

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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