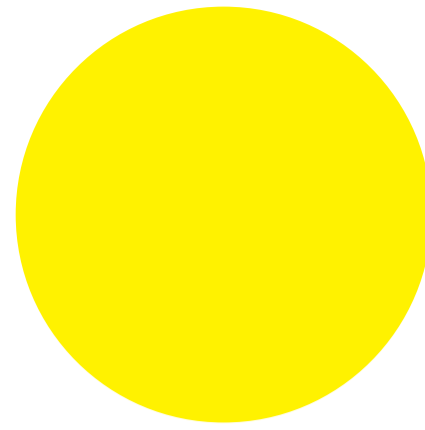




Iran qualifies for Asian Cup last 16 after beating UAE

Sports Desk

Iran secured a place in the AFC Asian Cup knockouts as Team Melli was victorious in its third game with a 2-1 win over the UAE in Al Rayyan's Education City Stadium of Qatar on Tuesday. Iranian Striker Mehdi Taremi scored two goals for Iran while two other goals by Ali Qolizadeh and Mohammad Mohebbi were denied for Iran by VAR. A goal by Yahya Al-Ghassani was not enough for the UAE to stop Iran. After the match, Iran sealed top spot with nine points in the Group C of the 2023 AFC Asian Cup.



Iran Daily

Leader urges Muslim nations to cut off Israel's vital arteries

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Harder days ahead for Netanyahu

By Ebrahim Beheshti
Staff writer

OPINION



Israeli protesters hold a banner featuring Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu during a rally against his far-right cabinet in northern Israel on January 23, 2024. AFP

Former Israeli prime minister Ehud Barak has warned that Israel would find itself "sinking in the Gaza mud for years to come" if Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu maintains his fragile grip on power. The stern warning carries weight, considering that Israel's well-equipped army is already mired in the Gaza Strip. Over a hundred days have passed since the Israeli aggression on Gaza, and thus far, Israeli soldiers have failed to uncover any trace of an Israeli captive in Gaza. The loss of 24 Israeli soldiers and officers on Monday in central Gaza is evidence that Hamas remains active. Many Israeli officials labeled Monday as a "difficult day" for Israel. This is the highest number of casualties for the Israeli army since the October 7 attack by Hamas on the occupied territories, even as Israel was gearing up for a post-Hamas Gaza. In recent days, various plans have been put forward for the governance of Gaza after the war, with the central premise of all such proposals being the eradication of Hamas. The heavy blow suffered by the Israeli army on January 22 poured cold water on Israel's and its supporters' plans for post-war Gaza. However, this does not imply that the Israeli war machine has stalled in the Gaza Strip; rather, it exemplifies the challenges that Netanyahu and Israel will face in the days to come, underscoring the complexities of the war in the Palestinian territory. [Page 8 >](#) Military superiority will not necessarily guarantee the desired outcomes.



One for Every Hour

24 Israeli soldiers killed in deadliest day of Gaza invasion

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Israeli troops carry the coffin of fellow soldier Captain Elkana Vazel during his funeral in the Mount Herzl military cemetery in Al-Quds on January 23, 2024. MENAHEM KAHANA/AFP

India in talks with Iran to resume crude oil imports

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Iran, Pakistan must work together to root out terrorist groups: MP

EXCLUSIVE

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An Iranian lawmaker said Iran and Pakistan, as victims of terrorism, must stand together in eliminating terrorist groups along their borders. In an interview with Iran Daily, Fada-Hosein Maleki expressed his country's expectation that Pakistan would join hands with Iran until the complete eradication of the threat of terrorism.

Netanyahu seeking political salvation by prolonging war

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Everest conqueror Danaei sets sights on K2 peak

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UK gov't to plough extra £1.3b into nuclear plant

AFP - The UK government said it will make available an additional £1.3 billion (\$1.9 billion) in funding for the construction of the Sizewell C nuclear reactor project with French energy group EDF.

The announcement from the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero late on Monday takes the level of state funding for the project in eastern England to more than £2.5 billion.

Opponents of the project criticised the additional government funding for a development they said lacked transparency and whose main beneficiary would be heavily indebted, French state-controlled EDF.

Energy security has become a more pressing issue for the UK since Russia-Ukraine war started in February 2022, and as the country looks to reach net-zero carbon emissions by 2050.

It wants to increase nuclear's share of the energy mix, as it does not emit carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.

Its use as an alternative to fossil fuels is highly controversial, however, with many environmental groups warning about safety risks and the disposal of nuclear waste.

The government gave the green light in July 2022 to Sizewell C and announced in November the same year that it would take a 50-percent share in the project after the departure of original partner CGN of China.

The new money "will allow early construction works to continue ahead of a final investment decision later this year", the department added.

Nuclear minister Andrew Bowie told the Financial Times in an interview published earlier this month that the UK was on track to conclude fundraising for Sizewell C before the end of the year.

The business daily said the government has to raise some £20 billion from outside investors.

Earlier this month, the UK government announced plans to build another nuclear power station in addition to Sizewell C and Hinkley Point C, which is under construction in southwest England.

Together Against Sizewell C (TASC), which opposes the development, criticised the additional government funding into what it called a "white elephant".

TASC deputy chairman Pete Wilkinson called it "nothing short of a contemptuous slap in the face for the UK's cash-starved public services".

"Sizewell C remains a purely speculative project, lacking transparency on cost and value for money leaving bankrupt EDF the only winners, laughing all the way to the bank," he said.

India in talks with Iran to resume crude oil imports



Indian sources said the country is willing to resume importing Iranian crude oil, adding that the issue was discussed in recent bilateral meetings held between the foreign ministers of the two countries.

India is reportedly considering the resumption of crude oil im-

ports from Iran following the escalation of fighting in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden near Yemen, wrote Tasnim News Agency. The issue has been on the agenda during the recent bilateral talks when Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar visited Iran last week.

The route for Iranian oil shipments passes through the Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman, swarajyamag.com reported.

So far, India has refrained from purchasing crude oil from nations under international sanctions. It only started importing oil from Venezuela after the US lifted sanc-

tions on the Bolivarian country. "We are always monitoring the situation when it comes to crude flows. However, there have been proposals to resume crude oil imports from Iran. We are studying them," an official said to the Business Standard report. Iran's oil revenues neared \$34

billion in the first nine months of 2023 despite brutal US sanctions, accounting for 12 percent of OPEC member states' total income.

The International Energy Agency (IEA), in its report, put Iran's oil revenues at \$33.9 billion during the period - two times the income obtained in 12 months in 2020, Shana reported.

The agency put 13 OPEC member states' total revenues from January-September 2023 at \$281.2 billion.

According to the US Department of Energy's estimates, Iran sold only \$17 billion and \$37 billion of crude oil in 2020 and 2021, respectively, while its revenues in 2022 hit \$54 billion.

Iran also had the highest oil production increase among members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in 2023 with over 300,000 barrels of oil per day (bpd) rise.

In its latest report, the US Department of Energy put Iran's average daily oil production volume in 2023 at 2.870 million bpd.

According to the report, Iran's oil production volume increased by 330,000 bpd compared to a year earlier.

This is while OPEC's total oil production volume decreased by 630,000 barrels in 2023 compared to the year before. In total, OPEC's member states produced 26.890 million barrels of oil per day in 2023, while they produced 27.520 million bpd in 2022.

Contracts worth over \$4b expected to be inked at Iran EXPO 2024: *Official*

The head of the organizing committee of the Export Potentials Exhibition of the Islamic Republic of Iran said it is expected that more than \$4 billion worth of trade contracts and agreements will be inked at the Iran EXPO 2024.

Speaking at the conference of introducing the event, Majid Takkbiri stated that the exhibition industry is considered an important means to showcase the production capacities of

goods and services of Iran, ISNA reported.

Political diplomacy should serve the economic diplomacy of the country and the role of diplomacy should be emphasized in economic development and growth, Takkbiri added.

The exhibition, which is the main event in the field of exporting non-oil goods, is held in line with materializing the objectives of the motto of production growth and resistance economy

policies in promoting the export of non-oil goods.

Establishing constructive and purposeful interaction between domestic companies and foreign traders has been cited as the main aim of organizing the exhibition.

The exhibition will focus on six groups of products of Iranian companies in the fields of food, agriculture, fisheries, handwoven carpet, tourism and handicraft, medicine, medical and lab-



oratory equipment and chemical products, building industry and technical and engineering services.

The 6th Export Potential Exhibition of the Islamic Republic of Iran will be held in Tehran from April 27 to May 1, 2024.

Tehran-Beijing trade reaches \$14.6b in 2023: *Customs Data*

The value of trade exchanges between Iran and China in 2023 topped \$14.6 billion, according to China's Customs Office.

The two countries exchanged \$14.65 billion worth of products in 2023, the report stated, adding that the value of the trade exchanges between Iran and China showed a 6.2% decline compared to a year before, IRNA reported.

Iran and China exchanged \$15.5 billion worth of products in 2022.

China exported \$10.7 billion worth of products to Iran from January to December 2023, indicating an 8.6 percent growth.

According to the report, China had exported \$9.27 billion worth of products to Iran from January to December 2022.

China's import of products from Iran fell from \$6.23 billion in 2022 to \$4.580 billion in 2023, showing a 27% decline.

The balance of trade exchanges between the two countries reached about \$5.5 billion in 2023 in favor of the People's Republic of China. The value of trade exchanges between Iran and China in December 2023 hit \$1.25 billion, showing a 4% growth compared to the previous year's corresponding period.



Iranian ports handle 194m tons of goods in 10 months

A total of 194 million tons of goods was loaded and unloaded at ports affiliated to the Iranian Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) in the first 10 months of the current Iranian calendar year (from March 21, 2023, to January 22, 2024), a report said.

More than 23 million tons of oil products were unloaded at the Iranian ports from March 21, 2023, to January 22, 2024, it said, IRNA reported. In addition, over 41 million tons of non-oil goods were unloaded from the ports in the first 10 months of

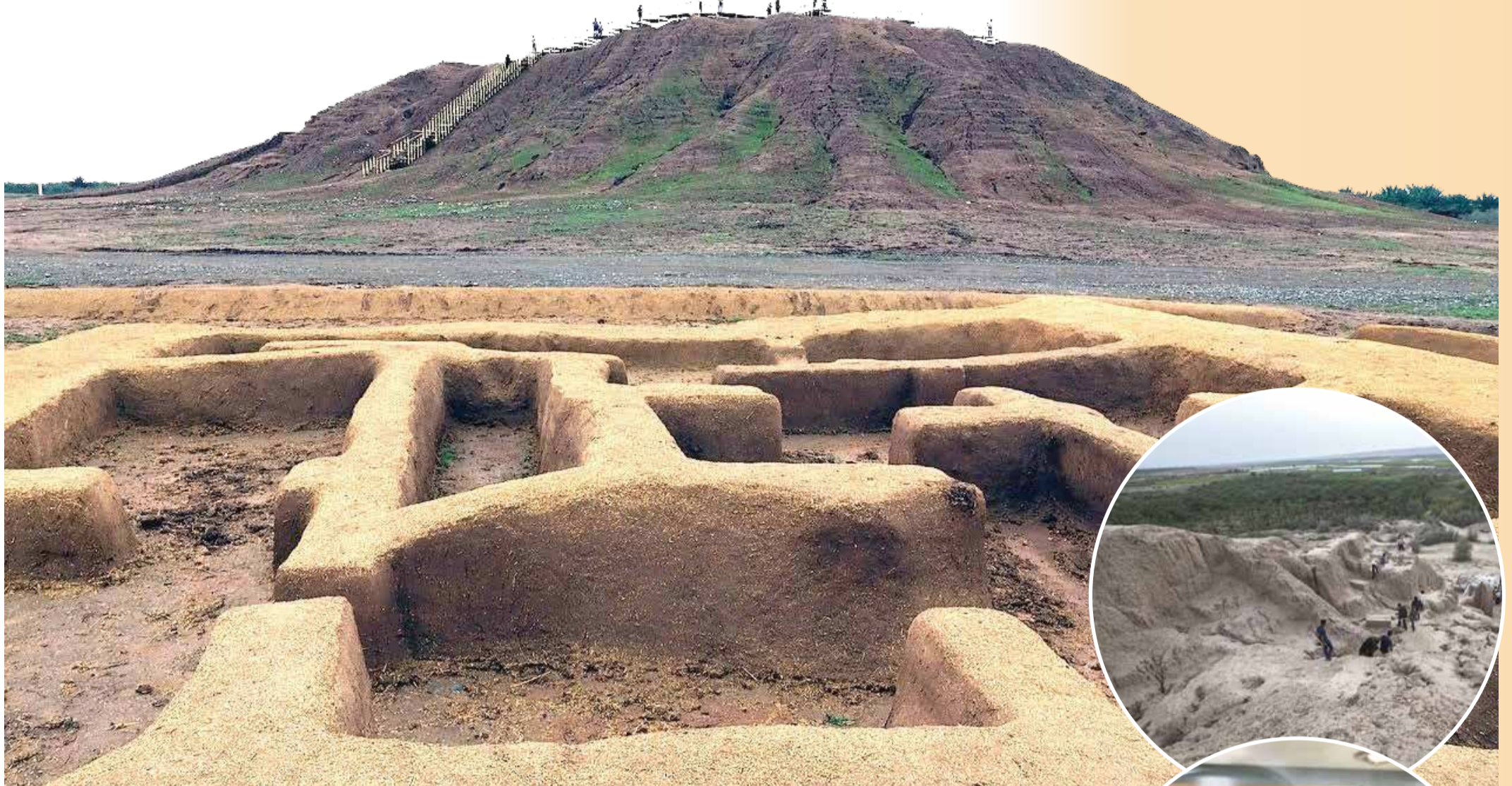
the current Iranian calendar year, it added.

The report put the total volume of oil- and non-oil goods unloaded in the Iranian ports at more than 65 million tons. In this period, more than 68 million tons of oil goods were loaded at the ports.

The loading and unloading of goods in containerized operations stood at more than two million tons from March 21, 2023, to January 22, 2024, showing a six percent hike compared to the same period a year earlier.



Preserving ancient legacy of Konar Sandal in Kerman Province



● wikipedia.org

Iranica Desk

The Cultural Heritage Organization of Kerman Province announced at the end of last December, after 15 years, that excavations at the ancient archeological site of Konar Sandal in Jiroft, Kerman Province, would begin.

However, the head of the excavation team recently stated that the extensive destruction in the area has forced them to prioritize restoration efforts before proceeding with further excavations. The history of this ancient area, located near the city of Jiroft in southern Kerman Province, dates back 4,600 years and holds significant cultural heritage value. Despite its historical significance, Jiroft was relatively unknown in terms of archaeology until 2001, when it suddenly became one of the most important archeological sites in West Asia.

Restoration and protection efforts

According to Youssef Majidzadeh, the head of the first excavation team at Konar Sandal, the available documents, the richness of its artworks, and their quantity and quality indicate that the Halil Rud area, where Konar Sandal is located, was the largest industrial-commercial center in the ancient East in the early third millennium BCE, specializing in the production and export of goods made from various types of soapstone and marble.

Excavation plans

Seyed Mansour Sajjadi, the head of the current excavation team in the area, told IRNA that most of the excavated sites at Konar Sandal used few stones and metals, while materials like brick and clay were employed more. If not addressed, these structures would be damaged by weather changes, wind, and rain. He emphasized that these areas have not been attended to for 15 years, leading to more severe destruction. Timely restoration of any damaged walls or structures will not only cost less but also prevent the destruction of other parts.

Highlighting their focus, Sajjadi noted, "Our priority in Konar Sandal is restoration and protection of the ancient structures."

He mentioned that they have commenced work on the five most critical areas and have completed initial cleaning.

He also mentioned, "Next year, we aim to conduct excavations alongside restoration

efforts. We are carrying excavations in a few areas and have allocated additional funds for restoration."

Reconstruction of bas-reliefs and structures

He said that one of the team members is currently reconstructing a bas-relief, which was not properly maintained. The bas-reliefs, most of which has been destroyed, is actually an image on a brick that remained half-buried during the excavation. This brick relief, dating back approximately 4,500 years, depicts a man with a patterned skirt, with folded hands against the chest. The skirt of this statue is decorated with black and red colors in lozenge shapes, and its upper part is covered in yellow color.

Sajjadi added, "The western part of the southern Konar Sandal Hill, which we believe was the entrance gate of the site and referred to as the temple, had a tower and a bas-relief. He mentioned that the wall that was found during the excavation after 2001 was promptly restored and is still intact. Part of the project is focused on its tower and entrance chambers, which have been destroyed.

He stated: "We also want to renovate a residential building that could be an example of the houses of the people of Konar Sandal at that time."

Three excavation workshops are currently engaged in exploratory activities to gain insight into existing structures and provide valuable information for planning extensive excavation next year.

Historical artifacts

He noted that a cow figurine and a metal nail have been unearthed, which hold less significance compared to previous finds. These items are valuable primarily from a technical and scientific perspective.

Sajjadi emphasized, "Our goal is not merely to uncover objects, but rather to discover the roots of civilization and culture in this region, and understand the communication networks, people's lives, societal management, and the evolution of their cities."

He said: "The peak of prosperity of this site, which was also connected to the ancient world at that time, dates back to around 4,400 to 4,600 years ago. A part of the region also dates back to 2,000 to 2,300 years BCE, which is about 4,000 to 4,300 years ago, and it was during this time that many objects were pro-

duced.

He continued: "Based on the findings in the Mahtutabad Cemetery, despite the looting, a series of documents and objects such as bones were found, which the archeologists were able to identify as evidence of an even older history, dating back approximately 6,000 years or the 4th millennium BCE.

Mahtutabad is located 30 kilometers south of Jiroft, and 800 meters east of the Konar Sandal. Due to unauthorized excavations and looting of ancient artifacts, few traces remain for archaeological excavations.

The archaeologist added there are usually small villages that gradually grow and prosper. The development and transformation from a small village to a large city like Konar Sandal is a process that spans thousands of years.

He said that Baft in Kerman Province, hosting the ancient Yahya Hill, was a village, but Konar Sandal was a large city.

He also referred to the antiquity of the tablets and their inscriptions, saying, "The tablets which are single-language have not been deciphered yet. However, other tablets may be found and read helping these tablets to be deciphered."

Wealth and prosperity

He emphasized that the difference between Konar Sandal and all its contemporary sites is its immense wealth. The people of Konar Sandal put all their wealth and valuable objects inside graves, thus outside of the graves nothing is found except for pottery shards, broken stones, and broken beads.

The abundance of wealth indicates that its inhabitants were rich, and this helped the art and industry of the region to make significant progress.

Seyed Sajjadi recalled that another reason for the existence of civilization and prosperity in the region is the presence of various mines.

Collaboration for cultural heritage protection

He said that although the Cultural Heritage Organization of the province is making great efforts, it is not enough, and all institutions, even private entities, must contribute to the protection of cultural heritage.

"If we want the civilization of Jiroft and the Konar Sandal to be registered as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, everyone must cooperate," he concluded.



● IRNA



By Javad Mohammad Ali
Staff writer

The role of Benjamin Netanyahu as the Israel's prime minister has time and again come under the spotlight in recent months in the wake of the regime's prolonged onslaught on the Gaza Strip, which has further exposed his inabilities both in politics and the battlefield. However, Netanyahu sees the continuation of war in Gaza as a way out of mounting criticism facing him following Hamas's October 7 infiltration into the occupied territories as well as the high number of civilian casualties during Israel's strikes on the Palestinian territory. He has so far defied the global cease-fire calls to end the deadly bombardments in Gaza, insisting on the continuation of the attacks in order to eliminate the Palestinian resistance group Hamas. But, in fact, the war on Gaza has turned into a final solution for him to escape the political problems he has been grappling with for months before the beginning of war in Gaza.

Netanyahu seeking political salvation by prolonging war

Unpopular prime minister

Before the war, Netanyahu was fighting for his political life which was in peril due to the weeks-long protests that had gripped Israel after he proposed reforms in the regime's judicial system. Critics say the proposed changes would politicize the judiciary and compromise its independence, foster corruption and harm Israel's economy. The increasingly unpopular prime minister has also been facing several corruption charges, which have contributed to his unpopularity in the Israeli society. Netanyahu has been charged with fraud, bribery and breach of trust in three cases filed in 2019, known as Case 1000, 2000 and 4000. He has denied the charges, claiming that he is the victim of a politically orchestrated "witch-hunt" by rivals and the media to remove him from power. A recent poll showed that just 15% of Israelis want him to keep his job after the end of war in Gaza. In another poll, 53% of Israelis said they believe his wartime decisions are primarily motivated by personal gain. The intelligence failure which led

to Hamas's successful attack on the occupied territories further made things worse for the regime's longest-serving prime minister. During the October 7 Operation Al-Aqsa Storm, the Palestinian resistance forces killed more than 1,100 people and took captive about 240 Israelis in revenge for decades of oppression by the occupying regime. About half of the captives have been released under deals mediated by some regional countries. Now the Israelis, especially the relatives of the remaining captives are exerting pressure on Netanyahu to bring them back and end the brutal war on Gaza, which has endangered the lives of their loved ones.

Opposite results

It seems that Netanyahu's policy of prolonging the war is producing results opposite to what he expects. The killing of more than 25,000 people, most of them women and children, has triggered widespread anti-Israel demonstrations worldwide for months and has further shattered the regime's image in the world. Some Western allies of the regime have gradually tried to distance them-

selves from Israel to preserve their international image. Despite throwing unwavering support behind the regime at the beginning of Israel's ferocious offensive, its allies are now critical of the atrocities happening in the besieged Palestinian territory. The United States, Tel Aviv's main supporter of war against Hamas, has also opposed its military actions in Gaza.

Israeli PM 'has to change'

Last week, US President Joe Biden publicly called out Netanyahu and the far-right cabinet he leads, criticizing "indiscriminate bombing" of Gaza and saying the Israeli prime minister "has to change". Biden's comments reflect growing unease in Washington about Israel's conduct of the war, the devastating destruction and the rising death toll. Washington has been pursuing the two-state policy and the establishment of a Palestinian state for years. However, the Israeli prime minister has recently told the US that he opposes the creation of a Palestinian state when Israel ends its aggression on Gaza. "Israel must have security control over all the territory west of the Jor-

dan," Netanyahu has said, referring to an area including the occupied territory that Palestinians hope will one day become their independent state. Divisions are also deepening within Netanyahu's cabinet. The war cabinet minister, Gadi Eisenkot, has recently suggested the key war aim of defeating Hamas is unrealistic and called for elections within months. "Those who say that there was a major blow and demolition of the capabilities in the north of the strip are telling the truth," Eisenkot told Israeli broadcaster Channel 12 News on Thursday evening. "Those who talk about an absolute defeat and lack of will and ability do not tell the truth. This is why there is no need to tell tall tales." Eisenkot said Israel needed fresh elections because the public no longer has trust in Netanyahu's leadership. Established shortly after the October 7 attack, the Israeli war cabinet includes some ministers already at odds with one another. In pursuing his own agenda for the war, Netanyahu has lost the trust of Israelis and isolated Israel in the world, and there is no end to the war in sight.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (C) wears a protective vest and helmet as he receives a security briefing with commanders and soldiers in the northern Gaza Strip on December 25, 2023.
Avi Ohayon/AP



Unity in Israel begins to crack as war effort lingers



Israel's former army chief of staff Gadi Eisenkot (L) and Defense Minister Benny Gantz arrive for a joint press conference to announce Eisenkot's election bid and their political alliance in Ramat Gan, occupied Palestine, on August 14, 2022. ● JACK GUEZ/AFP

By Keren Setton
Journalist

OPINION

October 7 may have temporarily pushed political disagreement aside. However, Israelis who previously opposed the Netanyahu cabinet over the plans to implement a judicial reform are now doubting Netanyahu's intentions about the war. When the war between Hamas and Israel erupted on October 7, 2023, Israelis instantly united. After almost a year of bitter divisions over a cabinet plan to overhaul the judicial system, the scenes of Hamas' offensive on Israel immediately pushed aside all the divisions. Most members of the parliamentary opposition, who had frequently called for the ousting of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, announced they were now backing the cabinet. The second-largest opposition party, led by former military chiefs Benny Gantz and Gadi Eisenkot, joined the cabinet just days after the fighting began. Since then, more than three months into the war, the political fractures are becoming visible again.

"There was a feeling that the war would end swiftly," Roni Rimon, a strategic adviser and partner at the public relations firm Rimon Cohen & Co., told The Media Line. "But now, as even senior officials including Netanyahu say it will last at least a year, those who want to replace him say waiting until the war is over is too long." "The same forces that were operating before the war continue to exist," said Dr. Liron Lavi, an assistant professor in the Department of Political Studies at Bar-Ilan University. "To some extent, the divisions are even more highlighted because there is a war going on and people are paying with their lives." As the unity seems to wane, some are questioning whether Netanyahu's handling of the war is steering Israel in the right direction. Meanwhile, others are questioning the prime minister's motives, suggesting his political interest lies in the continuation of the fighting, which inevitably delays his political demise. While Netanyahu has repeatedly ruled out holding elections during a war, increasingly, more and more voices are saying that elections are needed now. This is one of the reasons — but not the only one — that the Israeli premier and his Likud party are lagging in the polls, with numbers showing the party being cut in half if an election were held today. Gantz's party, Blue and White, has almost tripled in the polls. The ultra-right-wing party, Jewish Power, has also gained some strength. It is led by National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, who has consistently voiced hardline positions about Israel's war on Hamas. Gantz appears to have made his political capital on putting politics aside, including his own personal benefit, and giving the Netanyahu cabinet his backing as Israel faces an uncertain future in the region. "Gantz's poll numbers are unrealistic and reflect the lack of an alternative for voters who are right-wing but do not want Netanyahu or the current Likud party," Rimon explained. "Once there will be new actors from the right wing, this will change." But the undercurrents that reflect unease with the current leadership are gradually growing.

"It is like a water dam that has a small leak, which is gradually growing," Rimon told The Media Line. "This sentiment will likely increase, but it is dependent on developments on the ground." In an interview last week, Gantz's party member Eisenkot said that the Israeli leadership was not telling the public the truth. As part of the five-member war cabinet assembled at the beginning of the war, Eisenkot went on to say that the cabinet was spreading "illusions" by telling Israelis that the captives could be freed through military operations. The former army chief, who himself recently lost his son in the war, said the only way to secure a hostage deal was through an elongated cease-fire. His comments came as relatives of the captives stepped up public pressure against the cabinet. On Saturday, thousands of people gathered in several Israeli cities, calling for the release of the captives being held by Hamas in the Gaza Strip. One of those protests was in front of Netanyahu's home. Demonstrators held signs of the captives, some saying the cabinet wasn't doing enough. The goals of the war, as set out by the Netanyahu cabinet, were to release the captives and topple Hamas. As time inches by, there are increasing divisions about how the war is being handled and whether the fighting is risking the possibility of a hostage deal or promoting one. On Monday, the Knesset was set to vote on three different no-confidence votes against the cabinet. While it is highly unlikely that there will be a majority in favor of them, the notion of unbreakable unity is beginning to crack. When joining the cabinet, Gantz made it clear it was only to be part of the war effort. As this effort wanes, he is likely contemplating the timing of his exit. "As long as there is intense fighting, he will and should stay," said Rimon. "But the longer he stays, the higher the chances that any failures will stick to him." Gantz's departure could signal to the public that the time is ripe for elections. According to Rimon, such a move could set off more intense public pressure to head to the ballots.

The full article first appeared in The Media Line.

Israeli PM's looming political predicament

By Charlotte Lawson
Reporter

OPINION

As fighting in Gaza passes the 100-day mark, making it the country's longest conflict since the 1948 war, many Israelis are expressing growing concerns about cabinet accountability in light of the security and intelligence failures leading up to

October 7, the increasingly dire captive situation, and the economic toll of the war. It all spells particular trouble for Netanyahu, who's long branded himself as "Mr. Economy" and "Mr. Security." While some are resolute in their continued support for Netanyahu and his Likud party, many are rethinking their vote or doubling down on their opposition to Israel's longest-serving prime minister. His day of reckoning may come sooner than Bibi had hoped — even as he urges the country to first wait out the war.

"Going to elections would be irresponsible and would badly halt the war effort," Netanyahu said on Thursday night, during a press conference at the Kirya military base in Tel Aviv. "The ones who are hoping for this, and for all the other things we hear in the TV studios night after night, are Hamas and also its backer Iran. We won't give this to them. We will bring complete victory." Yet many Israelis — on the left and right — want cabinet accountability. Crowds of demonstrators have taken to the streets of Israel's major cities in recent days to demand that the cabinet set a date for new elections now. Others want to head to the ballot box as soon as the conflict comes to an end. In a December survey by the Israeli Democracy Institute (IDI), an independent research center, 69 percent of respondents — including a majority of right-wing voters — called for new elections immediately after the war.

Behind-the-scenes divisions are now regularly coming to the fore. While Netanyahu used to host press conferences alongside Gantz, the premier now tends to appear before reporters solo. Reports of War Cabinet meetings devolving into screaming matches headline Israeli media. For many Israelis, it's Netanyahu's continued reluctance to take responsibility for October 7 that's perhaps most damning. Since the war's start, the prime minister has repeatedly obfuscated when asked whether he's at fault for the catastrophic intelligence lapse that enabled the Hamas invasion, subtly shifting blame to the Israeli military for the oversight. In a since-deleted post on X in late October, Netanyahu seemed to criticize the heads of Israel's military and security services for failing to detect and inform him of the impending attack. Netanyahu later apologized for the remarks, but the episode

A protester wears a shirt depicting Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu during a demonstration to demand the release of the captives taken during Operation Al-Aqsa Storm, in Tel Aviv, occupied Palestine, on January 20, 2024. ● AP



"I always chose Netanyahu, and I am from the right side of the political spectrum, but it will be hard for me to choose him again. I want a change," Mordechai Sasson, the owner of a produce shop in Jerusalem's Mahane Yehuda market, said in an interview. "Everybody should go home, not only Netanyahu." The relative quiet of Mahane Yehuda, the holy city's largest shuk, underscores the financial pain the tense security situation is inflicting on many Israelis. Where hundreds of shoppers typically brave crowds to buy meat, spices, fresh bread, and local produce, vendors outnumbered customers on the weekday morning of my visit. Shlomo Nissan, a produce vendor and long-time Likud supporter, said the cabinet is at fault, adding that he has no plans to back Bibi's party again in the next Israeli elections. "The army and the security forces do everything they can to prevent attacks, but it's not always 100 percent, and the situation is very delicate. It's very complicated for me as a business owner. You can see it's Wednesday morning and usually packed with people, but it's not the case right now," he said. "It's a mess." The longer the war goes on, the worse the economic repercussions are likely to be, and Netanyahu recently predicted the fighting could stretch into 2025. But along with souring public opinion about the cabinet's failures pre-October 7, cracks in the War Cabinet are becoming increasingly difficult to ignore. Days after the initial Hamas attack, centrist lawmakers joined with the prime minister to form an emergency cabinet in a show of solidarity. The move elevated National Unity party leader Benny Gantz, a former IDF chief of staff and onetime defense minister, to Netanyahu's Cabinet. Together with former IDF Chief of Staff Gadi Eisenkot — an observer in the Cabinet without a vote — Gantz has sought to exert the opposition's influence on

was just one in a series of political clashes his cabinet has had with the IDF as the country has uncomfortable conversations about who's at fault. Earlier this month, a high-level meeting of ministers reportedly erupted after IDF Chief of Staff Herzl Halevi informed lawmakers of plans to launch an internal probe into the military's failures in the lead-up to October 7. The IDF's decision to initiate an inquiry puts pressure on the cabinet to do the same, which could have electoral consequences for Netanyahu. Netanyahu's continued efforts to distance himself from the military may backfire with other voters. A survey conducted in late-October found that Jewish Israelis' trust in the IDF had actually grown in the aftermath of Hamas' attack — from 84.5 percent to 87 percent — making it far and away one of the most trusted institutions in the country. By contrast, just 20.5 percent of Jewish Israeli respondents said they had trust in Netanyahu's Cabinet. At the same time, the question of the estimated 132 remaining captives — 105 alive, 27 dead — continues to hang over the cabinet's head. Family members of the captive Israelis have been among the loudest voices calling for Netanyahu's resignation, holding weekly demonstrations in cities across the country. On Thursday night, family members of captives blocked Tel Aviv's main highway to protest the cabinet's lack of progress toward a deal to secure their release. Brenda Donvi, the owner of a boutique in Jerusalem's elite Moshava neighborhood, said in an interview, "The greatest evil that Israel has is a self-enemy who is taking the country hostage for his own interests and his own benefits to stay in power. [Netanyahu] will do whatever he has to do to stay in power, in my opinion."

The full article first appeared in The Dispatch.

Everest conqueror Danaei sets sights on K2 peak

By **Mahdieh Qazvinian**
Guest contributor

Iranian record-breaking mountaineer Amir Danaei says his next journey will be aimed at summiting K2 in the Karakoram range on the Pakistan-China border.

"I will leave for Pakistan in late April, and I will be joined by a group of climbers from all around the world to head for K2," Danaei told Iran Daily, adding: "Given its unique conditions, K2 is a dream destination for all mountaineers, and I want to be the youngest Iranian to ever reach that summit." At 8,611 meters, K2 is the second highest peak in the world, known to be one of the most dangerous and difficult treks due to avalanches, steepness and unpredictable weather. Nicknamed the 'Savage Mountain', K2 boasts the second highest fatality rate – follow-

ing Annapurna in Nepal – with 23 deaths per 100 successful summits.

K2's death zone is particularly perilous, and its constant rockfalls, and difficult climbing sections contribute to its high mortality rate.

Some high-profile mountaineers, including Pakistani Muhammad Ali Sadpara, lost their lives while ascending the mountain.

Danaei, however, is no stranger to the scale of the task as he became the youngest-ever Iranian to reach the highest altitude on the face of the earth when he peaked Mount Everest at the age of 23 last May.

"I was privileged to train under a couple of acclaimed mountaineers in Nepalese Mingma Gyabu Sherpa and Nirmal Purja before embarking on the 150-day ascent," Danaei said.

The feat saw the Iranian receive a world gold medal by the country's Sports Ministry – a prize handed to the climbers who summit the 8,500m-plus peaks.

Danaei, for whom the climbing adventure began with Georgia's Mount Kazbek – a dormant stratovolcano in the Caucasus – when he was 16, says his Everest ascent rounded off "seven years of hard work and dedication" to his beloved sport.

"It is a dream for any mountaineer to step on the Everest peak one day. You have to be a climbing devotee and put your life at stake to achieve your goal. All those years of tireless effort flashed right before my eyes when I stood on the peak," said the Iranian.

"There was no clouds and fog around, so I could easily see the distant horizon. The oxygen level is massively low up there but I took the mask off and offered gratitude to the greatness of God while waving the Iranian flag. I'm sure that moment will never be repeated in my life."

Speaking of the challenges facing him in the Everest journey, Danaei said: "The proper climbing equipment has always been a top priority for me as I believe that can save you life in the toughest circumstances.

The Nepalese food was also a barrier as it does not fit the Iranian taste, which is why I had to carry a 120kg bag with me." "Our trip was delayed by the adverse weather a couple of times, no to mention the avalanches are quite challenging. A polish female teammate and I were stuck in one and came within inches of the death," Danaei added.

"The most unpredicted incident, however, happened when an Indian climber in the group had a Covid-like illness and led to the rest of team suffering from that. I remember I had to deal with a high temperature in a 6,500m-high camp but I carried on."

The K2 ascent will be yet another episode in an already impressive career for Danaei, who has peaked Mount Ararat in Turkey and Armenia's Mount Aragats as well as Mount Damavand – the highest peak in Iran and West Asia at 5,609 meters – on a remarkable 30 occasions over the past seven years.



Embiid scores record 70 points as 76ers beat Spurs

BBC – Joel Embiid became only the ninth player in NBA history to score 70 or more points in a game as the Philadelphia 76ers beat the San Antonio Spurs 133-123.

His tally of 70 points beat the franchise record of 68, held by the legendary Wilt Chamberlain since 1967.

Embiid also made a career-high 18 rebounds and contributed five assists.

"When he gets motivated like that, anything can happen," said 76ers coach Nick Nurse.

"He can score in so many ways. His sheer size gets him a lot of stuff around the basket and a lot of free throws.

"And his shooting touch is the skill that makes it extra hard to stop him."

Tyrese Maxey was the next highest scorer for the 76ers

with 18 points, while number one draft pick Victor Wembanyama scored 33 for the Spurs.

The 76ers, who have won three successive games, are third in the Eastern Conference, while the Spurs are bottom of the Western Conference with only eight wins from 43 matches. Karl-Anthony Towns scored a franchise record 62 points in the Minnesota Timberwolves' 128-125 home defeat by the Charlotte Hornets.

It was only the fourth time – and the first since 1978 – when two NBA players scored at least 60 points on the same day.

When Embiid, the NBA's Most Valuable Player, broke the 76ers record with one minute 41 seconds remaining, they called a timeout to allow him to leave the game. He received a standing ovation at the Wells

Fargo Center in Philadelphia. David Robinson, David Thompson, Elgin Baylor, Kobe Bryant, Donovan Mitchell, Devin Booker and Damian Lillard are the other players to score 70 points or more in a game.

Chamberlain holds the record with 100 for the Philadelphia Warriors against the New York Knicks in 1962.

The game was played 18 years to the day since Los Angeles Lakers legend Bryant scored 81 points against the Toronto Raptors – the second-highest individual haul in NBA history. "From the time I started playing, Kobe was my guy," Embiid said.

"He's the reason I started playing basketball. It's funny, on the same night he got 81 and was my favourite player."

Embiid has now scored at least

30 points in 21 consecutive games.

Kevin Durant scored a season-high 43 points to help the Phoenix Suns to a 115-113 home win over the Chicago Bulls.

Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 31 points and made 17 rebounds and 10 assists to help the Milwaukee Bucks to a 122-113 victory – their ninth in succession – at the Detroit Pistons. Jayson Tatum contributed 39 points and 11 rebounds as the Boston Celtics won 119-110 at the Dallas Mavericks, for whom Luka Doncic scored 33 points.

Philadelphia 76ers' Joel Embiid (21) goes up for the basket during an NBA victory over the San Antonio Spurs in Philadelphia, PA, US, on January 22, 2024. **AP**



Tajikistan players and the coaching staff celebrate after the 2-1 victory over Lebanon in the AFC Asian Cup in Doha, Qatar, on January 22, 2024. **AFC**

AFC Asian Cup: 'Great characters' took Tajikistan through, head coach Segrt says

AFC – Head coach Petar Segrt applauded the mental resilience of his players after Tajikistan came from behind to defeat Lebanon 2-1 in their AFC Asian Cup Group A tie on Monday.

Victory meant Tajikistan sealed a place in the knockout stage in their debut campaign.

The 56-year-old may have lost his spectacles amidst the joyous scenes after the final whistle but Segrt could see clearly where the match was won against Lebanon.

"It was a fantastic game, a tough game," said the Croatian. "Don't forget, two

times we got our goals cancelled, it was the right decision but mentally, it can be draining so I'm very proud of my players, they showed great fight.

"Lebanon played well but I thought we would get chances because we could see them tiring, so we just needed to keep attacking. This kind of game, you play for your life.

"I believe in these boys, they have great characters. Tajikistan people are fighters and they will fight until the end.

"Just this morning I spoke to Joachim Low (former Germany manager) and told him

this is a wonderful tournament and you can see that in this game.

"For us this is a big dream to qualify for this tournament. Then the dream became to qualify to the knockout stage. Now we dream again."

Bassel Jradi opened the scoring for Lebanon just after half-time but Kassem El Zein's red card turned the tide in Tajikistan's favour with Parvizdzhon Umarbaev netting the equaliser in the 80th minute before Nuriddin Khamrokulov headed in the winner two minutes into stoppage time.

Leader urges Muslim nations to cut off Israel's vital arteries

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei called on Muslim countries to cut off their political and economic relations with the Israeli regime.

Ayatollah Khamenei made the remarks on Tuesday during a meeting with those in charge of a congress of 24,000 martyrs of Tehran Province, Press TV reported.

The Leader criticized officials of the Muslim countries for making "wrong"

statements about Israel's genocidal war on the Gaza Strip, saying they raise issues such as a cease-fire, which is beyond their control and lies in the hands of the Israeli regime.

"The issue that is in the hands of the officials of the Muslim countries is to cut off the vital lifelines of the Zionist regime," Ayatollah Khamenei added.

"Muslim countries should sever their political and economic ties with the Zionist regime, and not help this regime."

The Leader asserted that the Palestinian nation will emerge victorious despite hardships and inappropriate conduct of the authorities of Muslim countries.

Since the beginning of Israel's onslaught on the Gaza Strip, at least 25,490 people have been killed in the Palestinian territory, mostly women and children.

However, resistance groups in Gaza have managed to inflict heavy losses on the Israeli army.



● khamenei.ir

24 Israeli soldiers killed in deadliest day of Gaza invasion

Israel said Tuesday 24 soldiers were killed in the biggest single-day losses since the start of its ground war in Gaza amid growing pressure on the regime to find a way to end the conflict. The heavy clashes came US media reported a new Israeli proposal for a deal that would involve a two-month pause in fighting.

Twenty-four soldiers were killed on Monday, with the army saying 21 of them were reservists slain when rocket-propelled grenade fire hit a tank and two buildings they were trying to blow up. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said an investigation was launched

into the "disaster" and that Israel "must learn the necessary lessons". Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said the "deaths of 24 of our fighters, our best sons... is a heavy blow".

On the ground, fighting raged in Khan Yunis, the biggest city in southern Gaza, which the army said it had "encircled".

Witnesses said powerful explosions rocked Khan Yunis, as well as Deir al-Balah in north Gaza and Rafah in the south.

The Gaza war broke out with Hamas's unprecedented October 7 attacks, which resulted in the deaths of about

1,140 people in Israel.

In response, Israel has carried out a relentless offensive that has killed at least 25,490 people in Gaza, mostly women and children, according to the health ministry in the Hamas-run territory.

The Hamas attack also saw about 250 hostages seized, and Israel says around 132 remain in Gaza. That number includes the bodies of at least 28 dead hostages, according to an AFP tally based on Israeli figures.

A week-long truce in November saw 105 hostages released, the Israelis among them in exchange for Palestin-

ian prisoners held in Israeli jails.

New truce deal

US news outlet Axios reported on Monday night that Israel had proposed to Hamas, via Qatari and Egyptian mediators, a new deal to free all the hostages.

The report, citing unnamed Israeli officials, said the proposed deal would be carried out in multiple stages, and would also involve the release of an undetermined number of Palestinian prisoners.

US State Department spokesman Vedant Patel said Washington still be-

lieved "a two-state solution, a creation of a Palestinian state, is the only path that gets us out of this endless cycle of violence".

Netanyahu has steadfastly rejected calls for the creation of a Palestinian state.

EU foreign affairs chief Josep Borrell on Tuesday said that Israel cannot be allowed to unilaterally block the creation of a Palestinian state after the war in Gaza.

"One thing is clear - Israel cannot have the veto right to the self-determination of the Palestinian people," Borrell told a Brussels press conference with his Egyptian counterpart.

New reforms - a progressive nation

Against the backdrop of ongoing geopolitical changes and global conflicts, 2023 has become a difficult year for the economies of the countries of the Central Asian region. However, among the states of the region, the Republic of Kazakhstan managed to achieve certain economic successes due to the internal political reforms carried out by President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, which were also voiced by him during an interview published on January 3, 2024 in the newspaper «Egemen Qazaqstan» (Independent Kazakhstan).

Indeed, according to analysts from the International Monetary Fund, by the end of 2023, the volume of GDP in current prices in Kazakhstan should be over 259 billion US dollars, which is 15% more than in 2022. This is the most significant nominal growth in Central Asia. In 2024, growth is projected to be 4.2%. The positive economic situation in Kazakhstan opens up opportunities for foreign companies and potential investors to turn their attention to the rapidly developing economy of the leading country in the region.

Among the Central Asian states, the Republic of Kazakhstan stands out as the largest country and a key player in the region. The Republic of Kazakhstan occupies a strategic position between the huge economies of Europe and Asia, which is especially reflected in the development of alternative trade routes, including «The Trans-Caspian International Transport Route» (TITR). The logistics project, stretching from Europe through Kazakhstan, the Caspian Sea, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and then through the Black Sea to Turkey, represents a new «transport artery» for the transit of goods.

In addition, Kazakhstan could become a key supplier of important metals and rare earth minerals, which are also in increasing demand from Western industry. Thus, currently Kazakh companies produce 18 of the 30 rare earth metals that are important for the EU economy, including titanium, beryllium, tantalum and niobium. This need was emphasized during the visit of French President Emmanuel Macron to the Republic of Kazakhstan in November 2023, which led to the conclusion of important deals for Paris for the purchase of necessary minerals and metals.

According to a report by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, despite uncertainty regarding oil prices and the negative impact of the Ukrainian-Russian war on the work of the Caspian Oil Pipeline Consortium to the export of Kazakh oil, the Republic of Kazakhstan's economy is projected to grow by 5% in 2023 and 2024. Thus, there is a significant growth in sectors such as trade, retail trade, wholesale trade and construction. In addition, public and private investment has increased in various areas, including infrastructure, transport and warehousing, which indicates the growing role of Almaty city as a center for the distribution of

services in the Central Asian markets.

Despite improvements of the economic conditions in the Republic of Kazakhstan, international organizations continue to criticize the lack of a competitive political environment and freedom of the press in the country's electoral processes. However, in order to build a «new Kazakhstan», President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev took the first and necessary steps towards his election slogan «a fair state, a fair economy and a fair society». In fact, the Republic of Kazakhstan has many short, medium and long-term plans for its political, economic, social and diplomatic development, which creates a predictable and sustainable market for foreign investors.

At the same time, there are many rumors among the world expert community about a planned referendum on the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan, which would allow President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev to again take part in the presidential elections. In his interview, the President of Kazakhstan denied these rumors, noting that the provision on a one-time presidential term in the Constitution is unchanged, as well as the rules on independence, unitarity, territorial integrity and the form of government of the state.

The holding of the World Nomad Games in Kazakhstan in 2024 also seems to be a big event. They are important both for the popularization of national sports and a healthy lifestyle, and for the expansion of cultural and humanitarian ties between fraternal peoples - heirs of nomadic civilization. As international observers note, although the tourism sector will not be able to match the revenues from oil and gas exports in the near future, investment in tourism will be a step in the right direction that will not harm Kazakhstan's brand image in the world. On the other hand, Kazakhstan's strategic approach is also decisive for its international economic attractiveness. The Republic of Kazakhstan strives to maintain friendly relations with the largest world powers - Russia, China, the EU and the USA, which is a manifestation of the strategy of «multi-vector foreign policy» of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev. Thus, while not openly supporting Russia's actions in Ukraine, Astana also tried to prevent the escalation of tensions with Moscow by taking steps to prevent circumvention of Western sanctions against Russia, including a system of checks and balances in its financial and trading systems to ensure compliance with international sanctions.

The ongoing reforms, as well as the goals for further economic development, voiced by President K. Tokayev in an interview published on January 3, 2024, suggest that the leading Central Asian Republic is slowly but surely moving towards achieving its goals of building a democratic legal state with a new economic model attractive for international investment.

Iran's FM: US, UK attacks on Yemen 'strategic mistake'

International Desk

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said the decision made by the US and Britain to launch strikes on Yemen was "a strategic mistake".

Amir-Abdollahian made the remarks in New York where he is scheduled to take part in a meeting of the UN Security Council on Palestine.

"We sent out a strongly-worded message and stern warning to Americans. The decision by the United States and the United Kingdom to jointly attack areas in Yemen poses threats to regional peace and security, and expands the scope of the [Gaza] war," he added. He emphasized that he had sharply criticized London for escalation of tensions in the Red Sea and launching military strikes against Yemen, and described the moves as "a strategic mistake" during a meeting with his British counterpart David Cameron on the sidelines of the 54th annual meeting of the World Economic Forum in the Swiss city of Davos.

On Monday, US and British forces launched strikes at eight different locations in Yemen, with support from Australia, Bahrain, Canada and the Netherlands, according to a joint statement signed by the six countries.

A senior US military official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said rough-

ly 25 to 30 munitions were fired, including from warplanes launched from a US aircraft carrier.

So far, eight rounds of strikes over the past month have failed to stop attacks by Yemeni Armed Forces against shipping linked to the Israeli regime.

Strikes won't go 'unpunished'

Military strikes by the United States and Britain will not go "unpunished," Yemen's Ansarallah resistance movement warned on Tuesday.

"These attacks will not go unanswered and unpunished," military spokesman Yahya Saree posted on X, formerly Twitter, listing raids in Sana'a, Hodeida, Ta'ez and Al-Bayda provinces.

Senior officials from Yemen's Ansarallah movement strongly condemned the latest US and UK strikes against the Arab country, stressing that such assaults will not deter Yemeni armed forces from pressing ahead with their operations against ships bound to Israeli ports.

Yemeni forces say they will continue to block Israeli ships or vessels heading to ports in the occupied Palestinian lands until the Tel Aviv regime's aggression stops and the siege on Palestinians in the Gaza Strip is lifted.

Yemenis have declared their open support for Palestine's struggle against the Israeli regime since it launched a devastating war on Gaza on October 7.



● A British Air Force Typhoon takes off to carry out airstrikes on Yemen from RAF Akrotiri in Cyprus on January 22, 2024.
● AFP

Harder days ahead...



Following the huge setback on January 22, there will likely be louder voices of internal protests against Netanyahu and his cabinet's warmongering and ineffective policies. Just hours before the killing of 24 Israeli soldiers in central Gaza, the families of the Israeli captives stormed the Knesset, disrupting the meeting and rebelling against Netanyahu's inability to secure the release of the prisoners. On the same day, even the Labor Party set in motion a plan to impeach Netanyahu in the Knesset.

Even though the hawkish prime minister is relentlessly beating the drum of war and promises an outright victory, few people in the occupied territories remain unconvinced that such pledges are merely hollow. The situation is not unfolding favorably for Netanyahu and Israel. The Israeli army's acts in Gaza thus far, resulting in the deaths of more than 25,000 Palestinians, many of them civilians, have not been an achievement but a disgrace for the regime.

According to media reports, US President Joe Biden, Israel's strategic ally, conveyed a message to Netanyahu, warning that if Netanyahu does not change his course, he will be remembered as the person responsible for the biggest strategic failure in Israel's history. The results of a recent survey conducted by Israel's Channel 13 revealed that 53% of Israelis believe that Netanyahu's motive for pressing ahead with the Gaza war is personal gain. Some experts suggest an alternative interpretation of these personal interests, highlighting Netanyahu's fear of the war's end and an unfavorable outcome for him and his cabinet.

It appears that the heavy casualties suffered on Monday will further complicate matters for Netanyahu. On one hand, Hamas has demonstrated its refusal to give in and is fiercely resisting the Israeli onslaught. On the other hand, it will lower the morale of Israeli soldiers, leaving them more vulnerable. Moreover, it will heighten internal pressure on Netanyahu. Political parties and concerned Israelis, who worry about the future of the regime, will double their efforts to end the war and topple Netanyahu. This agenda seems to appease both the United States and the Biden administration. That's why Barak, in an interview with the Telegraph, condemned Netanyahu's policies and called for him to step down, calling on the Israeli "executioner" of Gazans: "In the name of God, go."

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Iran, Pakistan must work together to root out terrorist groups: **MP**



This file photo shows members of anti-Iran Jaish al-Adl terrorist group.



By Sadeq Dehqan
Staff writer

An Iranian lawmaker said Iran and Pakistan, as victims of terrorism, must stand together in eliminating terrorist groups along their borders.

In an interview with Iran Daily, Fada-Hossein Maleki expressed his country's expectation that Pakistan would join hands with Iran until the complete eradication of the threat of terrorism.

Referring to the bilateral meetings on countering terrorism in the past and

the upcoming visit of the Iranian MP said, "Terrorist groups' operations along the Iran-Pakistan border are orchestrated from outside, aiming to disrupt regional stability and strain bilateral relations".

At the invitation of the Pakistani foreign minister, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian will travel to Pakistan on January 29.

The two neighboring countries witnessed an escalation of cross-border tensions over Iran's counter-terrorism operations on January 16.

On that date, Iran launched

simultaneous drone and missile attacks on two bases of Jaish al-Adl, a terror group that was formed in 2012, and has conducted several attacks on Iranian soil in recent years.

The group claimed responsibility for an attack in December 2023 on a police station in the southeastern city of Rask that killed 11 Iranian police officers. On January 10, another attack by the group on a police station in the city killed one officer.

Also, characterizing it as a response to Tehran's operation against terrorist bases inside Pakistan, nine people, including four children,

were killed after Islamabad admitted attacking a village in Saravan in Iran's south-eastern Sistan and Baluchestan Province.

Pakistan carried out the strikes on Thursday against what it called bases of the separatist Baloch Liberation Front and Baloch Liberation Army in regions close to Iran's border.

The parliamentary representative highlighted the deep relationship between the two countries, stating that while border issues and challenges have existed at times, they have never led to a breakdown in bilateral relations.

"Certainly, the security authorities of Iran and Pakistan have close ties, both sides respect each other's territorial integrity, and there will be further cooperation between the two countries in combating terrorist groups," Maleki stated.

"It is inevitable that there will be border issues between the two countries in the future. However, Iran and Pakistan will never stand against each other, and the two countries will always remain side by side," he said.

Maleki also commented on the bloodshed caused by Israeli attacks on Gaza, saying, "After these attacks, which led to the deaths of

thousands of innocent people in Gaza, the savage nature and aggression of the Zionists have become more evident to the people of the world, and we are witnessing significant changes in the region."

According to the Gaza Health Ministry, at least 25,295 people have been killed in the Palestinian territory during the war that erupted on October 7. "The Zionists are currently seeking to pursue two goals by any means possible:

firstly, to destabilize various regions in the area; and secondly, to engage Iran in a war of attrition. In essence, the Zionists aim to create turmoil and various problems worldwide," the parliamentarian said.

"However, the goals of the Zionists have not been realized due to the management and strategic measures taken by our officials and military commanders. Of course, implementing these measures by Iran doesn't mean that we do not respond to the actions of the Zionists; rather, it signifies our intention not to let the region fall further into turmoil."

"Certainly, at the appropriate time, a firm response will be given to the conspiracies and actions of the Zionist regime in the region," he concluded.



A 'powerful' Iran ensures regional security

International Desk

An Iranian parliamentarian emphasized the pivotal role of the Islamic Republic in the region, asserting that the presence of a "powerful" Iran

serves as a guarantor of the security of the region.

In an exclusive interview with Iran Daily, Mahmoud Abbaszadeh Meshkini said, "Our neighboring countries should realize that having the

powerful Islamic Republic in the region helps to ensure the security of other countries."

The Islamic Republic of Iran has always stood by all oppressed and free nations as well as all Shias, Muslims, and

liberation movements worldwide, he said, adding, "Even if challenges arise in Iran's relations with some neighbors, the Islamic Republic will never forsake its neighbors and, when necessary, will not hesitate to provide any assistance."

Emphasizing ties with the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Iranian lawmaker said the Islamic Republic, in its foreign policy approach, aims to strengthen relations with all neighbors. However, due to shared interests and other agreements between Iran and Azerbaijan, we hold a special focus on the comprehensive development of cooperation with the neighboring country.

Meshkini added that Iran's foreign diplomacy approach is based on the development and deepening of relations with the Republic of Azerbaijan. The member of Parlia-

ment's National Security and Foreign Policy Committee stressed the importance of both sides addressing obstacles and misunderstandings in their bilateral relations.

Referring to the deep cultural and historical ties between the two neighboring countries, the member of Iran-Azerbaijan parliamentary friendship group emphasized the need to thwart the efforts of enemies and hostile regimes in the region, who are trying to destabilize the relationship between the two countries.

"Today, many tensions between friendly neighboring countries are the result of psychological warfare propagated by opposing media, attempting to blur the boundaries of friendship between neighbors through resorting to false and unreal news channels," the Iranian lawmaker said.

The Iranian parliamentarian highlighted the economic

capacities of both countries, saying, "The two countries possess excellent potentials in this regard, and by relying on them, they can significantly increase the volume of trade and economic collaborations to several billion dollars."

A total of 120,125 tons of goods were transported between Iran and Azerbaijan through the Astarra Railroad Terminal from March 21-May 21, 2023, according to a local rail official.

The figure indicates an 81 percent rise compared to the corresponding figure for the preceding year, which was 66,638 tons. Meshkini also expressed his country's readiness to contribute to Azerbaijan in areas such as providing technical engineering services, manufacturing automobiles and various industries, as well as exporting agricultural products. "Iran can offer many products and services at a more competitive price than other countries. Conversely, Iran can leverage Azerbaijan's capabilities for mutual benefit," he concluded.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist

