shows they are fearful of Iran's positive and powerful presence in the region. The West and America have not yet understood that if Iran is present anywhere, it is to fight terrorism. The pressure by the West, particularly the United States, on the new rulers of Syria is to reduce the strength of the resistance front and prevent the increase of Iran's power

and influence in the region as Iran has always been the frontrunner in the fight against terrorism and domination by America and the Zionist regime in the region.

Donya-e-Eqtesad: Iran is absent from economic corridors

In a note, Donya-e-Eqtesad addressed Iran's absence in the global competition for corridors. It wrote: Iran has been practically ignored in major projects such as China's Belt and Road and Trans-Caspian projects. Various corridors for trade have been proposed and built in the region in recent years. Iran should take first place in both the Middle Corridor (also called TITR - Trans-Caspian International Transport Route), and INSTC, but it has lagged behind its neighbors, forcing rivals and even allies such as China and Russia to look for alternatives. Due to Iran's delay in completing the Rasht-Astara railway, China chose the Trans-Caspian alternative to deliver goods through Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Georgia to the Black Sea, Turkey, and Europe. Due to some tensions in Iran-Azerbaijan relations over Azerbaijan's plans to build the so-called Zangezur Corridor, Baku is less willing to facilitate the operation of the INSTC corridor through Iran. Therefore, Iran is losing money in this lucrative area and is losing a key tool to replace oil revenues.

Hamshahri: Syria is new playground against Tehran

Hamshahri wrote: "Isolation of Iran in the region" is one of the main approaches pursued by the Washington-Tel Aviv axis in recent months. This policy has gained momentum with the fall of the Assad government in Syria. Accordingly, confronting Iran's role in the future of Syria has been determined. While developments in Syria are still the focus of international and regional media, the Americans are implementing a new anti-Iran project in Damascus. According to this strategy, we have witnessed extensive actions from the Zionist-Western axis to realize it. In such a situation, however, the realities in the region show that the approach of isolating Iran has not achieved results for the enemy, and the Islamic Republic of Iran is advancing its political-economic diplomacy at regional and international levels with an ever-increasing dynamism. An example is the recent visit of the Iranian President to Egypt.

Iraq's Kurdistan Region aims to deepen ties with Iran under new consul general

TEHRAN – In a bid to enhance bilateral ties, the Iranian Consul General in Erbil, Faramarz Asadi, received a call for increased cooperation from Safeen Dizayee, the Foreign Relations Minister of Iraq's Kurdistan Region, during their credentials meeting on Sunday.

The meeting, which also included Shaker Hussein, the director responsible for the Iraqi Kurdistan Region's relations with Iran, saw Dizayee extend congratulations to Asadi on his new role and express optimism about the potential for stronger ties.

Dizayee affirmed the Kurdistan Region's readiness to support and advance cooperation, stating, "We are committed to enhancing our coordination to serve the mutual interests of both our regions, thereby strengthening our relationship and expanding our trade."

Asadi, taking up his new position with enthusiasm, conveyed his desire to elevate the relationship between Iran and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

"I am hopeful that during my tenure, we will see significant improvements in our collaboration," he said.

The discussions also touched on the historical connections that have long existed between the Iraqi Kurdistan Region and Iran, setting a foundation for future cooperation.

Asadi has taken over the role from Nasrollah Rashvandi, marking a new chapter in the diplomatic engagements between these neighboring regions.

The bond between Iran and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) is deeply rooted



Iranian Consul General in Erbil, Faramarz Asadi, in a meeting with Safeen Dizayee, the Foreign Relations Minister of Iraq's Kurdistan Region on December 2, 2024

in shared cultural, linguistic, and religious ties, which naturally foster stability and security against external threats.

Iran has been instrumental in backing the KRG, especially evident in the battle against ISIS, by offering both military support and humanitarian assistance.

A landmark event in this relationship was the visit of Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian to Erbil in September.

President Pezeshkian's diplomatic outreach was seen as a gesture of goodwill, aiming to deepen economic ties and address security concerns, including the handling of terrorist groups and militants in a manner that respects both regions.

His visit has been credited with fostering a more robust framework for dialogue and partnership, which is now expected to flourish during bilateral ties.

Iran never left the negotiating table: foreign ministry spokesperson on talks with West

From page 1 ▶ Baqaei confirmed that the next round of nuclear talks between Iran and Europe will take place in mid-January: "The discussions will continue based on the agreed framework from the previous session in December, with the nuclear issue being one of the primary topics."

Baqaei stated that both sides had agreed to continue the negotiations based on the previous format and framework.

He stressed Iran's unwavering commitment to dialogue over the past two decades, reiterating that the country has never abandoned the negotiating table.

The spokesperson emphasized that Iran's future decisions will depend on the behavior and actions of the other parties involved in the talks.

Tensions between Iran and European nations have intensified in recent years, with Europe accusing Iran of supplying ballistic missiles to Russia for use in the Ukraine conflict—claims Tehran has categorically denied.

In November, the European troika spearheaded a resolution by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Board of Governors.

The resolution criticized Iran for its alleged lack of cooperation with the agency and called for a comprehensive report on its nuclear activities by spring 2025.

In response to the resolution, Iran announced the activation of new and advanced centrifuges,



signaling a firm stance in the ongoing dispute.

Condemnation of U.S. interference

Baqaei also addressed the Leader's recent remarks on U.S. involvement in unrest in Iran: "These statements from U.S. officials are nothing new. When a senior official from the Democratic administration openly intervenes in a country's internal affairs, it adds another dark chapter to the extensive record of U.S. interference in Iran, which we strongly condemn."

Baseless allegations against Iran denounced

Responding to claims that Iran uses children to build proxy networks against Israel, Baqaei remarked: "These accusations have reached a new low in quality—absurd and entirely baseless. This claim is laughable and unfounded. Iran neither has proxies nor requires them."

Developments in Syria and U.S. policies

On the U.S.'s decision to waive

a bounty for Abu Mohammad al-Jolani, Baqaei commented: "The Syrian people are fully capable of deciding their own future. These remarks demonstrate America's imperialistic tendencies and ongoing interference in the internal affairs of other nations. Such actions only result in instability and division. The so-called terrorist sponsors' lists are just tools in the U.S. foreign policy arsenal used to pressure other countries."

Progress in Iran-Egypt relations

Regarding recent developments in Tehran-Cairo relations, Baqaei said: "President Masoud Pezeshkian's visit to Egypt was for the D-8 multilateral summit, an organization that has been active for nearly three decades. Participation in such platforms is important for fostering both multilateral and bilateral ties.

Egypt is a key regional player and a significant force in the Islamic and Arab worlds. Strengthening relations with neighboring

countries, including Egypt, remains a priority for Iran."

Iran-Russia agreement nearing finalization

On the Iran-Russia agreement, Baqaei announced: "The agreement is scheduled to be signed in late January, following the completion of discussions to finalize the timeline."

Addressing Palestinian rights and Israeli aggression

On recent UN resolutions, Baqaei highlighted: "This week, three resolutions were adopted concerning the Israeli regime, occupied Palestine, and Lebanon.

One focuses on the Israeli regime's responsibility for environmental damages caused by attacks on Lebanon's oil reserves since 2007. Another emphasizes Palestinian ownership of natural resources, underscoring the ongoing exploitation in occupied territories. The third resolution requests an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice on halting Israel's settlement activities."

Baqaei dismissed reports of normalization between Saudi Arabia and Israel: "Normalization only emboldens the Israeli regime. It cannot erase the crimes committed against Palestinians. Regional countries have a moral and legal obligation to confront these injustices."

The Gaza Health Ministry said on Sunday that at least 45,259 people have been killed and 107,627 injured during more than 14 months of the Israeli regime's genocidal war.

U.S. hostage-taking of nationals breach of intl. law: Iran deputy FM



Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister for Consular, Parliamentary, and Expatriate Affairs, Vahid Jalalzadeh

TEHRAN – Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister for Consular, Parliamentary, and Expatriate Affairs, Vahid Jalalzadeh, has vehemently denounced the recent arrests of Iranian nationals by the United States, accusing the U.S. of engaging in "hostage-taking" and violating international law.

This month, the U.S. detained two Iranian expatriates, alleging they supplied components to unidentified drone manufacturers whose weapons were used by the Iraqi Resistance to target U.S. forces in West Asia. Jalalzadeh took to X to decry the U.S. actions as "unilateral and inhumane," asserting that the country is using sanctions as a pretext for the wrongful detention of Iranian citizens. He emphasized Iran's unwavering commitment to defending the rights of its nationals worldwide.

Among those detained is Mohammad Abedini Najafabadi, a mechanical engineering graduate from Iran's Sharif University of Technology and the head of a Switzerland-based company that focuses on precision measurement equipment. He was apprehended at Milan Airport in Italy on December 16 at the request of the U.S. while traveling to Switzerland.

Another Iranian national, Mahdi Mohammadsadeghi, was arrested in Massachusetts in the U.S. around the same time. Issa Kameli, Iran's Assistant Foreign Minister and Director General for the Americas Department, echoed Jalalzadeh's sentiments, dismissing the U.S. Department of Justice's (DOJ) allegations against another Iranian national, Mohammad Reza Nouri, as "politically motivated." Kameli lambasted the accusations' lack of substantiation, pointing out that they exemplified a wider trend of U.S. judicial overreach.

The U.S. claims that Mohammad Reza Nouri, allegedly affiliated with Iran's Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC), orchestrated the 2022 murder of U.S. citizen Stephen Troell in Baghdad as retaliation for the assassination of General Qassem Soleimani.

Nouri remains in Iraq, where he has been arrested and convicted, according to the DOD.

Addressing the situation involving two other Iranian citizens arrested in the U.S. and Italy, Kameli criticized the U.S. judicial system for being weaponized to issue unfounded and politically motivated rulings. He stated that such actions, often justified by claims of circumventing unilateral U.S. sanctions—which lack legitimacy under international law and contradict established human rights norms—constitute wrongful conduct by the U.S. government and entail its international responsibility.

He reiterated that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as part of its inherent responsibilities, will persistently and vigorously advocate for and protect the rights of Iranian citizens worldwide.

Resistance robust and self-sufficient, IRGC insurmountable: Salami



Commander-in-Chief of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC) Major General Hossein Salami during a speech in Bandar Abbas on December 23, 2024

TEHRAN – Major General Hossein Salami, the Commander-in-Chief of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC), emphasized the steadfast resilience and independence of the regional Axis of Resistance.

Speaking aboard the Shahid Roudaki warship in Bandar Abbas on Monday, Salami highlighted that these allies not only manufacture their own weapons but also develop unique military tactics, underscoring their strategic autonomy.

On Sunday, the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei stressed that Iran does not have proxies, adding that the Resistance groups "are fighting because they have faith."

Moreover, Major General Salami stated that Iran's power "extends beyond its borders," urging the country's adversaries to reconsider their strategies. He also warned that any miscalculation could have catastrophic consequences.

The IRGC chief praised the dedication and sacrifice of IRGC servicemen, stating, "No power in the world can conquer this strength—be it on land, sea, or air." Additionally, he stressed the IRGC's commitment to promoting prayer and spiritual resilience. "Even during war, our warriors do not neglect their prayers, knowing that ignoring the enemy leads to sudden attacks," he added.

Additionally, Salami made pointed references to the Israeli regime, describing its future as bleak.

"The Zionist enemy thinks that

killing women, children, and unarmed individuals in Gaza is a success, but the truth is they are more anxious than ever," he said, adding that Israelis are "inflamed at an impasse with no bright future ahead."

The IRGC chief said efforts to suppress believers would ultimately fail, as divine justice favors the righteous.

He also highlighted that capturing Syrian territory would not solve Israel's problems and would only provide another battlefield for faithful warriors. Following the downfall of Bashar al-Assad's government this month, the Israeli regime has invaded Syrian territory and conducted airstrikes on hundreds of locations across the Arab country.

The regime faced no opposition from Syria's new de-facto "leadership," headed by Ahmed al-Sharaa (also known as Mohammad al-Jolani) of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS).

'Divine calculations will never change'

Also on Monday, Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, the Speaker of the Iranian Parliament, highlighted the challenging situation of the Resistance Front in southern Lebanon and Syria, noting that difficult conditions test the loyalty of individuals to divine principles. During a speech at IRGC's Imam Hossein University, he emphasized that Iran "must continue to stand against its enemies with faith and realistic idealism." He concluded by stating that divine calculations will never change and the path of Resistance will continue.

Western pressure drives Iran and Russia closer

By Soheila Zarfam

TEHRAN – A strategic cooperation agreement is poised to deepen the partnership between Iran and Russia, a development welcomed by insiders and despised by those who hope to decouple the two challengers of Western hegemony.

A 20-year strategic agreement signed in 2001 marked the first major cooperation pact between Tehran and Moscow, establishing collaboration in areas such as industry, technology, security, energy, and nuclear energy. Extended for five years in 2020, this initial agreement is now being replaced by a new pact.

At a press conference on Monday, Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman, Esmail Baghaei, revealed that both parties are consulting to identify the optimal time to sign the agreement. "We hope that the deal will be finalized and signed by the end of January," he stated.

Baghaei's remarks were quickly validated when a high-ranking Russian diplomatic delegation arrived in Tehran hours later for meetings with President Masoud Pezeshkian. Word has come that the new strategic cooperation agreement between Iran and Russia will be signed during Pezeshkian's long-anticipated visit to Moscow next year.

What's a strategic cooperation agreement?

A strategic cooperation agreement between two countries is a high-level, long-term pact designed to foster deep and enduring collaboration across multiple areas of mutual interest.

These agreements establish a framework for broad cooperation, often encompassing political, security, defense, economic, technological, cultural, energy, and educational sectors.

The most significant and widely reported strategic agreement Iran has signed recently is the 25-year Cooperation Program with China in March 2021.

The deal has been described as a "cooperation road map" by former Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif who oversaw its signing. Zarif is now back as the Vice President for Strategic Affairs under Pezeshkian's government.

The upcoming strategic cooper-

ation agreement will be similar to the one Iran signed with China, said Mahmoud Shouri, a Russia expert and director of the Institute of Iran and Eurasia Studies. It will, however, be more expansive than the 2001 pact with Moscow.

The expert told the Tehran Times



Pezeshkian tells Russian deputy PM Iran resolved to complete Rasht-Astara railroad

TEHRAN – Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian has underscored the nation's unwavering commitment to completing the Rasht-Astara railroad project, a crucial part of the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC).

During a meeting in Tehran with Russian Deputy Prime Minister Vitaly Savelyev, Pezeshkian affirmed that Iran is determined to fulfill its agreement with Russia for the railroad's construction.

President Pezeshkian urged Russia to initiate the project's preliminary phases, including route surveying. He also emphasized that Iran will meet its obligations on schedule. Savelyev confirmed Russia's financial backing for the project via a line of credit and noted their cooperation with Azerbaijan on the INSTC. He stressed Russia's eagerness to expedite the project. The Rasht-Astara railroad is poised to significantly boost cargo transport between Iran and Russia. Savelyev projected an initial capacity of 15 million tons once the rail line is operational. The INSTC, a vast network linking India to Europe via multiple modes of transport, will benefit greatly from this development.

Iran anticipates the railroad will carry one million passengers and 10 million tons of goods in its first year. Savelyev also extended an invitation for President Pezeshkian to visit Russia for further discussions in early 2025.

that the agreement's text is already drafted, and both countries are now focused on scheduling a signing ceremony.

"The agreement will be broader in scope," he explained, "encompassing defense, security, and political aspects, while also including new areas of cooperation such as medical, customs, and novel economic fields."

Shouri said both countries have considered the changes in the regional and international landscape. "Many developments have occurred since 2001," he stated, "and Tehran and

Moscow are addressing these issues in a way that benefits them both."

Western media coverage of the impending agreement with Russia is also expected to mirror the attention given to the previous agreement with China: malicious and diabolical.

Western states will be concerned and provoked into launching media campaigns against any cooperative pacts involving Iran, Russia, and China.

"These countries are averse to the current existing Western-dominated world order. The West considers each a threat and naturally observes their collaboration with anxiety," the expert remarked.

Bahman acknowledged that the forthcoming Iran-Russia cooperation agreement will come under attack by the same propaganda campaign, but he predicts it will be more fruitful than the agreement with China.

He attributed the challenges with China to sanctions, which have impeded the practical implementation of many deals.

"Sanctions have been a constant obstacle for collaboration between Iran and China," he noted. In contrast, he believes that Iran and Russia will have more freedom in future agreements because "Russia is already subject to extensive sanctions and won't be negatively impacted by those aimed at Iran."

Western pressure serves to strengthen Iran-Russia ties

Since the beginning of the Ukraine war and the subsequent storm of accusations against Iran for its refuted role in the conflict, Western think tanks, institutes, and media outlets have been exploring methods to drive Iran and Russia apart.

The West has tried everything—from secondary sanctions and propaganda campaigns to promoting dissent, cyber-attacks, and exploiting differences—in its ongoing attempts to separate Tehran and Moscow, and it is still exploring additional measures.

Not only have past attempts failed, but future efforts are also likely to be fruitless.

The only significant shift observed between Iran and Russia is their growing closeness, fueled by a mutual desire to push back against Western dominance and pressure.

During his October meeting with Pezeshkian, Russian President Vladimir Putin said ties with Iran are a "top priority". That came after the Iranian president said Tehran will not forget the "friends that aided it during difficult days."

"Based on this deal Iran will sell Kish Island to China," said an anti-Iran analyst on a Western-based Persian-language TV news channel, maintaining a composed demeanor while spewing nonsense. Similar unfounded and ridiculous claims circulated on other comparable programs and channels. The details of the agreement with Beijing have yet to be disclosed.

Why does the West stand in the way of Iran's partnerships?

According to Shoaib Bahman, an expert in international affairs and head of the Institute of Contemporary International Studies in Tehran,

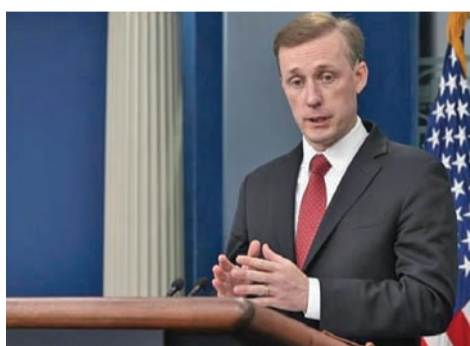
Trump could be key to reviving Iran nuclear agreement: Jake Sullivan

TEHRAN – The U.S. National Security Advisor, Jake Sullivan, has emphasized that President-elect Donald Trump could play a significant role in brokering a new nuclear agreement with Iran.

Speaking during an interview with CNN, Sullivan underscored the importance of Trump's upcoming administration in addressing Iran's nuclear program.

Sullivan claimed that Iran, alongside its allies in the Resistance Axis, has been weakened following the collapse of the Syrian government. He further expressed alarm over indications that Iran might reconsider its long-standing nuclear doctrine, which has thus far rejected the development of nuclear weapons.

According to Sullivan, the Biden administra-



tion has already conveyed its apprehensions regarding Tehran's potential shift toward nuclear armament to Trump's team.

"The risk of Iran moving towards the development of nuclear weapons is real, and we are vigilantly monitoring this possibility," Sullivan stated.

He went on to allege that recent military strikes by Israel against Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas, and key Iranian missile and defense sites have further undermined Iran's regional influence.

"It wouldn't be surprising if some in Iran began advocating for a reassessment of their nuclear doctrine in response to these challenges," he added.

The advisor revealed that discussions about Iran's nuclear policy have not been limited to the U.S. administration. Talks have also been held with Israeli officials, highlighting the shared concerns over a potential shift in Tehran's nuclear stance.

The Islamic Republic, however, maintains its firm position on nuclear non-proliferation.

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

Ties with Egypt will strengthen Iran's regional strategy, says former MP

TEHRAN – In an interview with ISNA, Mahmoud Abbaszadeh Meshkini, the former spokesperson of the Iranian parliament's national security and foreign policy committee, underscored the significance of Iran's diplomatic engagement with Egypt.

He highlighted that strengthening ties with Egypt is crucial for Iran to strengthen its position as a formidable power in West Asia and East Africa.

Abbaszadeh remarked, "Egypt is one of the most important countries in the region, and due to its specific cultural and historical characteristics, there are many common grounds between Iran and Egypt." He emphasized that collaboration with Egypt

could pave the way for Iran to form a powerful alliance in Africa, enhancing its geopolitical influence.

The former lawmaker noted that the success of foreign diplomacy is intrinsically linked to domestic strength. "The reality of diplomacy today is that each actor in the world can play in the international arena to the extent of their power," he stated.

Abbaszadeh called for a unified effort among all branches of government to focus on bolstering internal power, which he believes is essential for effective international engagement.

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

Media briefing held for General Soleimani's fifth martyrdom anniversary



TEHRAN – The media briefing for the fifth anniversary of General Qassem Soleimani's martyrdom was held on Monday, at the Mehr Hall of the Art Bureau in Tehran.

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

DECEMBER 24, 2024

Straight Truth
TEHRAN TIMES

3

SPORTS

Reasons behind Garrido's dismissal as Persepolis coach



TEHRAN – Juan Carlos Garrido's tenure at Persepolis football club was short-lived, lasting only five months. During this time, the team struggled to meet expectations, both domestically and in the AFC Champions League Elite.

This change in coaching staff could be significant given Persepolis's history as one of Iran's most successful football clubs, having won 15 league titles.

The departure might reflect broader trends in football where clubs often change coaches to refresh strategies or due to performance issues, despite Persepolis being a dominant team in Iranian football.

Domestically, Persepolis suffered a series of losses in the Iran's Persian Gulf Professional League (PGPL), including a surprising home defeat against struggling teams Nassaji and Mes. This led to growing discontent among the fans and pressure on the coaching staff.

In the AFC Champions League Elite, Persepolis have not secured a place in the knockout rounds so far. Despite taking an early lead against Pakhtakor and Al Rayyan, they were unable to hold on and ultimately were held to draw. This disappointing performance further fueled criticism of Garrido's tactics and team selection.

Other factors that may have contributed to Garrido's failure.

The Iranian league is known for its physicality and tactical complexity, and Garrido may have struggled to adapt his coaching style to these challenges.

Language barriers and cultural differences hindered Garrido's ability to effectively communicate with players and staff.

Garrido's short tenure may not have been long enough for him to implement his tactical ideas and build a strong team dynamic. It can be another reason to force him out.

Ultimately, a combination of these factors likely contributed to Garrido's failure to meet expectations at Persepolis.

Now, Karim Bagheri has been appointed as Persepolis interim coach. Persepolis sit fourth in the Iran league with 23 points, five points behind leader Tractor.

Iran futsal year in review

TEHRAN – Thailand advanced to the knockout stage as the Group B runners-up after wins against Croatia (2-1) and Cuba (10-5), while their tie against eventual champions Brazil ended 9-1 in favor of the South American side.

Debutants Afghanistan had a tournament to remember, sealing a spot from Group C in the knockout stage as one of the four best third-placed sides, with their 6-4 win over Angola confirming their ticket despite subsequent defeats to Argentina (2-1) and Ukraine (4-1).

Tajikistan's first appearance on the global stage ended with three defeats in Group E, losing to Morocco (4-2), Portugal (3-2) and Panama (8-3).

Iran were peerless in Group F, with the 13-time AFC Futsal Asian Cup champions defeating Venezuela (7-1), Guatemala (9-4) and France (4-1), the-afc.com reported.

The Asian challenge, however, ended in the Round of 16 with Afghanistan losing 3-1 to Paraguay, Thailand suffering a 5-2 defeat against France while Iran were edged 4-3 by Morocco.

Brazil won a record-extending sixth title with a 2-1 defeat of Argentina in the final while

Ukraine cruised 7-1 past France in the bronze medal playoff.

Sharifi snatches gold at 2024 Asian Youth & Junior Championships

TEHRAN – Iran's Haniyeh Sharifi of Iran won a gold medal at the 2024 Asian Youth & Junior Championships on Sunday.

Sharifi lifted 88kg in snatch and 112kg in clean and jerk for an aggregate lift of 200kg in the women's youth 71kg weight class.

Kazakhstan's Danilova Kira and Ysmanova Bibinur won the silver and bronze medal with 199kg and 170kg, respectively.

Iran's Reyhaneh Karimi claimed a bronze medal with 211kg in the women's junior 71kg. Phattharathida of Thailand (221kg) and Indonesian Indah Afriza (219kg) claimed gold and silver, respectively.

Zahra Hosseini snatched a bronze in the women's youth 64kg with 183kg. South Korea's Dayeon Lee (193kg) and Kazakhstan's Tanibergenova Altynay (192kg) won gold and silver, respectively.

Mehrab Davasari won a silver in the men's youth 67kg with 283kg. Kazakhstan's Askarbay Alikhan (284kg) won the gold and bronze medal went to Vietnamese weightlifter A Tung (282kg).

2024 Asian Youth & Junior Championships are being held in Doha, Qatar from Dec. 19 to 25.

Iran's Hazfi Cup Round of 16: Persepolis to play Sepahan

TEHRAN – Persepolis football team will play defending champions Sepahan in 2024/25 Iran's Hazfi Cup Round of 16.

The match will be held in Isfahan's Naghsh-e Jahan Stadium.

Shams Azar will host the most decorated team Esteghlal in Qazvin.

The Round of 16 matches has been scheduled for Feb. 12 to 15.

The Hazfi Cup is an Iranian knockout football competition held annually by the Football Federation of Iran.

Round of 16:

- *Gol Gohar vs. Kheybar
- *Sanat Naft vs. Besat Kermanshah
- *Sepahan vs. Persepolis
- *Mes Rafsanjan vs. Nassaji
- *Pakan vs. Foolad
- *Shams Azar vs. Esteghlal
- *Malavan vs. Zob Ahan
- *Shahrdari Noshahr vs. Palayesh Naft Bandar Abbas

Women powerlifters to represent Iran at LA 2028

TEHRAN – Head of powerlifting committee of Iran's Sports Federation for the Disabled Babak Mohammadi said that the women powerlifters will also represent the country in the next Paralympic Games in Los Angeles.

According to him, the Iranian women will participate in the Paralympic Games for the first time.

"The Iranian women will take part in the 2025 Cairo Para Powerlifting World Championships to be held in October in Cairo, Egypt. The competition serves as 2028 Paralympics qualification," Mohammadi said.

"We will also send our women powerlifters to the 2025 Youth Asian Games and 2026 Asian Para Games in Nagoya, Japan," he added.

Energy imbalance challenges highlighted at TCCIMA meeting

TEHRAN - Alireza Kolahi Samadi, head of the Industry Committee at the Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture (TCCIMA), stated that \$35 billion is required to address power shortages and modernize the country's electricity grid.

He also called for the establishment of a unified energy command to tackle systemic inefficiencies, the TCCIMA portal reported.

Kolahi noted that Iran faces a shortage of at least 10,000 megawatts in electricity production capacity. Public investment in electricity generation stopped in the late 2000s, and private-sector investments have also declined.

The official explained that the policy of price stabilization since the mid-2000s exacerbated the decline in energy infrastructure investment.

Kolahi highlighted that from 1999 to the late 2010s, only 15-20 percent of required investments in the power transmission and distribution network were made. Over the past three years, investment in this area has nearly stalled.

He warned that outdated power transmission and distribution networks have seen minimal investment in recent years, with efforts almost halting over the past three years.

Kolahi also raised concerns about decentralized power generation, cautioning that non-standard fuel use could harm modern engines and worsen environmental pollution.

Iran is tackling with significant energy imbalances as cold weather drives up demand, exacerbating fuel shortages and straining the country's power plants. The government has responded with systematic power outages across several provinces, highlighting deep-rooted challenges in the country's energy infrastructure.

As temperatures plummet during the winter months, energy consumption has surged, placing immense pressure on the country's electricity grid. Natural gas, which supplies a majority of Iran's power plants, is in short supply as residential heating demands take precedence over industrial and power generation needs.

Despite being one of the world's largest producers of natural gas, Iran faces limitations in delivering sufficient fuel to its power plants. Aging infrastructure, inefficiencies in transmission systems, and sanctions that restrict access to modern technology have further complicated the situation.

The Ministry of Energy has acknowledged that many power plants are operating below capacity due to fuel shortages, leading to widespread electricity cuts. Systematic scheduled blackouts have been implemented in major cities and rural areas, affecting businesses, households, and essential services.

In recent weeks, large portions of the country have faced unannounced power outages, disrupting daily routines and business activities. Reports indicate that industries and small enterprises, particularly in energy-intensive sectors such as manufacturing, have suffered production losses.

The outages have sparked public frustration, with concerns about economic repercussions and the impact on hospitals, schools, and households during the harsh winter. Local officials have urged citizens to reduce electricity and gas consumption, yet the imbalances persist.

The current energy imbalance stems from several interconnected factors:



Overreliance on Natural Gas: Iran's heavy dependence on natural gas for both residential and industrial consumption makes the energy system vulnerable during peak demand periods.

Aging Power Plants: Many of Iran's power plants are outdated, with low efficiency and high fuel consumption rates. The lack of upgrades has diminished their reliability.

Sanctions and Investment Shortages: Sanctions have restricted foreign investment and access to modern energy technologies, hindering the development of renewable energy projects and infrastructure improvements.

Inefficient Energy Consumption: Iran's subsidized energy prices have led to high consumption rates, discouraging energy-saving practices among industries and households.

To resolve Iran's persistent energy challenges and prevent recurring outages, the government must prioritize comprehensive reforms and strategic investments:

Expand Renewable Energy Capacity: Iran has significant potential for solar and wind energy development, particularly in its sun-rich and wind-prone regions. Investing in renewable energy would reduce dependence on natural gas and increase the resilience of the power grid.

Upgrade Power Plants and Infrastructure: Modernizing aging power plants to improve efficiency and fuel consumption rates is essential. Integrating combined-cycle power plants and smart grid technologies can optimize energy output.

Diversify Energy Sources: Beyond renewables, exploring alternative fuels such as biomass and hydroelectric energy would diversify the country's energy mix and lower pressure on gas supplies.

Enhance Energy Efficiency: The government should implement policies to reduce energy wastage through incentives for energy-efficient appliances, stricter regulations for industrial consumption, and public awareness campaigns.

Encourage Private Sector Participation: Facilitating private and foreign investments in energy infrastructure, particularly through partnerships with knowledge-based companies, can accelerate progress in renewable and efficient energy technologies.

Iran's ongoing energy imbalances and the resulting power outages underline the urgency of addressing structural weaknesses in the country's energy sector. While the immediate challenges of fuel shortages and rising winter demand require short-term solutions, a long-term strategy focused on renewables, efficiency, and infrastructure modernization can create a more sustainable and reliable energy future.

Iran exports non-oil goods worth \$4.8b to UAE in 8 months

TEHRAN - Iran exported non-oil commodities valued at \$4.8 billion to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) during the first eight months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-November 20), the head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) announced.

Foroud Asgari said that the UAE was Iran's third top export destination in the mentioned eight-month period.

Exporting commodities valued at \$13.6 billion to Iran, the United Arab Emirates was Iran's top source of import in the first eight months of the present year, the official further added.

As previously announced by the former head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA), the value of non-oil trade between Iran and the United Arab Emirates stood at \$16.2 billion in the first seven months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-October 21).

Mohammad Rezvaniyar said that the UAE was the top trade partner of Iran among its neighbors in the seven-month period.

In early August, the Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates in Tehran said over 122,000 Iranian business persons are currently working in the UAE.

"Economic figures show that Iran-UAE business interactions have increased in recent years, and more than 122,000 Iranian businessmen are doing business in the UAE," Saif Mohammed al-Zaabi said in a meeting with Head of Iran Chamber of Cooperatives Bahman Abdollahi.

Pointing out that the problems of Iranian and Emirati business-



men and economic operators are not political but in the legal field, he admitted: "Cooperation between the two countries in the field of sea and air transport has also increased."

Iran and UAE signed an MOU for expanding economic cooperation in a variety of areas on May 1.

Abdollahi for his part introduced some of the capabilities of the cooperative sector in Iran and said: "Cooperatives have an important and effective position in Iran and a significant part of the production in our country is done by cooperatives."

Iran and the United Arab Emirates signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) for expanding economic cooperation in a variety of areas at the end of the two countries' 3rd Joint Economic

Committee meeting in May 1.

The MOU was signed by former Iranian Transport and Urban Development Minister Mehrdad Bazrpash and UAE's Economy Minister Abdullah bin Touq Al Marri, who co-chaired the joint meeting.

During the mentioned committee meeting, the two sides stressed the need for further expansion of economic cooperation between Tehran and Abu Dhabi.

Speaking at the end of the meeting, Bazrpash said: "We have held the joint committee between the two countries after 10 years, which is an opportunity to develop the commercial and economic relations between the two countries."

"The UAE, as Iran's second biggest trade partner, has great strategic importance for us," the minister said.

Referring to the location of Iran and the UAE in the International North-South Transit Corridor (INSTC), Bazarpash said: "Access to the markets of the north and south can create an opportunity for the two countries to cooperate."

In the end, the minister emphasized solving the banking and monetary problems between the two countries to facilitate bilateral trade relations.

Abdullah bin Touq Al Marri for his part underlined the importance of the meeting, saying: "Holding today's meeting shows the development and expansion of economic relations between the two countries. After China, the UAE has the largest amount of trade relations with Iran. The trade value of the two countries has reached 27 billion dollars and many Iranian companies are established in the UAE."

"Creating new opportunities for transportation and banking cooperation is one of the achievements of this commission," the official said.

Referring to the performance of the UAE government in the field of investment, the official said: "The approval of the law on the formation of foreign companies and the government's support for companies that operate in the field of new energies has created a good opportunity for business with the UAE."

The 3rd Iran-UAE Joint Economic Committee meeting was held in Abu Dhabi from April 30 until May 1.

Increasing non-oil exports to the neighboring countries is one of the major plans that the Iranian government has been pursuing in recent years.

Iran shares land or water borders with 15 countries namely UAE, Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Kazakhstan, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Russia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, and Saudi Arabia.

Electricity generated by solar farms up 38% in a month on year

TEHRAN - Generation of electricity by solar farms in Iran increased by 38 percent during the ninth Iranian calendar month Azar (November 21 - December 20), as compared to the same period of time in the past year.

As reported, the solar farms generated over 81 million kilowatt/hours of electricity in the mentioned month of the present year.

This amount of electricity generated by the solar farms prevented the emission of 56,000 tons of Green House Gases (GHG).

The capacity of Iran's solar farms is going to increase by 4,000 megawatts (MW) by the end of the next Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2026), the country's energy minister announced.

Abbas Ali-Abadi said that the power network of the country is large and with the annual generation and consumption capacity of about 350 billion kilowatt hours of electricity, it has technically the potential for attracting more than 30,000 megawatts of solar energy.

"We are trying to realize this potential with the cooperation of the private sector and we provide an attractive investment environment and a suitable market to attract investors to cooperate, while significant contracts have been concluded in this field since the beginning of the government", the minister added.

He further stated that considering that the current capacity of the country's solar power plants is 1,200 megawatts, with this increase,

it is expected that this figure will reach more than 3,000 to 4,000 megawatts by next year, which is a significant figure.

As announced by an official with Iran's Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Organization (SATBA), the capacity of Iran's renewable power plants is going to increase by 500 megawatts (MW) by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2025).

Capacity of Iran's solar farms is going to increase 4,000 MW by March 2026.

"Considering the capacity of the new power plants under construction, the capacity of renewable power plants will increase by 500 megawatts by the end of the current year," Ali Shabnavard, the director general of SATBA's Office for Supervision of Construction and Production of Power Plants said.

This trend shows the serious determination of the Ministry of Energy and the government to overcome the imbalance of electricity supply and demand by the development of renewable energy in the country, he stressed.

He put the current nominal capacity of the country's renewables at 1,371 MW, adding that just last week 53 MW was added to the capacity of the country's renewable power plants.

Over the past few years, the Iranian gov-

ernment has taken serious measures to accelerate the growth and development of renewable energies in the country.

Diversification of financing models for renewable projects, increasing the ceiling of guaranteed electricity purchase, providing the possibility of buying and selling renewable electricity in the green board of the Iran Energy Exchange (IRENEX), and providing the possibility of exporting renewable electricity have been the most important measures taken for this purpose.

Iranian Energy Ministry has also put it on the agenda to add 10,000 MW to the capacity of the country's renewable power plants by the end of 2025.

In January 2022, the Energy Ministry and some of the country's private contractors signed memorandums of understanding (MOU) to cooperate in the construction of new renewable power plants across the country.

In late July, SATBA Head Mahmoud Kamani said 600 renewable power plants with a total capacity of 13,500 MW are under construction across the country and with these power plants going operational the share of renewables in Iran's power generation will reach 15 percent.

"We hope that by implementing these power plants, the share of renewable energies in Iran's electricity production will increase to more than 15 percent in the next two years," Kamani said.

Tehran hosting intl. printing, packaging, related machinery exhibit

TEHRAN- The 31st International Printing, Packaging and Related Machinery Exhibition of Iran (IPP) kicked off at the Tehran Permanent International Fairgrounds on Monday.

As reported, the four-day event is hosting 450 Iranian and foreign participants.

As announced by the deputy industry, mining and trade minister, the value of the export from the printing and packaging sector stands at \$400 million per annum.



TEHRAN - The Statistical Center of Iran (SCI) has put the average inflation rate in the twelve-month period ended on December 20, which marks the end of the ninth Iranian calendar month Azar, at 32.5 percent, falling 0.6 percent from the figure for the twelve-month ended to the eighth month.

The center put the country's point-to-point inflation rate at 31.4 percent in the ninth month, which means families have paid an average of 31.4 percent more

for purchasing the same package of commodities and services in that month, compared to the same month in the preceding year.

The point-to-point inflation rate rose 1.1 percent in the ninth month from the previous month.

In mid-June, the SCI announced that Iran's economy grew by 5.7 percent in the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19), marking the highest growth since 2017.

Inflation rate drops 0.6%

In its latest report, the SCI said the growth of the gross domestic product (GDP) for the year ending in March 2024 at the constant prices of 2017 is equivalent to 5.7 percent of the total GDP and 3.4 percent of the GDP minus oil.

The field of activities of industries and mines group grew by 6.9 percent, the services group by 5.7 percent, and the agriculture group by 2.2 percent compared to the previous year.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF), in its latest World

Economic Outlook, has estimated Iran's inflation to decline to 31.7 percent in 2024 from 40.7 percent last year.

The IMF forecasted that Iran's gross domestic product (GDP) will grow by 3.7 percent this year, up from a previous estimate of 3.3 percent announced in July, IRNA reported.

The IMF said that Iran's current account balance will be 2.9 percent of its GDP this year, slightly up from 2.8 last year.

WORLD HEADLINES

Gaza death toll surpasses 45,300

The death toll from the continued Israeli onslaught on Gaza has reached 45,317, with 107,713 wounded, according to the latest update from Gaza's Health Ministry on Sunday.

The ministry said nearly five dozen people were killed and dozens more were injured in the past 34 hours. The ministry reported that many bodies remain trapped under rubble and in the streets, as ambulances and civil defense teams struggle to access the affected areas due to relentless bombardments.

Palestinians tortured at Israel's Ofer detention camp

Israeli authorities have been accused of torturing Palestinians at the Ofer detention camp, which was established during the ongoing Gaza war to hold detainees from the territory, a new report has revealed. The camp, a military-administered facility, is located next to a prison with the same name, between Jerusalem (al-Quds) and Ramallah in the occupied West Bank.

According to 19 testimonies given to +972 and Local Call, the site has witnessed torture and ill-treatment of Palestinian detainees, mirroring what has been reported at the notorious Sde Teiman prison. Rami, a former Palestinian detainee at Ofer, described the facility as no less brutal than Sde Teiman.

"I was severely tortured," Rami said. "We were forced to kneel with our hands tied from sunrise until midnight. Guards beat us on every

part of our bodies. I was given electric shocks every two days."

Hamas kills 3 Israeli soldiers, downs quadcopter

The Qassam Brigades, the military wing of Hamas, said its fighters killed three Israeli soldiers in Beit Lahia, northern Gaza.

In a Telegram post seen by Al Jazeera, the soldiers were guarding a building when they were attacked and fatally stabbed. The statement added that the fighters then entered the building, killed the remaining soldiers at close range and seized their weapons.

The group also said it freed Palestinian captives held inside by Israel. Qassam Brigades also said it downed an Israeli quadcopter in "the new camp area" of the Nuseirat refugee camp.

Palestinian shot at Israeli military checkpoint in al-Quds

A young Palestinian man was shot by Israeli forces at Himza checkpoint on Sunday.

Citing local sources, Wafa news agency said Israeli forces fired at the man and his condition was not known. They also prevented an ambulance from reaching him and closed the roads surrounding the checkpoint.

Meanwhile, the Israeli police said a soldier opened fire at a suspect who got out of a vehicle and allegedly brandished a knife.

Implications of Lebanese-Syrian ties after Jumblatt's visit

By Sondoss Al Asaad

BEIRUT - For the first time after 13 years of estrangement, Walid Jumblatt, Lebanon's Druze leader, visited Damascus on Sunday, December 22.

Jumblatt met Abu Muhammad al-Julani, currently known as "Ahmad al-Sharaa," with a delegation of political and religious figures affiliated with Lebanon's Progressive Socialist Party (PSP).

Sources close to the PSP stated that the priority of the visit was to reassure the concerns of Syria's Druze minority, as al-Sharaa assured him of his "concern for all Syrian components and partnership."

Al-Sharaa allegedly stated, "Islam does not mean the abolition of other sects, but on the contrary, we have a duty to protect them. Today, we are fulfilling the state's duty in protecting all components of Syrian society."

In light of the lack of clarity on the final formula of the ruling clique in Damascus, sources close to the PSP refused to consider that Jumblatt had been hasty, noting that he did not present himself as a representative of the Lebanese state.

The PSP sources further pointed out that the visit was constructive, especially since al-Sharaa seemed open and even keen to correct the "future relationship with Hezbollah," as he indicated that "a page has been turned" and that the "Syria page is at an equal distance from all Lebanese forces," according to the delegation accompanying Jumblatt.

In return, al-Sharaa pledged that the new regime in Syria will respect "Lebanon's sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity, and security and stability," and that it will stand at an equal distance from everyone.

Jumblatt proposed to al-Sharaa a draft memorandum of understanding that called for harmonious Lebanese-Syrian relations and called for "revealing the fate of Lebanese detainees in Syrian prisons."

Al-Sharaa said, "Despite the past wounds, we will be a support for Lebanon and all components of the Lebanese people and we will build strategic relations."

Regarding Lebanon's Shiites, al-Sharaa explained, "whether opponents of the former regime or supporters" are "part of the Lebanese



environment. Today, we speak with the logic of the state, separate from previous political classifications, which negatively affected the structure of Lebanon, Syria and the countries neighboring them."

Jumblatt also told al-Sharaa, "The road is long, and we and you are suffering from Israeli expansion."

Besides, he stressed the importance of demarcating the land borders with Lebanon and agreeing on the identity of the Shebaa Farms. Jumblatt said that if an agreement is reached on demarcation between the two countries, the fate of "the Shebaa Farms will be subject to international resolution 242... but the Shebaa Farms are Syrian."

This statement angered the citizens of Shebaa, who criticized Jumblatt's provocative position, stressing in a statement: "We have previously met with Mr. Jumblatt and other Lebanese leaders on more than one occasion and presented to them everything that confirms the Lebanese identity of the Shebaa Farms and Kfar Shuba Hills."

The statement added: "We refer Mr. Jumblatt and others to Resolution 1701, which explicitly speaks about the Shebaa Farms and emphasizes Resolution 425 and never mentioned Resolution 242 regarding the Shebaa Farms."

It further said: "How can the demarcation be carried out, which is already demarcated, in light of the expansion of the Zionist occupation inside Syrian territory?"

The statement was concluded by calling on Jumblatt to "remove this national file from private and narrow calculations because the concept of sovereignty is indivisible. We will remain committed to our rights and our land and work by all means to liberate it from the occupation."

From fatigues to fashion: Al-Sharaa's suit and tie cannot hide rebels' true nature



The honeymoon between Turkey and Syria's new leadership will likely be over, it is merely a matter of time.

ment delegation to the southwestern Druze city of Sweida to provide services to its community.

In addition to his statements with Fidan and Jumblatt, al-Sharaa's choice to wear a suit and tie rather than the military fatigues he favored in his days as a terrorist commander, has grabbed the media attention.

Al-Sharaa's new style may please his foreign backers, but will raise eyebrows among his allied rebel groups in Syria that are vying for power.

Over the past days, protests have erupted against HTS as it is cracking down on voices of dissent. Protesters in Aleppo, Idlib and some other towns and villages

have denounced arrests made by the rebel group.

Public anger in Syria is also expected to grow in the face of the inaction of HTS toward Israel's aggression against the country.

The current situation suggests that the reliance of Syria's new leadership on external allies, coupled with the repression of internal dissent, may escalate into a significant crisis.

This may serve as a crucial wake-up call for Turkey. The increasing dissent and the weakening influence of the HTS could pose significant challenges for Ankara, which is believed to be the main supporter of the rebel group.

Besides, the YPG that is spear-

heading the US-allied Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in Syria could be a pain in the neck for Turkey. The US supports the group in line with its geopolitical interests. The potential conflict of interests between Washington and Ankara could work to Turkey's detriment.

In fact, Turkey is now experiencing its honeymoon in Syria which could come to an end soon.

Terrorism is intrinsically linked to the armed factions that have taken control of Syria. These fundamental characteristics are unlikely to change. In such an atmosphere, ISIL and Al-Qaeda terrorists may raise their ugly head in Syria and pose a grave threat to regional and international peace and security.

Iraq rejects US demand to dismantle Popular Mobilization Forces



From page 1 ▶ Iraqi religious authorities, including all major clerics, have consistently expressed their support for the PMU.

They emphasize that it is an official body essential for Iraq's stability. Ayatollah Sheikh Hassan al-Jawahiri, a prominent scholar at the Najaf Seminary, strongly opposed the dissolution efforts, warning that such a move could pave the way for the resurgence of terrorist groups.

The PMU was formed in the summer of 2014, following the collapse of the U.S.-trained Iraqi army when Daesh rapidly seized large parts of northern and western Iraq, including Mosul.

In response to the crisis, Ayatollah al-Sistani issued a historic fatwa calling on Iraqi citizens to take up arms to defend the nation.

This led to the establishment of the PMU, which played a pivotal role in defeating Daesh and liberating occupied territories.

The PMU's importance to Iraq's security was demonstrated during the fight against Daesh,

where it filled the critical gaps left by the Iraqi military. PMU forces were instrumental in key battles to liberate major cities, protect vulnerable populations, and dismantle the territorial ambitions of the extremist group. Without their intervention, Iraq's stability and sovereignty would have been severely compromised.

The PMU continues to enjoy overwhelming support and love from the Iraqi public, who view the force as a symbol of sacrifice and resilience.

Many Iraqis credit the PMU with saving their families and communities during the dark days of Daesh occupation, and they regard its members as national heroes.

Public demonstrations, gatherings, and cultural events frequently celebrate the PMU's contributions, reflecting a deep bond between the government forces and the Iraqi people.

This public support has bolstered the PMU's legitimacy and ensured its role remains central in the nation's defense.

In 2016, the Iraqi Parliament passed a law officially integrating the PMU into the National Armed Forces, granting it legitimacy as part of Iraq's defense system.

The law solidified the PMU's role in protecting Iraq's sovereignty and ensuring its territorial integrity, making its dissolution a highly controversial and sensitive issue.

As an official part of the armed forces, the

PMU operates under the direct authority of the Iraqi Commander-in-Chief, Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani.

Soldiers also receive orders, salaries, pensions, and other benefits from the Iraqi government. The PMU, established to combat Daesh, continues to be a symbol of Iraqi resistance.

Popular political parties have announced upcoming gatherings in support of the PMU and the Resistance Front in a number of provinces including Najaf, Karbala, and the capital Baghdad.

Despite mounting pressure from the U.S., Iraq's government has refused to dismantle the PMU. Officials have reiterated that the organization plays a critical role in safeguarding Iraq's territorial integrity.

The PMU remains active today in its mission to secure Iraq, with forces continuing to fight Daesh sleeper cells and protect the country's borders, particularly along the frontier with Syria.

The group plays a crucial role in preventing the resurgence of any terrorist activity and in ensuring the ongoing security of the nation, underscoring its ongoing relevance to Iraq's defense strategy.

As tensions persist, it remains clear that the future of the PMU will continue to be a contentious issue in Iraqi-U.S. relations. However, it appears impossible that this powerful force will be going anywhere.

Greenland is not for sale, its leader says in response to Trump

Greenland is not for sale, its elected leader said on Monday, responding to comments made by U.S. President-elect Donald Trump regarding the "ownership and control" of the vast Arctic island that has been part of Denmark for over 600 years.

"Greenland is ours. We are not for sale and will never be for sale. We must not lose our long struggle for freedom," the island's Prime Minister Mute Egede said in a written comment.

Trump on Sunday announced that he had picked Ken Hower, a former envoy to Sweden, as his ambassador to Copenhagen, and commented on the status of Greenland, a semi-autonomous part of Denmark and host to a large U.S. Air Force base.

"For purposes of National Security and Freedom throughout the World, the United States of America feels that the ownership and control of Greenland is an absolute necessity," Trump wrote on Truth Social.

Trump, who takes office on Jan. 20, did not elaborate on the statement. Denmark's foreign ministry and the prime minister's office were not immediately available for comment.

The Danish government must state in clear terms that control over Greenland is not up for discussion or negotiation, member of parliament Rasmus Jarlov of the opposition Conservative Party said on social media platform X.

"To the extent that U.S. activi-

ties aim to take control of Danish territory, it must be prohibited and countered. Then they can't be there at all," said Jarlov, who heads parliament's defence committee. The island, whose capital Nuuk is closer to New York than the Danish capital Copenhagen, boasts mineral, oil and natural gas wealth. But development has been slow, leaving its economy reliant on fishing and annual subsidies from Denmark.

(source: Reuters)

New research shows the massive hole Dems are in

Even voters who previously backed Democrats cast the party as weak and overly focused on diversity and elites.

Democrats conducting post-mortems on their sweeping losses in 2024 are finding more reason for alarm. And the problem isn't just Kamala Harris or Joe Biden.

In a trio of focus groups, even voters who previously backed Democrats cast the party as weak and overly focused on diversity and elites, according to research by the progressive group Navigator Research.

When asked to compare the Democratic Party to an animal, one participant compared the party to an ostrich because "they've got their heads in the sand and are absolutely committed to their

own ideas, even when they're failing." Another likened them to koalas, who "are complacent and lazy about getting policy wins that we really need." Democrats, another said, are "not a friend of the working class anymore."

The focus group research, shared first with POLITICO, represents the latest troubling pulse check for a party still sorting through the wreckage of its November losses and looking for a path to rebuild. Without a clear party leader and with losses across nearly every demographic in November, Democrats are walking into a second Trump presidency without a unified strategy to improve their electoral prospects. And while some Democrats blame Biden, others blame inflation and still others blame "losing hold of culture," the feedback

from the focus groups found Democrats' problems are even more widespread and potentially long-lasting than a single election cycle.

The focus groups offer "a pretty scathing rebuke" of the Democratic Party brand, said Rachael Russell, director of polling and analytics at Navigator Research, a project within the Hub Project, which is a Democratic nonprofit group.

"This weakness they see, [Democrats] not getting things done, not being able to actually fight for people — is something that needs to be figured out," Russell said. "It might not be the message, it might be the policy. It might be something a little bit deeper that has to be addressed by the party."

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

Agha Bozorg Mosque's restoration complete

TEHRAN- A recent restoration project has come to an end on the 18th century Agha Bozorg Mosque in Kashan.

According to the assessment of cultural heritage experts, parts of the Agha Bozorg Mosque and School required restoration and with the efforts of the restoration team, this project was completed in four months, Kashan's tourism chief has said.

Agha Bozorg Mosque is one of the most beautiful historical mosques and is considered one of the finest architectural works in Iran, currently nominated for inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage List, CHTN quoted Alireza Abdollahzadeh as saying on Monday.

The restoration work included repairing the old tiles on the mosque's minaret, removing worn-out flooring in the courtyard, debris clearing in the basement, reconstruction of part of a collapsed ceiling, and creating a new roof structure, he added.

He also emphasized that the entire structure, including its dome, which is one of the largest brick domes, was built with mud bricks and clay, and the insistence on using pure bricks in the facades has resulted in a unique purity and integrity in the building's design.

He expressed hope that, with ongoing efforts, the Agha Bozorg Mosque and School will soon be registered as the sixth site of Kashan on the UNESCO World Heritage list.

Constructed in the late 18th century, the Agha Bozorg Mosque stands as an exquisite testament to Persian architecture in the heart of Kashan, Iran. Renowned for its unique design, this mosque features a madrasa sunken into its courtyard, which is flanked by stunning tiled minarets and lofty badgirs (wind catchers). One of its architectural highlights is the magnificent muqarnas (stalactite) work adorning the dome of the entrance portal, creating a visually captivating focal point for visitors. The mosque's decorative elements primarily showcase café au lait brickwork, accentuated by light blue and brown geometric tiles. However, the truly spectacular tiles are those that exhibit intricate Persian designs, artfully arranged in vibrant blue and turquoise patterns that create a harmonious visual experience, capturing the essence of Persian artistry.

The Agha Bozorg complex occupies an elongated, roughly rectangular floor plan that extends from northwest to southeast. At its center lies a courtyard organized on two levels, incorporating both a ground floor and a balcony, an architectural feature that exemplifies the mosque's dual purpose as a

place of worship and a center for learning.

An inscription in the mosque attributes its construction to the influential theologian Mulla-Mahdi Naraqī II, known as Aqa Bozorg, and dates the building to 1832-1833.

The design is said to have drawn inspiration from esteemed educational institutions like the Chahar Bagh and Sadr schools in Isfahan, emphasizing the blend of spiritual and academic life within this structure.

Entry to the complex is marked by an arched, domed iwan-portal that leads into a large vestibule, enhancing a visitor's sense of grandeur upon entering.

The vestibule, characterized by its impressive domed ceiling, overlooks the courtyard through a prominent arched aperture—a design that fosters a seamless flow between the indoor and outdoor spaces.

The architecture of Agha Bozorg Mosque is distinguished by its thoughtful integration of functional spaces, with corridors and archways providing access to various levels and rooms. The upper courtyard level, enhanced by a roof terrace, boasts panoramic views of the lower courtyard featuring a central pool, exemplifying the profound relationship between nature and architecture.

The ground level accommodates dormitory spaces for students, emphasizing the madrasa's educational purpose alongside its religious significance. Notably, the mosque itself is designed as a domed pavilion (gunbad-khanah) that flanks a hypostyle prayer hall (shabistan).

The interior creates an intimate atmosphere with an octagonal chamber crowned by a large dome, accentuated with elegant arches leading to an ambulatory surrounding it. A prominent mihrab within the shabistan marks the direction of prayer, embodying the spiritual heart of the mosque.

Kashan's strategic location along the route connecting major Iranian cities, such as Tehran, Isfahan, Shiraz, and Yazd, makes it a vital cultural hub, drawing visitors eager to explore its historical treasures.

Among the highlights surrounding this ancient town are the opulent houses of Brujerdi, Tabatabai, Ameri, and Abbasi, each contributing to the region's rich tapestry of architectural heritage. The Agha Bozorg Mosque stands not only as an architectural masterpiece but also as a vibrant symbol of Kashan's spiritual and educational legacy, inviting both visitors and scholars to appreciate its timeless beauty and significance in Iran's cultural landscape.

Archaeologists uncover 7,000-year-old settlement near Prague during road construction

Researchers from the Czech Academy of Sciences (CAS) have uncovered evidence of a 7,000-year-old settlement, a Hallstatt-period village, and medieval gold prospecting pits, shedding light on human activity in the region from the Neolithic to the High Middle Ages.

The most ancient findings include eight long, columnar structures dated to the Late Neolithic to early Chalcolithic period, around the second half of the 6th millennium BC. These structures, believed to be part of a settlement, were accompanied by storage and waste pits as well as a prehistoric stone-processing workshop.

Monika Psohlavcová, head of the research team from the CAS Institute of Archaeology, explained: "Numerous stone axes or axe-hammers, their semi-finished products, and unsuccessful products prove the presence of a local workshop for processing the polished stone industry."

The site also revealed the remnants of a Hallstatt-era village dating back to the 5th century BC. Archaeologists identified ten partially sunken houses, along with settlement pits, troughs, and remnants of above-ground structures.

Among the recovered artifacts were coarse kitchen ceramics, finely decorated tableware, small iron and bronze tools, and clay and

glass beads. The discovery of a kylix handle, a wine-drinking vessel popular in the Adriatic region, and glass beads suggests indirect contact with the Mediterranean.

"Together with the discovery of bronze horse phalerae [ornamental decorations], the kylix handle indicates the presence of a high-ranking member of the local community," Psohlavcová added in a press release from the Institute of Archaeology.

In another section of the excavation, researchers uncovered several dozen circular pits, measuring between two to five meters in diameter and as deep as 12 feet. These pits, dated to the 13th century, are believed to be related to gold mining activities. Psohlavcová noted that the pits' location aligns with the historical gold mines of Jilové u Prahy, situated about nine miles away, suggesting medieval miners were prospecting for gold in the gravel-sand terraces of the Pitkovický stream.

The excavation, which began in May as part of preparations for the Prague Ring Road, has so far uncovered more than 9,000 artifacts. The construction of the ring road aims to ease traffic congestion around Prague by linking major highways and is scheduled for completion in 2027.

(Source: Archaeology Mag)

Iran advances to fourth place globally in intangible cultural heritage rankings

TEHRAN- Iran has risen from seventh to fourth place globally in intangible cultural heritage, the Deputy Minister for Cultural Heritage has announced.

Over the past four years, Iran has improved its standing from seventh to fourth position and currently leads in the registration of multinational heritage files, Ali Darabi has said.

He made these remarks on Sunday during a ceremony in Tehran celebrating the International Day of Intangible Cultural Heritage, which was attended by various cultural heritage officials.

In his remarks at the ceremony, he emphasized the importance of intangible cultural heritage as a vital asset of society, one that is transmitted from generation to generation and from era to era, CHTN reported on Monday.

He stressed the importance of transforming cultural heritage literacy into a shared cultural value within society, asserting that cultural heritage should be accessible and significant to all. Furthermore, Darabi pointed out the vital role of cultural heritage



in public diplomacy, noting that the primary aim of public diplomacy is to influence public opinion, facilitated through cultural exchanges such as exhibitions, festivals, and sister-city relationships.

Emphasizing the need for networking and coordination both domestically and internationally, he called for all effective institutions in the country to contribute to this cause.

"Cultural heritage does not belong to any single institution but is the responsibility of all compo-

nents and individuals in the nation. We must have short-term, mid-term, and long-term plans, and we need to have a significant presence on the global stage," he stated.

Intangible cultural heritage refers to the practices, expressions, knowledge, and skills that communities, groups, and individuals recognize as part of their cultural inheritance. Unlike tangible heritage, such as monuments and artifacts, intangible cultural heritage includes traditions, oral histories, performing

arts, social practices, rituals, and festive events. This form of heritage plays a crucial role in maintaining cultural diversity in the face of globalization, as it fosters a sense of identity and continuity among communities, allowing them to express their values, histories, and social cohesion.

The preservation of intangible cultural heritage is essential for promoting cultural sustainability and fostering mutual respect among diverse cultures. Recognized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) through the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, efforts are being made to safeguard these practices through documentation, education, and community involvement.

By engaging local communities in preserving their traditions and encouraging intergenerational transmission, intangible cultural heritage not only enriches the cultural landscape but also empowers communities, enhances social cohesion, and promotes a deeper understanding of cultural diversity on a global scale.

Legacy of Riz Ali Khajavi: Iran's "Devoted Farmer"

By Seyyed Hossein Hosseinseddig and Azam Sadat Hosseinseddig

TEHRAN- On an autumn evening, as Riz Ali Khajavi was returning home from the farm, he noticed that the train route had been closed due to a landslide. These opening sentences are from a story in the third-grade Persian literature textbook, recounting the heroism of a devoted farmer who has captivated the hearts of Iranian students for six decades.

Azbar Ali Hajavi, who became known as Riz Ali Khajavi in Iranian primary school textbooks due to an error made by journalists at the time of the train accident, was a dedicated farmer who etched his name in Iran's history by bravely attempting to save the lives of hundreds of passengers on the perilous railway route through the towering mountains of Miyaneh County in East Azerbaijan province. His selfless actions not only reflect the spirit of heroism but also the enduring impact of one individual's courage in the face of disaster.

He was a hardworking and conscientious villager who became a household name among Iranians when he learned of the fallen rocks blocking a train's path. In a desperate bid to stop the train, he set fire to his coat and jacket as a signal.

Riz Ali Khajavi's sacrifice on that dark night in the Miyaneh mountains transformed him into a mythical figure in Iranian culture. His selflessness resonated deeply with the public, leading to the story of his bravery being featured in one of the lessons in the third-grade textbook. This enduring tale continues to inspire and educate future generations about the values of courage and altruism.

He was born on February 24, 1931, in the village of Qala'e-Jouq in the Miyaneh County, and fate had decreed that his name would be immortalized in history forever because of his sacrifice to save the lives of some of his compatriots.



An image from the "Devoted Farmer" lesson in the third-grade Iranian elementary school textbook

In November 1961, at the age of thirty-two, Riz Ali Khajavi was walking along the train tracks at night after returning from his farm when he noticed that the train route was blocked by a landslide in the Qaranqu region. Determined to save the train and its passengers, he set fire to his clothes and approached the train, hoping to alert the crew. However, his efforts were unsuccessful in capturing their attention. Ultimately, it was only when he fired a few shots from his hunting rifle that the "devoted farmer" succeeded in stopping the train, ensuring the safety of those on board.

But that was not the end of the story, as the passengers and train officials, who had mistaken him for bandits, initially beat him up for stopping the train, but when they realized the extent of the incident, they apologized to him and realized the importance of his work.

After that, his name found its way into textbooks, and the lesson "The Devoted Farmer" became an inseparable part of the memories of Iranian students for 60 consecutive years.

The outcome of these events demonstrated how the sacrifice of a community member

can be mythologized and serve as a model for the nation's children through mass media and inclusive platforms like education. By emphasizing such acts of bravery and selflessness, society can inspire future generations and instill valuable lessons about courage and altruism.

Appreciation of the devoted farmer

It is important to note that the "Devoted Farmer" has been respected by Iranian society since the 1990s, especially in the 2000s and 2010s. During this time, many sought to honor his legacy on various occasions. In 2006, he was recognized at the third conference for awarding the National Statue of Dedication, where he received the prestigious statue. The ceremony took place in the Allameh Amini Hall at the University of Tehran, and all attendees stood to their full height in respect for Iran's "Devoted Farmer."

However, the story of the "Devoted Farmer" extended beyond textbooks and the media, becoming the subject of a film. In 1968, a documentary titled "That Night When the Rain Came (The Epic of an Azarbaijani Countryman)," directed by Kamran Shirdel, captured the narrative of the devoted peasant, further immortalizing his legacy.

Another documentary film, "The Devoted Farmer," is also a narrative of the life of Riz Ali Khajavi from the words of himself, his wife, relatives, and friends during the final days of his life; the film is a documentary narrative of the heroic story, the location of the event, and conveying the sense of sacrifice to the audience and Saman Morad Hosseini, a television and cinema director and producer, produced this film in 2017.

The "Devoted Farmer" finally passed away on Saturday, December 2, 2017, at the age of 86, after enduring 20 days of illness in Imam Reza Hospital in Tabriz, capital city of East Azerbaijan province, and was buried on December 4 in his hometown of Miyaneh County.

From street protests to an Airbnb ban, all the ways Barcelona said no to tourists in 2024

Last year, graffiti appeared in Barcelona telling tourists, "Your luxury trip - my daily misery".

But in 2024 the Spanish city's pushback against overtourism reached new heights.

With more than 15 million tourists visiting Barcelona every year - drawn by its stunning blend of art and architecture, top-tier football team, and beachside location - locals are feeling the strain.

It is not the only place in Europe calling timeout on too many tourists. Italy, for example, is also dealing with the 'plague' of overtourism, and cruise ships are facing new restrictions at many ports.

Here we review a turbulent

year in tourism for Spain's most visited city - and look ahead to what's next in 2025.

Back in June, Barcelona City Council announced a radical plan to rid the city of tourist flat licenses by 2028.

Barcelona has not actually granted new licenses since 2014 when it froze supply at nearly 10,000 units. But that hasn't fixed the issue of unaffordable rent for locals.

"We want to guarantee the right to live in Barcelona and deal effectively with the housing crisis we have been suffering for years," said mayor Jaume Collboni.

The tourism industry hit back, naturally. The Barcelona Asso-

ciation of Tourist Apartments (APARTUR) says these Airbnb-style apartments only make up a fraction of the city's housing. It warns that restricting licenses could increase the number of illegal apartments and potentially cause 40 per cent of the city's tourism to disappear.

There are ongoing legal challenges over the plan. The European Holiday Home Association filed a complaint with the European Commission (EC) in November, claiming it breaches the provision of services directive - something the EC has questioned itself.

The overtourism debate got particularly heated in July, when around 3,000 people took to the streets, shouting "tourists

go home" and spraying them with water.

Some 150 collectives, organizations and social movements were involved in the demonstration, which followed similar actions in the Canary Islands and Mallorca. Hotel and restaurant entrances were also symbolically closed off.

"We want the city's economic model to prioritize other much fairer economies. And for that, we consider that we have to decrease tourism," explained Martí Cusó, spokesperson for the Association of Neighbors of the Gothic Quarter and an activist against tourist overcrowding.

(Source: Euronews)

Iranian women making headway in technology

From page 1 ▶ However, despite the rise in the presence of leading women in the technology and innovation sector in the country in recent decades, they have remained a significant minority, compared to men, in the research and scientific sectors, the private sector, as well as technological businesses.

Only 12 percent of modern, technological firms are founded by Iranian women. Moreover, out of 27,237 individuals who are members of the board of directors of knowledge-based companies, only 5,154, making up 19 percent of the members, are women.

In the latest international event, four Iranian women namely Azam Karami, Mahvash Abyari, Marzieh Ebrahimi, and Fatemeh Hosseini made history.

They were among the winners of the BRICS Women's Startups Contest 2024, which is one of the main programs of the BRICS Entrepreneurs Forum. The contest's international panel of judges considered more than 1,000 applications from 30 countries.

The contest winners included 26 projects in such areas as innovation in energy and infrastructure facilities; artificial intelligence technologies in medicine, education, agricul-



ture, and the aviation industry; the fight against cancer and infertility; and robotics. Iranian women rank second in terms of the number of winners in startups contest following Russia.

Azam Karami holds a Ph.D in electrical engineering (telecommunication systems). She is managing a knowledge-based company that provides technological services and develops products in the fields of artificial intelligence, robotics, drones and remote sensing, intelligent monitoring, data mining, and the internet of things.

Her startup project in BRICS

was 'Automatic Fault Detection in Power Transmission Lines' (AFTL) which uses deep learning techniques in order to find more than 80 types of defects in power transmission lines. In terms of technology readiness level (TRL), it is at TRL 8.

Fatemeh Hosseini is the manager of a knowledge-based company that manufactures new products to improve the life of patients with brain and nerve disorders.

Her product, Intelligent Spoon for Tremor Alleviation (ISTA) helps patients with tremors eat independently and without stress by reducing tremors using motion sensors

and an intelligent high-speed control system.

Iran is the third country to have the knowledge technology, following the U.S. and China.

Marzieh Ebrahimi is the founder and CEO of a company. Her winning project was titled 'Immune Cell Bank for the Treatment of Cancer and Auto-immune Diseases'. Natural killer (NK) cells play a crucial role in eliminating transformed or dysfunctional cells, thus maintaining overall health.

Mahvash Abyari's start-up project was 'Insightfully Scanned Glucose Monitoring'. The platform analyzes patient behavior using artificial intelligence and machine learning algorithms, providing reports to doctors to help them make more targeted prescriptions for patients.

Nafiseh Hatami, the manager of a knowledge-based company, has made a 'comprehensive digital authentication platform'.

Utilizing the most up-to-date artificial intelligence algorithms, this knowledge-based company has succeeded in implementing digital authentication and digital signatures for businesses in no time and has developed the digital economy and digital transformation in Iran.

Iran has capacity to accept more Iraqi students

TEHRAN – An official with the Iranian science ministry has said the country holds the capacity to accept more Iraqi students.

Omid Rezaei-Far also highlighted the importance of developing scientific and technological relations between the two neighboring countries.

He made the remarks during a meeting in Tehran on Monday with Haider Abd Dahed, the Iraqi deputy minister of higher education, IRNA reported.

The Iraqi official, for his part, said visiting Iran's scientific, technological, and innovative activities can be a good experience for Iraqi students.

Referring to close relationships between the two countries, the official stressed the need to eliminate obstacles to scientific interactions.

Rezaei-Far also said the exchange of professors and students, the establishment of joint science and technology parks, and the implementation of joint research projects, can develop strategic partnership between the two ministries.

He went on to say that the implementation of decisions made by the joint scientific committee of the two countries, and the working groups in technology, innovation and research projects, along with the approval of agreed-upon regulations by the parties, will enhance cooperation between the two countries.



Developing scientific and technological ties can address the challenges of Iraqi students studying in Iran, and boost cultural and scientific relations between Iran and Iraq, Rezaei-Far noted.

Enhancement of academic ties

In a meeting held on August 21 in Iraq, officials from Iran and Iraq highlighted the need to expand educational and research collaborations between the two countries.

During the meeting, the head of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution's office for universities, Mostafa Rostami, and Iraqi Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Naeem Al-Aboudi, explored potential ways to foster scientific cooperation between Iranian and Iraqi universities, IRNA reported.

Stressing the significance of enhancing co-

operation in higher education, Al-Aboudi expressed Iraq's interest in utilizing Iran's educational expertise and experiences to improve its educational system.

Rostami, for his part, underscored the central role of universities in strengthening cultural and scientific relations between the two nations.

The official voiced Iran's readiness to share its knowledge and experiences with Iraq. Rostami went on to suggest conducting shared short-term research and educational courses for both students and professors. He further called for increasing the exchange of students and professors.

The officials also discussed ways to solve Iraqi students' problems in Iran and improve their learning conditions.

In June, an Iraqi delegation headed by Al-Aboudi met Mohammad-Ali Zolfigol, former Minister of Science, Research, and Technology, in Tehran to discuss the potential for enhancing educational cooperation.

Over the past three years, scientific and academic cooperation between Iran and Iraq has been promoted, leading to the signing of important memorandums of understanding, IRNA quoted Al-Aboudi as saying.

The Iraqi official considered the education of 100,000 Iraqi students in Iran as a great opportunity to promote cultural cooperation.

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

Special clinic to relieve families during coronavirus pandemic

A special clinic will be opened for the first time in the country to provide free psychological services to families who have lost their loved ones during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The clinic is called "Soog" (literally meaning mourn) will be inaugurated at Shahid Beheshti Educational and Medical Center in Zanjan province on Wednesday.

The outbreak of coronavirus has changed the lifestyle of many families, Ehsan Fakoor, head of the mental health department of Zanjan University of Medical Sciences said.

Sudden changes in life cause stress, while the coronavirus itself has doubled the stress due to its contagion and the number of lives it has claimed in the world to date, he regretted.

کلینیک سوگ، برای افرادی که اعضای خانواده را بر اثر کرونا از دست داده‌اند

رئیس گروه بهداشت روان دانشگاه علوم پزشکی زنجان از افتتاح نخستین کلینیک سوگ در کشور برای ارائه خدمات رایگان روان‌شناختی به خانواده‌هایی که اعضای خانواده خود را به دلیل ابتلا به کرونا از دست داده‌اند خبر داد و اظهار کرد: این کلینیک ۲۳ مهرماه امسال در مرکز آموزشی درمانی شهید بهشتی زنجان کار خود را آغاز خواهد کرد. فکور با بیان اینکه شیوع ویروس کرونا باعث شده است تا سبک زندگی بسیاری از خانواده‌ها دچار تغییر شود، ادامه داد: ایجاد تغییرات ناگهانی در زندگی باعث ایجاد استرس می‌شود، این در حالی است که خود ویروس کرونا به دلیل واگیردار بودن و نیز آمار فوتی‌هایی که تا به امروز در دنیا به جا گذاشته، این استرس را دوچندان کرده است.

WFP releases November report on Iran

TEHRAN –The World Food Program (WFP) has released a report, expounding on activities in Iran over the month of November.

In November, WFP food assistance reached 32,959 beneficiaries, which included Afghan and Iraqi refugees as well as Iranian teachers. Refugees are assisted with a staple food basket which includes fortified wheat flour (12 kg per person per month) and vegetable oil (810 ml per person per month).

In addition to this in-kind food assistance, WFP provides cash assistance to 7,303 Afghan and Iraqi refugee households each month. In November, households headed by refugee men received Iranian Rials (IRR) of 2.5 million (US\$ 5, according to the UN Operational Rate) per person.

Households headed by refugee women received a slightly higher monthly cash allocation, amounting to IRR 3 million (US\$ 6) per person due to limited access to working opportunities, leading to higher food insecurity.

To maintain beneficiaries' purchasing power amid deteriorating economic conditions, since June 2023, WFP has increased its cash assistance to vulnerable refugee women and men facing serious risks over their food security and well-being.

The school feeding resumed again after a three-month summer break, and 10,005 refugee school children including their teachers received daily school snacks consisting of date bars and/or fortified biscuits.

However, cash incentive distribution would start upon receipt of the list of schoolgirls, expected this month.

By November 2024, WFP Iran helped ease the financial burden associated with the gluten-free dietary needs of 52 refugee celiac patients from WFP's beneficiaries by providing them with an extra cash amount of 7.7 million rials (US\$ 15.48) per person as a replacement for their usual food entitlement.

To support the income generation and resilience of 300 refugees (49 percent women and 51 percent men), in November, WFP continued supporting the operations of 20 livelihood activities across 17 settlements, including welding, tailoring, baking, and farming.

Following WFP's Disability Inclusion Workplan 2023, WFP implemented a pilot initiative in two settlements, Shahid Naseri of Markazi and Mohajerin of Semnan provinces, providing refugees with disabilities a monthly cash top-up of IRR 1.5 million (US\$ 3) across eight settlements, on top of their regular entitlement.

In November, WFP scaled up its response by assisting an additional 12 refugee since October, reaching a total of 261 persons. This follows the program expansion in October, covering Kerman, Lorestan, West Azarbaijan, Fars, Khuzestan, Markazi, and Semnan provinces.

WFP Iran's Budget Revision of the Interim Country Strategic Plan (ICSP) was approved in September, leading to adjustments in the Needs Based Plan (NBP). Due to evolving circumstances including the suspension of two planned new refugee settlements to accommodate displaced persons from Afghanistan,

the revision made changes as follows.

** Reduced the total planned number of beneficiaries from 52,000 to 35,000.

** Extended the duration of ICSP by two years, now covering April 2023 to December 2027, aligning with the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (SDCF) duration.

The total ICSP budget has increased by USD 5.8 million, bringing it to USD 42.82 million, to account for these adjustments and the plan's extended timeline.

On April 3, the WFP released its 2023 report on Iran based on the interim Country Strategic Plan (2023-2025). The Islamic Republic of Iran has been hosting millions of Afghan refugees over the past four decades. According to the report, roughly 4.5 million Afghans live in Iran.

Around 33,000 of the most vulnerable documented refugees live in 20 settlements in 13 provinces of Iran. WFP's response in Iran focuses on addressing the food security needs of the most vulnerable refugees living in settlements.

WFP provides food, education, and livelihood assistance through a hybrid modality of in-kind food, unconditional cash, and capacity strengthening to refugees. In 2023, WFP Iran was able to secure more than 75 percent of its funding and address the daily food requirements of around 33,000 vulnerable refugees.

In addition to the unconditional assistance provided to around 33,000 refugees inside settlements, WFP also provided conditional support for students attending primary schools and junior high schools.

Through WFP's school meals program, around 8,620 refugee school children (49 percent girls) at primary schools and junior high schools and their 610 Iranian teachers (30 percent women) received nutritious school snacks throughout the scholastic year.

The snacks included fortified milk and either a date bar or whole grain biscuit for every day of school attendance to support their education and nutrition.

Under the same program, around 2,900 girls at primary schools and junior high schools also received cash incentives to support their education in line with girl's empowerment.

Following the successful establishment of bakeries in some settlements in the past years, WFP supported equipping a bakery in 2023 in one settlement to improve the efficiency of the baking process and the quality of the bread for around 1,400 inhabitants of the settlement.

WFP's commitment to supporting the government of Iran's assistance response for crisis-affected populations was further reinforced by WFP's provision of locally procured emergency family food packs to around 9,780 Iranian people affected by an earthquake in Koy City in May, through its co-operating partner, the Iranian Red Crescent Society (IRCS).



Daffodil harvest in southern Iran

Harvesting daffodils in Khafr County, southern Fars Province, is underway until mid-January.

Daffodils symbolize rebirth, new beginnings, hope, joy, and good luck, as they emerge each spring to light up barren landscapes with their cheerful yellow, orange, and white flowers.



DECEMBER 24, 2024

GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Our affairs are attached to the destiny decreed by Allah, even our best plans may lead us to destruction.

Imam Ali (AS)

Prayer Times > Noon:12:04 Evening: 17:17 Dawn: 5:42 (tomorrow) Sunrise: 7:12 (tomorrow)

Veteran actress Zhaleh Olov passes away at 97

TEHRAN-Veteran Iranian actress and dubbing artist Zhaleh Olov passed away on Monday in Tehran at the age of 97.

Born in 1927, she started her career working in radio in 1948 and as an actress in theater in 1949. She made her screen debut in "The Tempest of Life" (1948), Mehr reported.

She served as the dubbing manager for several movies, TV series, animations, and animated series including Walt Disney titles: "Cinderella," "Pinocchio," "Sleeping Beauty," "One Hundred and One Dalmatians," "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs," and "The Aris-

tocats" as well as the popular Japanese series "Oshin" (1983).

She has performed in more than 50 films and series. Her works include the movies "The Lost Time" (1989), "The Snowman" (1994), "The Fateful Day" (1995), "Pari" (1995), and "Mom's Guest" (2003) as well as the series "Mokhtarnameh" (2010-2011), "Sheikh Bahaei" (2008), "Brighter Than Black-out" (2003), "Once Upon a Time" (1991), "The Rey Traveler" (1990), and "Wolves" (1988).

She was chosen as one of the immortal faces of cinema in Iran in 2011.

Serge Joncour's "Human Nature" published in Persian

TEHRAN-The Persian translation of the novel "Human Nature" written by French novelist Serge Joncour has been released in the bookstores across Iran.

The book has been translated by Esmail Karamnejad and published by Negah Publication in 384 pages, Mehr reported.

For the first time, he found himself alone at the farm, with no sound whatever from the livestock, nor from anyone else, not the least sign of life. And yet, within these walls, life had always won through.

In 1999, as France prepares to see in a new millennium, the country is battered by apocalyptic storms. But holed up on the farm where he and his three sisters grew up, Alexandre seems less afraid of the weather than of the police turning up. Alone in the darkness, he reflects on the end of a rural way of life he once thought could never change. And his thoughts return to the baking hot summer of 1976, when he met Constanze, an environmental activist who fell for the beauty of the countryside, and was prepared to use any means to save it.

When his three sisters escape to the city, Alexandre is left to run the family farm. Though reluctant, he commits himself to honoring the traditional methods that prioritize the welfare of his cattle, and produce the highest quality meat. But the world around him is changing. The insatiable appetites of supermarkets and fast-food chains demand that standards must be sacrificed for speed. As Alexandre struggles to balance his principles and his livelihood, he is drawn to the beautiful Constanze, part of a group of environmental activists keen to draw him into their cause. Farmers use ammonium nitrate and so do eco-terrorists.

Joncour's impassioned, ambitious novel charts three decades of political, social, and environmental upheaval through the lives of a French farming family, as the delicate bond between the human and natural worlds threatens to snap.

Serge Joncour, 63, is a French novelist and screenwriter. He was born in Paris and studied philosophy at university before deciding to become a writer. His first novel "Vu" was published in 1998. His 2016 novel "Repose-toi sur moi" won the Prix Interallie.

Cartoon of Day



Genocide
Cartoonist: Gervasio Umpiérrez from Uruguay

Playwright's Night honors veteran figures

TEHRAN-The Playwright's Night ceremony, held at the Shahnaz Hall of the Iranian Artists Forum, celebrated the contributions of iconic Iranian playwrights.

The event also marked the birthday of Bahram Beyzai and commemorated the anniversary of Akbar Radi's passing, two giants of Iranian drama.

During the session, a segment of Bahram Beyzai's 2019 play "Dash Akol: As Narrated by Marjan" was read by Afshin Hashemi.

Beyzai, 85, is an Iranian playwright, theatre director, screenwriter, film editor, and master of Persian letters, arts and Iranian studies.

Before the outset of his cinematic career in 1970, he was a leading playwright (as well as theatre historian), so much so that he is often considered the greatest playwright of the Persian language.

In 1968, Beyzai was one of the nine founders of the Iranian Writers' Guild, a highly controversial organization in the face of censorship. In 1969, he was invited to teach at the Theater Department of the College of Fine Arts at the University of Tehran. He chaired this department from 1972 to 1979. With his readership, many prominent authors and artists started teaching at the department and created the most fruitful period in the history of that department.

Some of his plays, such as his masterpiece "Death of Yazdgerd," have been translated into numerous languages and performed worldwide.



Moreover, in memory of Akbar Radi (1939-2007), excerpts from his play "Slowly with the Red Rose" were staged.

Radi completed his studies at the University of Tehran in social sciences. The playwright's works have been compared with those

of Anton Chekhov and Henrik Ibsen.

A part of the ceremony was dedicated to honoring playwright and translator Andranik Khechumyan. Colleagues and collaborators praised his dedication to the craft.

Khechumyan's name is synonymous with groundbreaking theatrical work in Iran. He is often referred to as a bridge between the Armenian and Iranian theatrical traditions.

Behzad Sedighi, the former chairman of the Playwrights' Association, was another honoree in this event.

Rahim Rashidi Tabar, Hadi Hoori, Hamid Dashi, Shokoufeh Arvin, Maryam Yasinzadeh, and Reza Ashofteh were also recognized as other collaborators of the Playwrights' Association.

Writers Hossein Kiani and Nader Borhani Marand were honored at the ceremony as well. The final part of the program was dedicated to awarding the special medal of the Playwrights' Association to master writer Khosrow Hakim Rabat.

Iran's culture ministry denies claims of TRT Persian Channel license

TEHRAN-Iran's Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance has announced that, contrary to published reports, the TRT Persian channel does not possess an operating license.

In a statement published on Monday, the ministry clarified its position regarding a recent newspaper article that discussed the issuance of an operating license for the Persian section of Turkey's TRT television network.

The ministry asserted that it has not granted any such license, and the claims regarding authorized activities by this network are inaccurate.

In October, remarks made by Mehmet Zahid Sobaci, the General Director of Turkey's state broadcaster TRT, sparked controversy. He stated, "We are in a state of confusion and discomfort for Iran. We must do this," while announcing plans to launch a Persian-language channel as part of TRT's expansion into 41 foreign languages by year's end. These comments raised concerns among the Iranian public.

In response, Iranian Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Seyed Abbas Salehi communicated with Turkish officials to express apprehensions regarding Sobaci's statements. He urged that "such statements should be avoided," highlighting the need for unity among Muslim nations amidst regional tensions and the growing aggression of the Zionist regime.

Salehi welcomed Turkey's commitment to enhancing cultural relations, emphasizing that "the Islamic Republic of Iran's fundamental foreign policy principle is to strengthen ties with its neighbors, with Turkey occupying a significant position." He pointed to the robust political and cultural connections between the two countries and the opportunities for collaboration in the designated Year of Iranian-Turkish Culture.

Describing culture as a vital foundation for cooperation, Salehi insisted that both nations should leverage their shared cultural resources. He acknowledged recent initiatives in media collaboration, asserting Iran's readiness to

bolster these ties in a manner that aligns with the interests of both countries.

During this dialogue, Fahrettin Altun, Director of Communications for Turkey's Presidency, reiterated Turkey's dedication to strengthening political and cultural relationships with Iran. He noted the importance of fostering communication and mutual understanding between the two nations and referred to a recent meeting between the two presidents that emphasized expanding cooperation across all sectors.

Altun expressed regret over Sobaci's comments, clarifying that "any statement contradicting this has no connection with the thinking and approach of the Turkish President and government." He reaffirmed Turkey's commitment to friendship and cooperation with Iran, underscoring that challenges can be addressed through dialogue. The conversation concluded with a mutual commitment to ongoing cooperation while being mindful of media narratives and public sentiment.

Cinema Palestine Bangladesh 2024 concludes



The second edition of Cinema Palestine Bangladesh concluded on Saturday with a performance by Palestinian artist Salma Shaka at 101, an art space at Gulshan in Dhaka.

Curated by Parsa Sanjana Sajid, the festival comprising film screening, discussions and performances at different locations across Dhaka was inaugurated on December 12, New Age reported.

Vienna-based multimedia artist and researcher raised between Palestine, Cyprus, and the UAE, Salma Shaka staged a performance titled "Resistance Ritual" that showcased connections between herbalism and spiritual Muslim practices.

The performance aimed to understand the essence of divine

protection, personal resistance, and the urgent fight for justice through culminating a defiant call for the liberation of Palestine and all colonized lands in the world.

"The festival arranges different mediums of art shows to express solidarity with the Palestine people. Israel-run genocide not only kills people of Palestine but also demolishes their cultural references. Cinema Palestine Bangladesh is a small attempt to promote Palestine culture," said Parsa Sanjana Sajid.

More than 45,000 Palestinians have been killed in the war in Gaza between Israel and Hamas, health officials in the embattled territory said, as often-stalled ceasefire negotiations appeared to be gaining ground. They said 106,962 others have been wounded since the war began, and warned that the true toll is higher because thousands of bodies are buried under rubble or in areas that medics cannot access.

Qatar, Egypt and the United States have renewed efforts to broker a ceasefire deal in recent days, and Israeli Defense Minister

Israel Katz said he believed negotiators are closer to a deal than at any time since the only previous truce, a week-long pause in November 2023 that saw 105 hostages released.

The war is by far the deadliest round of fighting between Israel and Hamas, with the death toll amounting to roughly 2% of Gaza's prewar population of about 2.3 million.

Repeated Israeli military attacks on Palestinian civilians over the last 14 months, the dismantling of the health care system and other essential infrastructure, the suffocating siege, and the systematic denial of humanitarian assistance are destroying the conditions of life in Gaza, according to a new Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) report, "Gaza: Life in a Death Trap".

MSF is urgently calling on all parties, once again, for an immediate ceasefire to save lives and enable the flow of humanitarian aid. Israel must stop its targeted and indiscriminate attacks against civilians, and its allies must act without delay to protect the lives of Palestinians and uphold the rules of war.

"People in Gaza are struggling to survive apocalyptic conditions, but nowhere is safe, no one is spared, and there is no exit from this shattered enclave," says Christopher Lockyer, MSF secretary general, who visited Gaza earlier this year.

Israeli forces have on numerous occasions prevented essential items such as food, water, and medical supplies from entering the Strip, and also blocked, denied, and delayed humanitarian assistance, as documented in the report. Some 1.9 million people—90 percent of the entire population of the Strip—have been forcibly displaced, many forced to move multiple times.

Meanwhile, Palestinians' physical and mental health injuries are overwhelming, and the needs continue to grow. People are suffering from war wounds as well as chronic diseases, made worse when they cannot get access to essential health care services and medicines. Israel's forced displacement has pushed people into unbearable and unhygienic living conditions where diseases can spread rapidly.