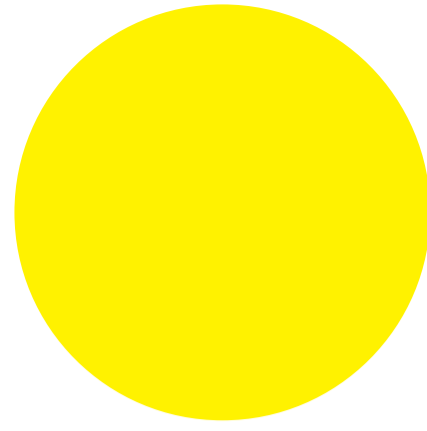


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SPECIAL ISSUE



Iran Daily



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NEWS IN BRIEF

Russia, Iran
to sign deal
on free trade
zone soon:

Deputy PM



An interstate agreement between Russia and Iran will be signed in the near future, an agreement on a free trade zone with the EAEU will be signed in December, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said on the Rossiya-1 TV channel.

"Several important documents will be signed in the near future. In December, an agreement on a free trade zone between Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union, and we will soon embark on the key document, which is an interstate agreement," he said.

Novak noted that Russian leader Vladimir Putin and Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi reviewed in detail the entire list of trade and economic relations, discussed financial and banking relationships and settlements. The negotiations between the presidents of Russia and Iran took place in the Kremlin on December 7, and lasted more than five hours.

No 'single
solution'
for energy
transition:
OPEC chief

The head of the OPEC oil cartel said Saturday there was no "single solution" to the energy transition as pressure grows to agree a phase-out of fossil fuels at the COP28 climate talks.

"There is no single solution or path to achieve a sustainable energy future," OPEC secretary general Haitham Al Ghais said during the UN meeting in Dubai, AFP wrote. "We need realistic approaches to tackle emission, ones that enable economic growth, help eradicate poverty and increase resilience at the same time."

OPEC attracted criticism Saturday after it emerged that the Kuwaiti secretary general wrote to the group's 13 members and 10 allies this week urging them to "proactively reject" any language that "targets" fossil fuels instead of emissions.

Negotiators have held marathon sessions aimed at finding a compromise on the fate of oil, gas and coal as they aim to achieve the global goal of limiting warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

Tehran, Damascus to
expand all-out trade ties

Iran's First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber underscored the "strategic and amicable" relations between the Islamic Republic and Syria.

The Iranian official said Tehran is determined to expand economic cooperation with Damascus, Press TV reported.

"The Iranian government and nation attach profound significance to Syria, and consider the nation's stability, independence, welfare and prosperity among their priorities," Mokhber said in a meeting with visiting Syrian Prime Minister Hussein Arnous in Tehran on Saturday.

The senior Iranian official also mentioned the ongoing Israeli military onslaught on the Gaza Strip. Mokhber said the international community is witnessing circumstances that have no precedent in history.

Mokhber said Washington and the Tel Aviv regime failed miserably to attain any of their set objectives in Gaza, emphasizing that the Axis of Resistance has grown to be strong and powerful, and rendered enemies unable to confront it.

"Just like Daesh terrorist group, which could not achieve its goals in Syria due to the heroic resis-

tance of the country's government and nation, the Zionist regime will not be able to dominate the region because of the strong steadfastness of the people of Gaza."

He expressed hope that enemies as well as their military forces and proxies would pull out of West Asia completely.

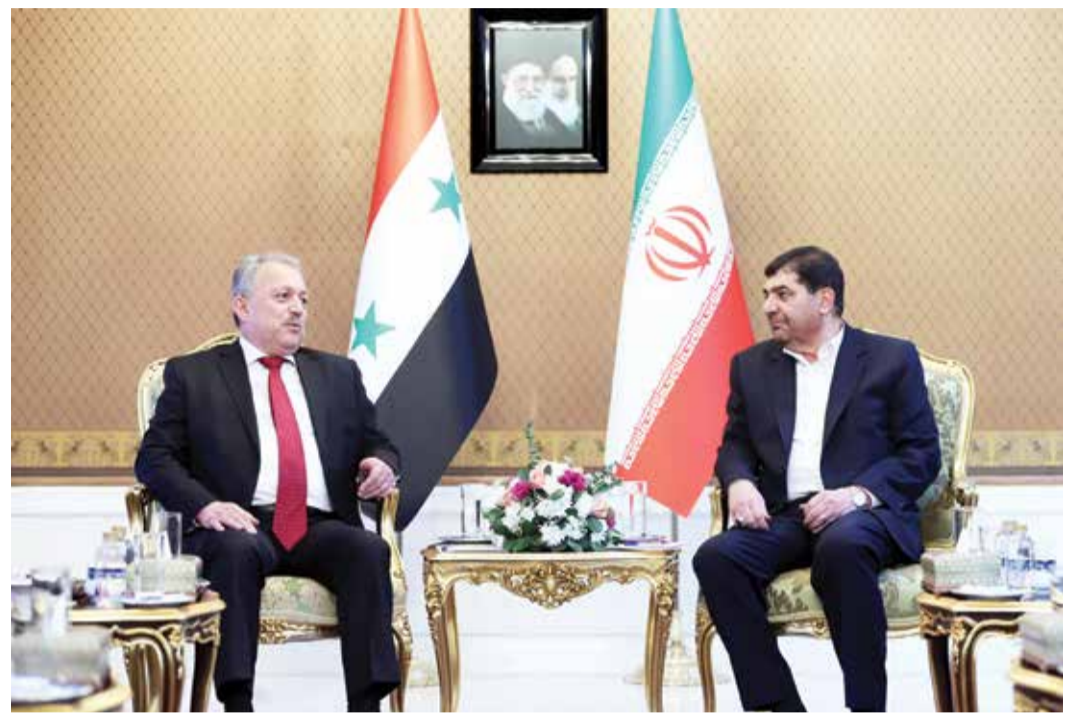
For his part, Arnous said the Syrian government and nation will never forget Iran's unconditional support and honorable positions vis-à-vis Syria.

"Iran and Syria have always come under pressure from global arrogance, the United States and certain Western states because they have been safeguarding their independence. Western countries have been putting pressure on Syria as it is one of the main pillars of the Axis of Resistance."

"Nonetheless I give you assurances that Syria will not alter its stance and will continue to tread the path of resistance," the Syrian prime minister said.

Turning to the relentless Israeli air and ground strikes on Gaza, Arnous described the scale of the regime's aggression as "bizarre and out of the ordinary."

"It is eccentric that such atrocities are taking place just before



Iran's First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber (R) meets with visiting Syrian Prime Minister Hussein Arnous in Tehran on December 9, 2023.
fypresident.ir

the world public opinion. It seems as if some parties are willing to wipe Gaza off the world map. We hope the Axis of Resistance would foil all these conspiracies."

Inking several MoUs

Later on Saturday, Iran and Syria signed six cooperation agreements, including a deal on free trade and memoranda of understanding pertaining to tourism,

media, sports, museums and libraries.

The two sides also agreed to launch shipping routes and promote transportation between Tehran and Damascus.

Zimbabwe Iran's gateway to
East African market: MP

By Sadeq Dehqan
& Reza Abesh Ahmadi
Staff writers

The head of the Iran-Zimbabwe Parliamentary Friendship Group said the African Continent has many unknown and attractive capacities for investment and cooperation with Iran, noting that Zimbabwe can be considered Iran's gateway to the East

African market.

Eqbal Shakeri told Iran Daily that stable collaboration have been established between the two countries in the fields of mining, agriculture and medical services, and extraterritorial cultivation. A delegation comprised of Zimbabwean traders and some members of the parliamentary friendship group will visit Iran in the near future, the MP said,

adding that during a recent visit of another delegation from the African country to Tehran, ways were studied to broaden the bilateral cooperation.

Referring to the recent visit of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, which took place in July, the lawmaker noted that 12 memoranda of understanding (MOUs) were signed between the two countries in the fields of agricul-

ture, pharmaceuticals, transfer of technology and medical services. The previous government of Iran put all its efforts to communicate with Europe and completely neglected the African Continent, the MP criticized.

Referring to the activities of the incumbent government in the African market, he continued, "The African market, especially countries such as Zimbabwe, Kenya and South Africa, has surprised our investors and the private sector."

"The Africa has many untouched capacities that can be used for Iranian companies active in the field of technology-based services."

During Raisi's visit to Africa, the Civil Committee of the Parliament was tasked to study the ways of exporting techno-engineering services to the continent, the MP added.

The Islamic Republic of Iran's joining the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, BRICS and having stronger presence in ECO

and the African market show the incumbent government's active diplomacy in the economic field, Shakeri said.

He also pointed to the strategic position of Iran in the region and noted that Iran is located at the crossroads of world traffic with a large amount of cargo and passengers pass through this region.

"Considering the importance of Iran's transit routes, our enemies tried hard to reduce the importance of our transit routes by activating alternative routes around Iran, but all these plans failed after a short time," the lawmaker noted, saying that the fastest and shortest transit routes to many parts of the world pass through Iran.

The government and Parliament have many plans for development of land, sea and air transportation, which will lead to good results in the promotion of commercial cooperation with other countries, the MP concluded.

Iran, Qatar can boost bilateral trade to \$1b: Official



The annual trade between Iran and Qatar can reach \$1 billion, announced the director of the International Affairs Department of the Ministry of Energy. Mojtaba Akbari made the remark in the 9th meeting of the Iran-Qatar Joint Economic Cooperation Commission in Tehran on Saturday, adding that the amount of export of goods and equipment to Qatar from Iran is about \$200 million a year, while Iran is doing its

best to increase this amount to \$1 billion, IRNA reported. According to the official, the annual joint commission meeting is being held to upgrade economic cooperation and constructive interaction between the two nations, which is attended by high-level representatives of executive authorities as well as the trade council of Iran and Qatar to deepen an amicable relationship.

The Joint Economic Cooperation Commission comprises four specialized committees, including the trade committee (commerce, industry, banking, customs, and insurance), the infrastructure committee (roads, urban planning, agriculture, information technology, communications, and labor sectors), social and cultural committee (tourism, handicrafts, health, science, research, and judicial system), and energy committee (water, wastewater, electricity, gas, and environment).

Plan underway to improve Kerman Province's tourism sector

Iranica Desk

Kerman Province, located in southeastern Iran, is a highly attractive destination for both domestic and foreign tourists. The region boasts more than 10 cultural heritage sites registered on the UNESCO World Heritage List, and over 700 nationally registered monuments, along with thousands of historical and natural attractions with diverse climates and geography. Additionally, the warm hospitality of the people of this region makes it a welcoming place for visitors.

The tourism industry in Kerman Province is facing several challenges that have hindered its growth and development. These challenges include lack of sufficient advertising and promotion, inadequate infrastructure and outdated facilities, lack of international connections and a comprehensive plan for sustainable tourism.

Given that the tourism industry is relatively inexpensive and comes with significant employment and value-added benefits, more attention to this sector, if accompanied by planning and implementation of various plans, can turn tourism

into the second source of economic income for the province after mining and industry.

The Kerman 1404 plan was prepared in collaboration with the Kerman Chamber of Commerce a few years ago to attract tourists from neighboring regions and provinces to Kerman. The plan aims to give a boost to the tourism industry in the short term through various planning and implementation. (1404 in the Iranian calendar corresponds to Mid-March 2025 to mid-March 2026).

According to Mohammad Jahanshahi, a tourism consultant at Kerman's Chamber of Commerce, Kerman Province has a significant potential in the field of cultural heritage and tourism.

Kerman Province has a diverse climate from south to north, and from west to east, due to its vastness. The province has dry areas such as the Lut Desert and mountainous areas with relatively high rainfall in the city of Rabar. Its climate and geography have led to the cultural, architectural, culinary, handicraft, and other diversities.

He noted that Kerman Province has a rich cultural heritage and tourism industry which is a great capac-

ity for the tourism industry. It has many tourism assets that need to be aligned with new markets. The Kerman 1404 plan focuses on the markets of neighboring regions and provinces.

"Iran is a country with a rich cultural heritage and diverse tourism industry. Cities such as Tehran, Mashhad, Tabriz, and Isfahan are the largest tourist target cities in Iran. However, due to the limited air and rail transportation facilities in the country, especially in Kerman Province, attracting tourists to its cities has become a challenge," he stated.

He observed that the marketing plan aims to promote the tourism sector of Kerman Province by focusing on events and the capacities of different regions. The plan is designed to involve all parts of the province in the project, rather than just focusing on well-known tourist areas. The plan is based on a comprehensive marketing strategy that includes several components.

Jahanshahi mentioned that the 1404 tourism plan includes national events organized by the government. This inclusion is expected to increase the number of visitors



Carpets of Kerman
● IRNA



Rabar
● kermanshahi.ir

to the province and boost various sectors such as handicrafts, souvenirs, and other productions of the province.

The plan includes the use of content produced by young people in the internet for various campaigns. For instance, a content production competition for the Shahdad or Rigan camel race can be held to inform the general public and enthusiasts.

Jahanshahi said that the Kerman 1404 plan aims to promote tourism in the province by focusing on various events and activities. The following are some examples of events and activities that can be turned into tourism events: Harvesting pistachios and dates,

which are major agricultural products of the province, organizing sports events such as camel racing, which is a popular activity in the Shahdad Desert, producing handicrafts such as carpets, rugs, and other traditional items that showcase the province's rich cultural heritage and showcasing the production of spices and Mohammadi rose, which are unique to the region.

"The tourism plan aims to compensate for a significant part of the backwardness of tourism infrastructure in Kerman Province. It provides a platform for convergence of all sectors, a practice for collective work, and having common concerns," he noted.



Rigan camel race
● yjc.ir

Development of Iranian Art

development of architecture in Azerbaijan, has pointed out that several changes can be observed between the 14th and 15th centuries, and this phase culminates in the 16th century. Apparently some new phenomena occur at the turn of the 18th century too. The period of change in architecture at the end of the 14th century corresponds to the beginning of the new stage indicated by Grube – around 1350.

Nor have the problems of classifying the periods of late Iranian ceramics been fully solved yet. The late phase in the development of Iranian ceramics covers the period from the 14th to the first half of the 18th centuries. This chronology has met with determined opposition from Gerald Reitlinger, an English art historian, who considers that the age of Timur is the watershed between the early and late periods – that is, the last quarter of the 14th and the early 15th centuries. To explain the changes which occurred in the Iranian applied arts during the 14th century apart from metalwork one can study carved gems. It was during this period that Kufic script fell into disuse and inscriptions were as a rule executed in

Thuluth script, covering the entire surface of the seal. These signs of a new style appear around the 14th century and end in the mid-16th century. The last rare examples of seals with depictions of animals and people are found amongst 14th-century seals.

During the course of the 14th century an important change also occurs in calligraphy – a new script is developed, Nastaliq, which becomes extremely widespread throughout Iran during the following century. The majority of surviving manuscripts were copied out in this script. Historical tradition associates the invention of this script with the name of Mir Ali Tabrizi who worked in the middle to late 14th century. True, one can scarcely consider him the creator of Nastaliq but his work apparently laid down those rules which served as models for other artists.

For a long time the design of manuscripts did not attract the attention of scholars. But studies of manuscripts of the 14th-16th centuries have shown that the 14th century marked the turning point in the history of this art form. Between 1340 and 1390 CE, important changes occurred in the

decoration and use of colour and this almost coincides with the end of the second inter-regional period.

But the most clear-cut changes of all can be seen in Iran's metal manufacture. Earlier Islamic metalwork had been made from an alloy of copper, bronze or brass, but mostly of brass, and decorated with copper and silver inlay, or, after the mid-13th century, silver and gold. In the 14th century pure copper begins to be used. Such pieces were tin-plated so that food could be stored in them. The first copper vessels are not distinguished in form or ornament from contemporary bronze (brass) articles inlaid with gold and silver. The inscriptions on the copper vessels are also benedictory and in Arabic. They were presumably made for the middle ranks of the Iranian urban population.

At present, it is still difficult to determine with any great precision when the use of the new metal began in Iran, but if we take into account the fact that copper was used in the Syro-Egyptian region from 1330 CE onwards, then we may suppose that the articles which concern us in Iran also existed in the second quarter of the 14th century.



A page from a book calligraphed by Mir Ali Tabrizi

The Mongol invasion did not cause any significant changes in the art of Iran until almost the end of the 13th century, when one begins to sense the influence of China on miniatures and applied art.

During the first three decades of the 14th century Iranian craftsmen also took over and reworked elements of

Chinese art, but around the mid-14th century a period of changes began in all branches of Persian art. The greatest difficulties arise when we attempt to fix a periodic classification for architecture (to the present day many studies adhere to a dynastic chronology). However, Leonid Bretnitsky, who has researched the

Instagram's 'accidental' mishandling of pro-Palestinian content



Manufacturing Consent

Since its inception, mass media has played an undeniable role in shaping public opinion on various issues, particularly contentious ones. Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky coined the concept of "manufacturing consent" to describe how dominant institutions, including mass media, shape public opinion and control the societal narrative in their scholarly 1988 book 'Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media'.

Through subtle manipulation and control,

these institutions create consensus or consent among the population for specific political, economic, and social agendas. By applying filters, selecting and framing news, emphasizing certain issues, and excluding alternative viewpoints, manufacturing consent shapes public perception, reinforces existing power structures, and suppresses dissenting voices.

Herman and Chomsky argue that the filters employed by mass media shape the news we consume, often resulting in biased cover-

age that serves the interests of power structures. Their incisive critique of the media's role in propagating dominant ideologies offers a comprehensive and thought-provoking understanding of the media as a social institution. Contrary to the common perception of news media as defiant, obstinate, and relentless in their pursuit of truth and justice, they actually defend the economic, social, and political agendas of privileged groups that dominate domestic society, the state, and the global order.

Drawing on extensive criticism and research, including case studies on the media's differential treatment of "worthy" and "unworthy" victims, Herman and Chomsky

propose a Propaganda Model to explain the media's behavior and performance. Their work provides a powerful assessment of the propagandistic nature of US mass media, their consistent failure to meet their self-image as providers of necessary information for understanding the world, and offers a radically new understanding of their function.

Following the Israel-Hamas war, it became evident that Israel and the US failed to "manufacture consent" through their traditional propaganda tactics using mass media. Instead, social media emerged as a new tool for the public to access information and make sense of the world. Pro-Palestine con-

tent challenging the accepted ideological stance of Israel and the US quickly spread on social media. Consequently, there was a need for censorship, employing the same filters used in legacy media, and other similar tactics to control the narrative.

It is not incorrect to assume that in our times, social media has replaced legacy media as the primary source of information for the public, as well as a potential tool for governments to "manufacture consent" for their policies and wars. Therefore, it is crucial for us to scrutinize how social media platforms behave during significant events, such as the ongoing brutal Israeli attacks on the Gaza Strip.





Policing Content, Censorship

The Israel-Hamas war has once again highlighted the manner in which mass media tend to favor established power structures and controlled narratives. Similarly, as it turned out, the social media walked the same path by policing user-generated content. In recent weeks, there have been multiple instances of pro-Palestinian voices being suppressed on platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, X, YouTube, and TikTok. Users have accused these major platforms of censorship, citing experiences of shadowbanning and reduced reach for their pro-Palestinian content. To address these concerns, organizations like the Arab Centre for Social Media Advancement have called on tech companies to respect Palestinian digital rights, as numerous instances of pro-Palestinian censorship have been documented. They highlight the disproportionate censorship of pro-Palestinian content, which includes content takedowns, hidden hashtags, and account restrictions, posing a grave threat to freedom of expression, access to information, freedom of assembly, and political participation. Activists, civil society members, and human rights defenders have raised concerns about such blatant content takedowns and account restrictions on platforms like Instagram and Facebook. This censorship obstructs their efforts to ad-

vocate for Palestinian rights, even for those who do not share graphic images or engage in hate speech. Additionally, the censorship appears to target keywords and hashtags associated with Palestine, preventing their posts from reaching wider audiences and diminishing engagement. Moreover, several Instagram users have noticed a decline in engagement on their posts related to Palestine, despite the absence of graphic content or hate speech, resulting in grave concerns about censorship and freedom of expression. Users question why their stories highlighting the humanity and rights of Palestinians are receiving lower views. Similar experiences have been shared by individuals discussing protests and the war in Gaza, leading to complaints about shadowbanning and limited visibility. This has sparked discussions about the collaboration between governments and big tech in suppressing information during contentious conflicts. Media outlets have also accused social media platforms of censorship. Websites like Muslim and Mondoweiss experienced significant decreases in post reach on Instagram and TikTok, respectively, during the conflict. Additionally, the Palestine-based Quds News Network faced a suspension of its Facebook page.

Countering Censorship

In response to this censorship, activists have resorted to workarounds to bypass algorithms. They have altered their writing styles, using symbols or changing letters to deceive the algorithms. Some have even developed online tools that alter sentence structures to make it harder for artificial intelligence and algorithms to understand the

text's meaning. As social media users' valid concerns about censorship grow, they are pushing back against the US and Israel's attempts to control the narrative of the conflict. Campaigns like #WeWontBeSilenced encourage users to post graphics or images that challenge censorship and intimidation. The effects of

shadowbanning, censorship, and intimidation are being felt, leading to a collective resistance against efforts to silence pro-Palestinian voices. While social media platforms have acknowledged "accidental limitations" in post reach, they deny intentional censorship. However, concerns about the suppression of pro-Palestinian voices continue, raising questions about how these platforms will respond to Israeli public relations pressure. The censorship of pro-Palestinian voices

on social media platforms during the Israel-Palestine conflict are truly worrisome. Activists, media outlets, and organizations who advocate for Palestinian rights have witnessed obstructions on the path. It goes without saying that the impact of such censorship is far-reaching, impeding the flow of information, stifling freedom of expression, and hampering efforts to establish context. As the conflict continues, the role of social media platforms in facilitating open dialogue and protecting digital rights remains

a critical issue. The constant censorship of pro-Palestinian content not only obstructs journalists but also undermines civil society and human rights defenders in their efforts to provide accurate information and context during the crisis. It is crucial for social media companies to recognize their role in facilitating the flow of information to and from Palestine, as it is essential for saving lives and mitigating the human rights impact of censorship.



ic Islamophobia and discrimination against Arabic content posters, while the reign of Israel-sponsored content on its platforms is unchecked. Critics argue that Meta's automated content moderation tools struggle to accurately interpret Arabic dialects, particularly Palestinian Arabic, leading to glitches in translation algorithms and the unjust censorship of innocuous content, mistakenly labeling it as promoting "Palestinian terrorists." While Meta acknowledges these incidents and vows to improve their algorithms, the damage to the pro-Palestinian narrative remains. Language competency and resource allocation pose significant challenges for US-based platforms like Meta when moderating Arabic content, as Arabic's diverse dialects prove difficult to navigate, resulting in inconsistencies in content moderation that inadvertently perpetuate the suppression of pro-Palestinian voices. Despite these challenges, videos from bloggers on the ground in Gaza and pro-Palestinian users providing commentary resonate strongly with younger audiences, fostering positive engagement. Individuals like Ariana, who shares her perspectives on the war from her US home, initially faced a decrease in views and lost followers when she began posting about Palestine. However, as she started exposing what she believes to be Israeli propaganda, her engagement on platforms like TikTok increased. Social media usage by the pro-Palestinian community has become essential in challenging Islamophobic narratives, exposing war crimes, and dismantling misinformation used to justify Israeli actions.



Control of Narrative

The recent round of escalation in Israeli-Palestinian conflict has intensified the battle for control over the online narrative, with Israeli propaganda accused of quietening pro-Palestinian voices. Censorship, biased content moderation, and targeted sponsorships are among the tactics employed to limit the reach and impact of pro-Palestinian content. Within the Gaza Strip, journalists face numerous challenges, including censorship and harassment campaigns orchestrated by Israel. Despite these obstacles, dedicated individuals strive to tell untold stories. However, the struggle extends beyond Gaza, infiltrating

major social media platforms. The suppression of pro-Palestinian voices goes beyond automated content moderation. Comedian Abby Govindan discovered that expressing her pro-Palestinian views on social media resulted in lost sponsorships, as patrons distanced themselves from Middle East-related statements. Shadowbanning, a covert form of suppression, disproportionately affects pro-Palestinian content. Digital rights experts argue that biased content enforcement remains a persistent issue for pro-Palestinian advocates. Meta, the parent company of Instagram, has faced allegations of system-

Israeli Propaganda, Bullying

The Israeli government has recently intensified its propaganda efforts, as Palestinians are constantly denied permission to narrate. The battle for control over the online narrative even attracted the attention of influential figures like Elon Musk, who faced backlash for endorsing an anti-Semitic post. An agreement was reached during his visit to Israel that Musk's Starlink satellite internet service would require Israeli government approval for use in Gaza, reinforcing Israel's control over critical resources and highlighting power dynamics at play. As the Israel-Hamas conflict rages on, platforms such as TikTok and Instagram serve as popular sources for real-time updates and firsthand accounts. However, this demand for intimate perspectives inadvertently creates opportunities for disinformation, conspiracy theories, and propaganda to flourish, and

Israel has seized the opportunity to utilize all that in order to manufacture consent. Regulators and researchers warn that these malicious influences pose a dangerous threat to public debates surrounding the war, muddying the waters of truth and perpetuating misinformation, which in turn would benefit the Israeli side. In the battle for control over the narrative, pro-Palestinian voices face significant challenges on social media platforms. Israeli propaganda and PR tactics, combined with biased content moderation, sponsorships, and language competency gaps, suppress the reach and impact of pro-Palestinian advocates. As the conflict continues, the struggle for a fair and balanced online conversation remains a pressing issue, demanding attention and action from both platforms and users alike.

Yazdani not to be rushed back into action, coach Kaveh insists



UWW

Sports Desk

Iranian wrestling sensation Hassan Yazdani will not be rushed back into action, the national freestyle team head coach Mohsen Kaveh said.

A winner of a national-high nine world and Olympic medals, Yazdani is expected to be sidelined for up to six months after a surgery on his injured shoulder in September, facing a race against time to make it to the Paris Olympics – starting July next year.

“I spoke with Hassan a couple of days ago. He is doing well with the recovery process and the physiotherapy sessions. I will be looking to have him in his best form for the Olympics,” Varzesh3 quoted Kaveh, who took over from former head coach Pejman Dorostkar last week, as saying.

“His health, however, is a top priority for us. He needs to be back on the mat in proper conditions first, before we decide on his Olympic campaign,” added the Iranian.

Yazdani had to cope with the shoulder problem through September’s World Championships in Belgrade, where he had yet another disappointing finish, by his own standards, after a fall defeat against his familiar foe David Taylor in the 86kg final, which gave the American a 3-1 lead in the head-to-head battles with the Iranian in the recent four major finals – including the showdown at the Tokyo Olympics.

The silver medal was still enough to secure the 86kg berth in Paris for Yazdani, meaning he will not have to be involved in the Olympic qualification events in the coming months.

However, the comments made by the Iranian federation chairman, Alireza Dabir, after Yazdani’s surgery raised doubts over the future of the 28-year-old’s career.

“No wrestler in Iran has fully recovered from a shoulder injury over the past 20 years. That’s what happened to me as my career came to an end when I was 25,” said Dabir, a gold medalist in Sydney 2000. Already having an Olympic gold (2016) and silver under his belt, Yazdani will be hoping to overtake former taekwondoka Hadi Saei as the most decorated Iranian in the history of the Olympic Games in Paris.

2024 Volleyball Nations League: Iran to chase Olympic berth in Brazil, Japan, Philippines

Sports Desk

Iran will take one last shot at a place in next summer’s Paris Olympics when visiting Brazil, Japan, and the Philippines for the preliminary round of the 2024 Volleyball Nations League – starting May 21.

The international governing body of the sport, the FIVB, on Friday unveiled the initial draw for the men’s and women’s flagship annual event, where the top 16 national teams in each category were divided into three pools apiece.

Iran will kick off its campaign in Rio de Janeiro, alongside the host and 2021 champion Brazil, Japan – which marched to last year’s Finals before finishing third – Cuba, Germany, Serbia, Italy, and Argentina. Week 2 of the preliminary phase puts Iran in the same pool with Japan, Brazil, newcomer Turkey, reigning champion Poland, Bulgaria, Slovenia, and Germany – starting June 4 in Japan, with the host city yet to be confirmed.

The third and the final week (June 18-25) will see Iran visit Manila, where massive showpieces against Japan, Canada, USA, the Netherlands, Brazil, Germany, and France could be on the cards for the Asian powerhouse.

The FIVB is yet to announce the fixtures list across the three weeks and the host country for the VNL Finals, which will be joined by the top seven of the 16-team table in the quest for the ultimate prize on June 27-30. This year’s event will also



FIVB

play a crucial part in completing the lineup for the volleyball contests in Paris, as the remaining five slots will be decided through the FIVB Men’s World Ranking by the end of the preliminary round.

Egypt will likely take the African berth for the Games, while the other four spots will go to the four highest-ranked teams, which have not qualified yet. As it stands in the ranking, Italy (third), Argentina (sixth), Slovenia (seventh), and Serbia (ninth) are the

favorites to qualify, with Iran lagging behind in the 15th place.

Iran will be back in Rio de Janeiro after a dreadful run in September’s Olympic Qualification Tournament in the Brazilian city, in which the Asian side finished second from bottom in the eight-team standing, managing a single victory over Qatar in seven outings. Germany, Brazil, Poland, Canada, USA, and Japan have already punched their tickets for Paris thanks to a top-two finish across the

three qualification pools. Iran’s qualification campaign was the latest episode in a disastrous five months under Behrouz Ataei – featuring a 15th-place finish in the VNL, followed by a straight-set defeat against Japan on home soil in the Asian Championship final – which ultimately saw the Iranian head coach step down from his role after a 3-1 defeat against the Czech Republic midway through the tournament in Brazil.

The future of the Iranian

volleyball remains unsettled ahead of the crunch Volleyball Nations League as the national team job has been vacant since Ataei’s departure while the sport’s governing body in the country is yet to know its chairman, after Mohammadreza Davarzani’s four-year reign came to an end in late November.

Vahid Moradi, a vice-chairman to Davarzani, was appointed by the Iranian Sports Ministry as the caretaker of the federation and is tasked with holding the

elections for the new president and board members. According to several reports in recent days, Moradi is also expected to name the head coach of the national team before the end of the year. The federation unveiled a list of six candidates for the job in November, with former skipper and world-class setter Saeed Ma’rouf as well as Italian Roberto Piazza – now in charge of Allianz Milano in his home country – reportedly leading the race to replace Ataei.

Russians, Belarusians allowed to compete at Paris Olympics

THE GUARDIAN – Russian and Belarusian athletes will be allowed to compete at the Paris 2024 Olympics as long as they have not supported the war in Ukraine, the International Olympic Committee has decided.

However athletes who do qualify in individual sports will have to compete as “neutral” athletes – with no flags, emblems or anthems allowed. Russian and Belarusian teams will remain banned.

The hugely controversial decision comes in defiance of Ukraine’s president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, as well as more than 30 western countries – including Britain and the US – who had called for a complete ban.

Unsurprisingly it was quickly criticised by Ukrainian athletes, including the Winter Olympic skeleton star Vladyslav Heraskevych, who questioned whether there would be any Russian or Belarusians in Paris who did not support the invasion of his country.



GETTY IMAGES

“To me this is madness, not something that is subject to common sense,” he said. The news also was greeted with anger in Russia, with the former sports minister Pavel Kolobkov saying: “This feels like some kind of handout.”

“In such a situation, the Olympics have ceased to be such an interesting competition for Russian athletes,” he added.

“It was one thing when we performed on equal terms and competed on equal terms with other

athletes. And it’s another thing when we are asked to participate under such humiliating conditions.”

In a statement explaining its decision, the IOC said that only eight athletes from Russia and three Belarusians had so far qualified for

Paris, out of over 4,600 from around the world.

The IOC confirmed that athletes and coaches who actively support the war will not be able to compete in Paris. “Athletes who are contracted to the Russian or Belarusian military or

national security agencies will not be eligible to be entered or to compete,” it added.

Russian and Belarusian athletes will have to sign a statement promising to respect the Olympic Charter, including “the peace mission of the Olympic movement” and fulfil anti-doping requirements for their sport.

“Among the 4,600 athletes from around the world who have qualified for Paris 2024 so far, there are only 11 individual neutral athletes (eight with a Russian passport plus three with a Belarusian passport),” the IOC said. “In comparison, to date more than 60 Ukrainian athletes have qualified for Paris 2024.”

No Russian or Belarusian government or state officials will be invited to or accredited for the Games. The IOC insisted that its decision was backed by sports and athletes. “The view of the overwhelming majority of athletes is not to punish fellow athletes for the actions of their government,” it said.

Int'l ire after US vetoes cease-fire Ever Game for War

PA: US complicit in Israeli crimes



International Desk

The United States vetoed a United Nations resolution Friday backed by almost all other Security Council members and dozens of other nations demanding an immediate humanitarian cease-fire in Gaza. Supporters called it a terrible day and warned of more civilian deaths and destruction as the war goes into its third month. The vote in the 15-member council was 13-1, with the United Kingdom abstaining. France and Japan were among those supporting the call for a cease-fire, according to AP. The United States' isolated stand reflected a growing fracture between Washington and some of its closest allies over Israel's monthslong bombardment of Gaza.

In a vain effort to press the Biden administration to drop its opposition to calling for a halt to the fighting, the foreign ministers of Egypt, Jordan, the Palestinian Authority, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey were all in Washington on Friday. But their meeting with Secretary of State Antony Blinken took place only after the UN vote. Along with the vote, the Arab diplomats' mission served to shift responsibility more squarely onto

the United States for protecting Israel from growing demands to stop the airstrikes that are killing thousands of Palestinian civilians.

US Deputy Ambassador Robert Wood called the resolution "imbalanced" and criticized the council after the vote for its failure to condemn Hamas' October 7 attack on Israel or to acknowledge Israel's right to defend itself. He declared that halting military action would allow Hamas to continue to rule Gaza and "only plant the seeds for the next war". Israel's military campaign has killed more than 17,700 people in Gaza — 70% of them women and children — and wounded more than 46,000, according to the Palestinian territory's Health Ministry, which says many others are trapped under rubble.

US draws int'l ire

Palestinian Authority president Mahmoud Abbas said the United States' veto made it complicit in what he described as war crimes against Palestinians, France 24 reported. The council called the emergency meeting to hear from Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, who for the first time invoked Article 99 of the UN Charter, which enables a

UN chief to raise threats he sees to international peace and security. He warned of a "humanitarian catastrophe" in Gaza and urged the council to demand a humanitarian cease-fire.

Guterres said he raised Article 99 — which hadn't been used at the UN since 1971 — because "there is a high risk of the total collapse of the humanitarian support system in Gaza." The UN anticipates this would result in "a complete breakdown of public order and increased pressure for mass displacement into Egypt," he warned.

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian told UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in a phone call that "As long as the US supports the crimes of the Zionist regime and the continuation of the war ... there is a possibility of an uncontrollable explosion in the situation of the region."

Iran's top diplomat also praised the UN chief's decision to use Article 99 of the UN Charter as "brave action to maintain international peace and security". Nasser Kanaani, spokesman for the Iranian Foreign Ministry, stressed in a statement, "The US government once again proved that it is the main culprit and guilty party in

the killing of civilians and Palestinian citizens, especially women and children, and destruction of vital infrastructure in Gaza," Press TV wrote.

Abushahab, the UAE diplomat, said before the vote that the resolution, which his country sponsored, had garnered nearly 100 co-sponsors in less than 24 hours, a reflection of global support for efforts to end the war and save Palestinian lives.

After the vote, he expressed deep disappointment at the US veto and warned that the Security Council is growing isolated and "appears untethered" from its mandate to ensure international peace and security.

Ambassador Nicolas De Rivièrre of France, a veto-wielding permanent council member who supported the resolution, lamented its lack of unity and pleaded "for a new, immediate, and lasting humanitarian truce that should lead to a sustainable cease-fire".

Amnesty International's Secretary General Agnès Callamard criticized the US for continuing to transfer munitions to the Israeli government "that contribute to the decimation of entire families." And Louis Charbonneau, UN director at Human

Rights Watch, said that by providing weapons and diplomatic cover to Israel "as it commits atrocities, including collectively punishing the Palestinian civilian population in Gaza, the US risks complicity in war crimes."

Israel arrests, 'humiliates' civilians

Israel said Friday that the military was rounding up Palestinian men in northern Gaza for interrogation, searching for Hamas fighters.

The detentions pointed to Israeli efforts to secure the military's hold on northern Gaza as the war entered its third month. Furious urban fighting has continued in the north, underscoring Hamas' heavy resistance, and tens of thousands of residents are believed to remain in the area six weeks after troops and tanks rolled in.

Palestinian, Arab, and Muslim officials condemned Israel on Friday after images of detained Palestinian men stripped to their underwear in Gaza circulated on social media. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said it was concerned by the images and that all detainees must be treated with humanity and dignity in accordance with international humanitarian law.



UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres (R) and Deputy Representative of the UAE Mohamed Abushahab stare at the UNSC meeting at the UN headquarters in New York City, US, on December 8, 2023.

● JUSTIN LANE/EFE

Some Palestinians said they recognized relatives in the images and denied they had links to Hamas or any other group. Some, they said, were boys or youths, Reuters reported. Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Al Safadi, speaking at a news conference in Washington, said doctors and journalists were among the men captured and "humiliated". The London-based Arabic-language news outlet Al-Araby Al-Jadeed said one of the men detained was its correspondent, Diah Kahlout. It urged the international community and rights groups to denounce the arrest of journalists. The Committee to Protect Journalists called for his release. Meanwhile, Aryeh Yitzhak King, the deputy mayor of the occupied Al-Quds (Jerusalem), called for burying alive those Palestinian civilians that were captured and paraded by Israeli forces during the occupying entity's war on the besieged Gaza Strip.

Iran: JCPOA becoming more useless day by day



● IRNA

International Desk

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said the 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and world powers is becoming more and more useless, day by day.

Addressing a group of students at the University of Tehran on the occasion of the national Student Day, the Iranian foreign minister said that Iran will not cross its redlines to revive the 2015 agreement on its nuclear programs.

Talks on the deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), have been on pause since August, 2022, with Iran blaming a lack of political will on the part of US President Joe Biden's administration to undo the damage caused to the multilateral nuclear deal by the previous US administration.

Former US president Donald Trump pulled Washington out of the UNSC-endorsed agreement in May 2018, imposing severe economic sanctions against Tehran while Iran was adhering to its commitments under the deal and even continued to do so for a year after the US withdrawal.

Tehran scaled back its commitments to the JCPOA in a series of pre-announced and clear steps after witnessing the other parties' failure to secure its interests under the agreement.

Amir-Abdollahian said that the other parties to the nuclear deal did not heed Iran's redlines. Iran is not currently on the path to sign a new agreement to revive the JCPOA. "We will not get caught in the narrow tunnel of the JCPOA," the Iranian top diplomat underscored.

"Of course, this does not mean that we have set the agreement aside. If the agreement serves our interests, [we will accept it] with all its flaws."

Elsewhere in his remarks, he said that American companies are among customers of Iran's heavy water.

As confirmed by US officials, Iran produces a very high quality heavy water in the world, Iran's top diplomat said. Back in 2016, the US agreed to buy 32 tons of Iran's heavy water, which is used in some nuclear reactors. US officials said the heavy water would be resold for research purposes.

Heavy water, formed with a hydrogen isotope, is not radioactive but has research and medical applications. Under the 2015 nuclear deal, Iran was allowed to use heavy water in its modified Arak nuclear reactor, but must sell any excess supply of both heavy water and enriched uranium on the international market.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



Germany asks Iran to help de-escalate region

International Desk

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock called on Tehran to contribute to the alleviation of tensions in the Western Asia region, as the Gaza war has raised concerns over the expansion of the conflict.

In a telephone conversation with his Iranian counterpart, the German diplomat underscored that the Gaza crisis can be settled only through political solutions.

Iranian FM Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, for his part, emphasized that a political solution for the crisis is a move by the United Nations to conduct a referendum in Palestine among the true civilians there, including the Jews, the Muslims, and the Christians.

Amir-Abdollahian urged the global society to pay special attention to the fact that civilians, children, and women continue to be killed in Gaza and the West Bank.



● FLASHPIC

Berlin-based journalist raps Germany's falling living standards



Social Desk

Imploring immigrants to reconsider moving to Germany was the headline of an expatriate Iranian journalist on her live Instagram stream on December 8.

"Germany could no longer be recommended to people who have immigration at heart," said Mahdieh Pouryadegar, while criticizing the falling living standards of Germany, the EU's strongest economy, and a country generally considered to have favorable standards of living.

"The vision of leading a good life in Germany is no longer viable under current circumstances." Pointing out Germany's stance on the war in Ukraine, Pouryadegar identified it as the main reason behind the country's political and economic instability.

"All the European countries destabilized themselves by siding with the Ukrainians," she said, further adding, "And when Germany, the leading country of the union, is in such a state, one can only imagine the conditions the rest are in."

Citing the country's insufficient housing market, she cautioned, "Even if there's a house to be found, it would be too expensive and not at all affordable."

Moreover, the journalist complained about the rise in crime and security issues, which seem to be troubling the citizens.

She further stated that day-to-day life in Germany is occasionally disturbed due to inefficient bureaucratic processes, as well as recent economic and political distress, and refers to recent strikes in the country as an example. The latest case is the train drivers' strike at the national railway Deutsche Bahn, which went on a 24-hour strike, according to the GDL trade union representing the drivers.

In line with the journalist's observations, Ipsos published an article on December 6, echoing the "sick man of Europe" allegory for Germany. The article cited the November What Worries the World survey, revealing that "an alarming three-quarters of Germans (74%) believe their nation is on a downward trajectory."

According to the article, Germany's longstanding political stability and robust state coffers have been rattled by recent global events, primarily the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

"Now, one in four Germans (24%) find it challenging to maintain financial stability, and one in three (32%) anticipate having to reduce their current standard of living."

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● Editorial Dept. Tel: +98 21 84711171
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To be male and in Gaza

Humiliating civilians arises from hate, not anger

International Desk

PERSPECTIVE

While news and footage of the battering and torturing of prisoners of war (POWs) by Israel Defense Forces (IDF), abhorrent and brutal as they are, are nothing new, the occupying army always finds new lows to sink to.

Dozens of Palestinians have been pictured stripped to their underwear, bound, and lined up on their knees after reportedly being captured by Israeli soldiers in northern Gaza, according to the Daily Mail.

The men are believed to have surrendered in the Jabalia refugee camp and other areas around northern Gaza, with Israeli outlet Walla saying they were stripped "to rule out the possibility that they were carrying weapons". Dozens of captives are reported to have been paraded through Palestine Square in Gaza City, with shoes and sandals strewn across the street in one image.

When asked about the images, IDF spokesman Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari seemed to confirm that the men had been taken prisoner but did not clarify whether those pictured were members of Hamas or civilians.

The last point seems to be the worst. It's not even clear to the IDF



● REUTERS

itself whether those Palestinians were simple, hardworking men. Nevertheless, they were paraded around their hometown in front of the eyes of their neighbors and the world in the most humiliating way, with all their discerning features visible.

It's probably beating a dead horse to mention that even if these men were all Hamas members, this is a gross violation of the Geneva Convention, which both Israel and Hamas ratified as ruling political bodies. According to Article 3 of the universally accepted convention, "outrages upon personal dignity, in particular, humiliating and degrading treatment" shall "remain prohibited". But if there was an ear that listened to Israeli transgressions of international law, it must have been convinced

by now. Legalties aside, this cries hatred. It is hatred toward each and every Palestinian. It is a generational, systematic, and much deeper-seated hatred that can't conceivably be traced back to the October 7 attack alone.

Since October 7, Hamas fighters have killed 1,200 people in Israel. This still pales in comparison to the over 17,000 individuals that were killed indiscriminately by the IDF in response, but still, Hamas must have naturally stirred anger within many Israelis, IDF soldiers included.

We'll tell you why this is hatred and not anger. The great Greek philosopher Aristotle provided timeless, comprehensive definitions for many emotions. In his seminal book, Rhetoric, he distin-



guishes hatred sharply from anger. "Anger derives from what happens to oneself, whereas enmity arises also without [the offense] being directed at oneself. For if we believe that someone is a certain kind of person, we hate him. Also, anger is always about individuals... whereas hatred (misis) is also felt toward types: for everyone hates a thief and an informer."

If we contend that once again, Aristotle's observations have hit the mark, we can see why Palestinian civilians may have well been given the same inhumane treatment as members of anti-Israeli resistance movements. These men fit the criteria of being "a certain kind of person," that is, a brown-skinned, able-bodied Palestinian man in Gaza. Even the IDF admits that it has not yet conducted investiga-

tions to prove the guilt of those men. So, they have not committed any "offense" directed at anyone unless proven otherwise and, as such, should not be subject to any anger.

It is as heartbreaking to write this as I imagine it is to read it. The reason is simple: what if we were born in Gaza? We, or our loved ones, could have well matched that insanely general criteria. I assume this is a harder pill for some to swallow, but it's difficult to find fault with this argument.

To be sure, Aristotle does not forget to say that there is hatred toward individuals who have slighted us as well. But, even so, who, in their right mind, goes willy-nilly to a neighborhood and arrests and humiliates everyone in sight just because they were slighted by some unidentified men?

I challenge those soldiers to tell us what the man in the front row did, what the man beside him did, and what any of the other ones did to deserve this. And don't give us the "They have at least supported Hamas" argument. Every citizen of every country supports their ruling bodies by paying taxes and working in the public or private sectors. You have to do better than that argument, for your own sake, when you inevitably stand in front of a court, whether it be in this life or the other.

Message of Putin's trip to UAE, Saudi Arabia: *Moscow is not isolated*



By Ebrahim Beheshti
Staff writer

INTERVIEW

Russian president on Wednesday visited the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, followed by hosting his Iranian counterpart, Ebrahim Raisi, the next day. These diplomatic visits occurred against the backdrop of an arrest warrant issued by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for Vladimir Putin on charges of war crimes in Ukraine, dated March 17, 2023.

He had previously visited Kyrgyzstan and China. However, his visits to the UAE and Saudi Arabia, as allies of the United States in the region, were more significant. Iran Daily discussed the Russian president's trip with Mahmoud Shoori, an international affairs expert specializing in Russian issues.

IRAN DAILY: In your opinion, besides negotiating for bilateral exchanges, did the Russian president's visit to the UAE and Saudi Arabia have any specific political message or goal?

SHOORI: Certainly, it had a specific political message. After the

start of the Ukraine war and widespread Western sanctions led by the US against Moscow, a crucial issue for Russia was to demonstrate that the country is not isolated. Russians have said that only a few countries worldwide follow the West's sanction policies against the country, and most states maintain their previous relations with Russia. Now it seems that political and economic relations between Russia and many countries in the world are normal. Therefore, Putin's visit to the UAE and Saudi Arabia, which are considered allies of the US, sends a message that Moscow is not in isolation. Both the UAE and Saudi Arabia acted in a grey area towards Russia amid the Ukraine war. The UAE not only has not reduced its economic relations with Russia but has increased them. A significant portion of Russia's needs is supplied through the UAE. Russia and Saudi Arabia have always engaged in negotiations regarding the oil market, and they continue to do so. Therefore, Putin's trip, in addition to its bilateral economic goals, also had an international political aspect, emphasizing the inefficacy of Western sanctions against the country. **Regardless, Western sanc-**

tions against Russia have created challenges for the country, as President Putin had not undertaken multiple foreign trips before. However, it seems that with the prolongation of the Ukraine war and the continued conflict in Gaza, a breathing space has been created for Russia.

President Putin, nonetheless, exercised caution during his travels to foreign countries due to the International Criminal Court's indictment that labeled him a war criminal. In countries that have accepted the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court, a judge can issue an arrest warrant, making travel to these countries risky for Mr. Putin. However, for countries that have not accepted the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court, or have not provided assurances of compliance with its rulings, it is not problematic for the Russian president. Nevertheless, the longer the Ukraine war persists, the more it is in Russia's favor in terms of the international landscape. Countries that cut or reduced their relations with Russia under Western sanctions and the onset of Ukraine war gradually adjusted their positions and moved towards revitalizing relations, seeking to benefit

from engagements with Moscow.

In the news, it's mentioned that Mr. Putin will run for the presidential election in 2024. Do you think Putin has tangible achievements that ensure his victory?

There is no doubt that Putin will run for the presidency again, and he will likely win, as there is no serious competition in the field. Recent polls show he enjoys a popularity rating of 60 to 70 percent. He undoubtedly envisions successes for himself, especially considering his resistance to Western pressures over the past two years. He is currently engaged in a war, and naturally, he wants to bring an end to this conflict himself. Therefore, one can anticipate his victory in the elections.

Do you think there will be any changes in the current situation of the Ukraine war until the presidential elections in Russia and the US in 2024?

No, currently, there is no pros-



pect for a change in the war front. It doesn't seem that both sides are tired of the war or showing signs of a willingness to reconcile. So, the most foreseeable option is the continuation of this war of attrition. The best-case scenario is a cease-fire agreement rather than peace.

Trump is a serious candidate for the US presidential election. If Trump wins, how do you think the Ukraine war will evolve? Trump has claimed he can end the war within 24 hours.

It's too early to discuss the outcome of the US elections. Even if Trump wins, he won't be the ultimate decision-maker on the Ukraine war. European countries support Ukraine and their opinion is also important. However, Ukrainian opinions also matter. But a change in US policy in supporting Ukraine and Trump's pressure on Europeans might force them to accept a temporary agreement with Russia.