

Shoe exports up 32% in eight months



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Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei (R) talks with Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Al-Sudani (C) in a meeting also attended by Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian in Tehran on January 8, 2025. [khamenei.ir](http://khamenei.ir)

### What is Iraqi PM after in Tehran?



By Mehdi Ebrahim  
Staff writer

**OPINION  
EXCLUSIVE**

Today's visit of Mohammed Shia al-Sudani, the prime minister of Iraq, to Iran occurs amid a highly sensitive and tense regional environment. During the trip, it is expected that key agendas related to such developments will be discussed and debated. Most likely, Sudani's discussions in Tehran will focus on two main topics: the current situation in Syria and the position of Iraqi resistance groups. Issues concerning Syria and the resistance groups have decisive and sensitive dimensions for regional stability and the Iran-Iraq relationship. Additionally, topics such as energy and gas may also receive attention during the visit. The halt of Iran's gas exports to Iraq signifies a serious disruption in the country's electricity supply, especially since

Iraq's gas import contract from Turkmenistan has not yet entered the operational phase. Sudani's visit reflects the concerns of the Iraqi government as well as its efforts to align the perspectives of regional actors and present an image of a neutral yet active mediator. Recently, speculations have arisen regarding the potential resumption of US attacks against resistance group positions in Iraq and even a possible regime change, similar to what occurred in Syria. Despite the suspension of missile and drone attacks on occupied territories under continuous pressure from the prime minister and some members of the Coordination Framework, the resistance groups or factions remain a worrying source for the Zionist regime and the United States. Simply halting these attacks does not seem sufficient for the latter two, and there are serious concerns about the military capabilities and armaments of these groups. Page 8 >



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## Iran rolls out nearly 2,000 locomotives, wagons

### Economy Desk

Iran's Deputy Minister of Industry, Mine, and Trade announced the production of 1,975 locomotives, wagons, bogies, and car bodies in the first eight months of the current Iranian year (March 20–November 20, 2024).

The announcement was made during the third meeting of the Rail Committee of the Industrial Development and Renovation Organization of Iran (IDRO).

According to IRNA, Farshad Moghimi, head of IDRO, stated during the meeting on Wednesday that the production target for the current year was set at 3,858 units.

He noted that the production of 1,975 units in eight months marks an increase compared to the same period last year, when 1,792 units were produced.

Moghimi emphasized IDRO's focus on integrating supply and demand chains, consolidating resources, reducing costs, and improving quality in the rail industry.

Speaking at the meeting, Hamed Ameli, Deputy Minister of Machinery and Equipment Industries at the Ministry of Industry, Mine, and Trade, highlighted the challenges of registration, currency allocation, and customs procedures within the rail sector.

He stated that efforts are underway to streamline processes, shorten procedures, and resolve existing issues.

Ameli also called on rail industry associations to submit proposals for addressing these challenges. During the meeting, managers of rail production units outlined key issues facing the industry. These include the unfavorable economics of rail transportation, difficulties in leveraging opportunities under the law on removing production barriers, the aging fleet of freight and passenger wagons, limited orders, and the inability to modernize the fleet due to economic constraints.

Iran has made significant strides in locomotive and rail car production over the past year, reflecting the country's commitment to expanding its rail infrastructure and reducing reliance on road transportation.

To address challenges in this sector, Iran is focusing on integrating supply and demand chains, consolidating resources, and improving the quality of rail manufacturing.

These efforts aim to position the rail sector as a more competitive and sustainable component of the country's transportation network, supporting both economic growth and environmental goals.

# Shoe exports up 32% in eight months

A deputy industry minister highlighted the significant potential of Iran's shoe industry, noting a 32% increase in the value of footwear exports over the past eight months compared to the same period last year.

On the sidelines of Iran's largest shoe industry exhibition, Ebrahim Sheikh, the deputy of general industries at the Ministry of Industry, Mine, and Trade, announced that 160 million pairs of shoes were produced in the country during the eight-month period, ISNA reported.

In the first eight months of the previous year, various types of machine-made shoes worth \$58 million were exported to other countries, he said, noting that the figure reached \$78 million in the same period this year, marking a 32% growth in export value.

Sheikh pointed out that there are 8,337 shoe production units in the country. Last year, 158.5 million pairs of shoes were produced in the first eight months, which increased to 160 million pairs this year.

### \$100m target for exports

The deputy minister stated that the nominal production capacity of shoes in the country is 300 million pairs, emphasizing that the shoe industry has substantial potential, and the ministry is prepared to increase the export value of the product to \$100 million annually.

He added that 115,000 people are directly employed in the shoe industry, with 35,000 working in industrial units and 80,000 in commercial units.

Meanwhile, Abdolhossein Khosropanah, secretary of the General Culture Council of Iran, highlighted the development of the footwear industry, particularly through the efforts of the Qom Machine-Made Shoe Association.



Khosropanah described the establishment of a shoe vocational school and the development of shoe-related academic programs in technical and vocational schools as significant steps toward the growth of the machine-made shoe industry.

He suggested that the next step could be the establishment of a shoe university, similar to universities dedicated to automotive and home appliance industries.

He emphasized that while Iran has achieved a national governance model for shoe production, the work is not complete. "The General Culture Council of Iran, which has approved science

and technology documents, will also address the needs of the shoe industry."

The governance model for shoe production will be realized through the efforts of industrialists and officials, with much of this potential already being realized.

Khosropanah called for identifying and resolving obstacles faced by shoe producers, noting that the government is responsible

for addressing such challenges. One major issue is providing raw materials, he said, proposing the establishment of a shoe science and technology park, with the help of universities, to produce necessary raw materials domestically.

He expressed hope that the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Finance would support producers in areas such as hard currency, exports, and customs.

## Iran's envoy to Russia predicts surge in 2025 bilateral trade



Iran's Ambassador to Russia Kazem Jalali outlined several factors that could lead to a significant boost in trade between Iran and Russia by 2025, which include upcoming presidential talks, the implementation of further steps in a bilateral monetary and banking agreement, the start of Iran's free trade agreement with the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), and geopolitical developments. Talking to IRNA, Jalali referred to the \$5-billion trade volume between Iran and Russia in 2024 and said the figure is not up to par, given the untapped potential for cooperation.

He identified five key obstacles hindering bilateral trade, including a lack of mutual understanding, transportation issues,

customs procedures, financial and monetary challenges, and logistical bottlenecks. Jalali highlighted the importance of Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian's upcoming visit to Moscow on January 17, 2025, where ministers from both countries will discuss bilateral projects in the presence of the two presidents.

A comprehensive cooperation agreement is expected to be signed, marking a significant step in removing trade barriers and expanding relations across various sectors.

The ambassador noted that Russia's perspective on Iran has shifted due to geopolitical changes, particularly after the Ukraine war began on February 24, 2022.

Previously, Russia did not view Iran as a key economic partner, focusing instead on security and political ties. However, in the past three years, Russia has sought to enhance economic relations with Iran, exploring ways to streamline transportation routes and utilize Iran for both imports and exports.

Jalali emphasized the need to address the five major obstacles to trade, stating that Iran has significant economic potential and can play a much larger role in the Russian market.

He also mentioned the initial implementation of a monetary agreement between Iran and Russia, which allows Iranian bank cards to withdraw rubles from Russian ATMs. The second and third phases of this agreement, enabling Russian and Iranian citizens to use their bank cards in each other's countries, are expected to be operational in the first and second halves of 2025.

Jalali described 2025 as a pivotal year for resolving financial and monetary issues in Tehran-Moscow relations, citing progress in central banks negotiations.

He also pointed to the implementation of a free trade agreement between Iran and the five Eurasian Economic Union

(EAEU) member states in 2025, which will eliminate customs tariffs on approximately 9,000 goods. This agreement, signed in St. Petersburg in December 2024, has already been ratified by the parliaments of the EAEU countries and Iran's parliament, pending final approval by Iran's Guardian Council. With Russia being the largest economy in the EAEU, Jalali predicted that 2025 will offer a golden opportunity to boost trade with Russia and other member states, as 87% of goods will be exempt from tariffs.

He also expressed optimism about the future of bilateral trade, anticipating improvements in banking and customs procedures, the completion of the Rasht-Astara railway, and enhanced economic integration between the two countries.

### Current status of INSTC

Jalali provided an update on efforts to develop the Rasht-Astara railway, a key missing link in the western branch of the International North-South Transit Corridor (INSTC).

He reported that in 2024, an estimated 1.8 to 2 million tons of goods were transported along the eastern branch of the corridor, which runs through Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkmen-

istan, and Iran. The corridor has a capacity of 15 million tons, with 650,000 tons transported in 2023, its first year of operation.

The ambassador also noted that the multimodal land-sea route via the Caspian Sea has a capacity of 12 million tons, with 8 to 10 million tons currently in use.

Additionally, 3 million tons of goods are transported annually along the western land route through Azerbaijan.

Jalali acknowledged ongoing customs issues in Russia, Azerbaijan, and Iran but noted improvements in Russian customs, except in Astrakhan. He called for enhanced coordination among the three countries to resolve these challenges.

Jalali identified a deficiency of suitable cargo ships in the Caspian Sea as a major obstacle to trade along the middle route of the INSTC.

He stressed the need to strengthen maritime navigation and port infrastructure in both Iran and Russia.

In a previous statement, Jalali confirmed that Pezeshkian will visit Moscow on January 17, 2025, to sign a comprehensive cooperation agreement with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin, further solidifying bilateral ties.

# Urmia; where ancient cultures meet stunning landscapes

## Iranica Desk

Urmia, a vibrant city in north-west Iran, is the capital of West Azarbaijan Province and one of the oldest cities in the region. Rich in history, culture, and natural beauty, Urmia is often referred to as the 'Cradle of Civilizations' due to its strategic location along ancient trade routes and its role as a melting pot of diverse cultures, religions, and traditions. From ancient churches and mosques to breathtaking natural landscapes, Urmia is a treasure trove of historical and cultural landmarks. In this article, we will explore the fascinating city of Urmia and its most intriguing ancient sites and attractions.

Urmia's history dates back to at least the 2nd millennium BCE, making it one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in Iran. Its historical significance stems from its strategic position along trade routes connecting Persia, Anatolia, and the Caucasus. The city has been home to various ethnic and religious groups, including Assyrians, Kurds, Armenians, Azaris, and Persians, each contributing to its rich cultural mosaic. Throughout history, Urmia has been a center of commerce, education, and religious diversity. The city is known for its ancient churches, mosques, and temples, which stand as testaments to its multicultural heritage. Its proximity to Lake Urmia, one of the largest saltwater lakes in the world, has also played a crucial role in its economic and cultural development.

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● IRNA

## Lake Urmia

Lake Urmia, once the largest saltwater lake in the Middle East, is one of Urmia's most famous natural landmarks. Renowned for its unique ecosystem, vibrant red and turquoise colors, and therapeutic properties due to its high salinity, the lake has faced severe shrinkage in recent years because of climate change and water mismanagement. However, efforts are underway to restore its former glory. The surreal landscape of Lake Urmia, with its white salt crusts, shimmering waters, and stunning sunsets, offers a unique experience for visitors. The lake's therapeutic mud and mineral-rich waters have long been believed to possess healing properties, attracting those seeking natural remedies.

## Saint Mary's Church

Saint Mary's Church, also known as Marmar Church, is one of the oldest churches in Iran, dating back to the 1st century CE. According to local tradition, it was built by early Christian missionaries and is considered one of the first Christian establishments in the region. The church symbolizes Urmia's ancient Christian heritage and its historical significance as a center of Assyrian Christianity.

The church's architecture reflects a blend of ancient Assyrian and early Christian styles, featuring a simple stone structure, a small bell tower, and intricately carved doorways. Inside, visitors can find ancient manuscripts, frescoes, and religious artifacts that offer a glimpse into the early Christian era.

Saint Mary's Church is not only a place of worship but also a living museum of Urmia's Christian history. Its serene atmosphere, historical importance, and unique architecture make it a must-visit site for those interested in religious history and ancient architecture.



● mehrnews.com



● IRNA

## Urmia Bazaar

Urmia Bazaar is a bustling market that has served as a center of commerce and social interaction for centuries. Its history dates back to the Safavid era, and it has been a vital part of the city's cultural and economic life ever since. The narrow alleys, arched ceilings, and traditional shops reflect the region's architectural style and create a lively atmosphere.

The bazaar is divided into sections, each dedicated to specific goods, including spices, textiles, jewelry, handicrafts, and local produce. The spice market, with its vibrant colors and fascinating aromas, is particularly popular among tourists. Visitors can also find traditional Iranian sweets, dried fruits, and Urmia's famous herbal medicines.

Visiting Urmia Bazaar is like stepping back in time. It offers a chance to experience the city's vibrant culture, interact with friendly locals, and shop for unique souvenirs. The bazaar is not just a place to buy goods but a living piece of history that reflects the city's trading heritage.



● IRNA

## Jaame Mosque

The Jaame Mosque of Urmia is one of the oldest and most significant mosques in the city. Built during the Seljuk period in the 12th century on the site of a Zoroastrian fire temple, it highlights the historical transition of religious beliefs in the region. The mosque has undergone several renovations, reflecting various architectural influences over the centuries.

Its architecture is a blend of Seljuk, Ilkhanid, and Safavid styles, featuring an impressive brick dome, intricate tile work, and a stunning mihrab (prayer niche) adorned with floral motifs and the Holy Qur'anic inscriptions. The courtyard, surrounded by arched arcades, provides a tranquil space for reflection and prayer.

The Jaame Mosque is a masterpiece of Islamic architecture and a symbol of Urmia's religious diversity. Its historical significance, architectural beauty, and serene atmosphere make it a fascinating destination for visitors interested in Islamic art and history.

## Se Gonbad Tower

Se Gonbad, meaning "Three Domes," is an ancient tomb tower located in Urmia, dating back to the 12th century during the Seljuk period. Believed to be a burial site for local nobles, it stands as one of the finest examples of Seljuk-era funerary architecture in the region.

The tower's most striking feature is its conical dome, adorned with decorative brickwork and intricate geometric patterns characteristic of Seljuk art. Inside, the Se Gonbad Tower features a simple yet elegant central chamber that houses the tombstones of the deceased.

As a significant historical monument, Se Gonbad Tower showcases the architectural excellence of the Seljuk period. Its unique design, historical importance, and serene setting make it a captivating site for visitors interested in ancient Persian architecture.



● eliqasht.com



● borna.news

## Urmia Museum

Urmia Museum is a must-visit destination for history enthusiasts eager to explore the city's rich past. The museum boasts an extensive collection of artifacts spanning prehistoric, ancient, and Islamic eras, including pottery, coins, manuscripts, and textiles.

Highlights of the museum include artifacts from the Urartian civilization, an influential kingdom that ruled the region in the 1st millennium BCE, as well as exhibits that showcase the cultural and artistic achievements of various dynasties that have shaped Urmia. Additionally, there is a dedicated section focusing on the Assyrian and Christian heritage of the area.

Urmia Museum provides an enlightening journey through the city's history, offering valuable insights into the cultural and artistic legacies of the civilizations that have influenced Urmia. It serves as an excellent place to learn about the city's ancient roots and historical significance.

## Sheikh Tappeh Forst Park

Sheikh Tappeh Forest Park is situated in the southeastern part of Urmia, adjacent to the ancient Sheikh Tappeh hill. Covering an area of 44 hectares, the park is filled with pine and cypress trees, and its elevated location offers stunning panoramic views of the city.

The park features various facilities and recreational amenities, including a small amusement park, a restaurant, fast food outlets, and a café, making it one of Urmia's premier tourist attractions. Whether for a leisurely stroll, a family outing, or simply soaking in the natural beauty, Sheikh Tappeh Park is a delightful escape for both locals and visitors alike.



● kojara.com



By Mehdi Jalilian  
Guest contributor

### OPINION EXCLUSIVE

Solar panels and solar renewable energy plants use some of the more innovative and sustainable technologies that have been widely focused on in the last decades due to their key role in environmental protection and the reduction of dependence on fossil fuels. They convert the energy from the sun into clean, pollution-free electricity. With features including low production cost, high efficiency, and long life, these technologies are quite enticing when compared to conventional power plants. Flexibility in the deployment of solar power plants, especially in very remote areas, has granted them a vital role in the supply of sustainable energy and energy security. Distributing solar panels and plants across multiple locations provides several benefits, including reduced transmission losses, enhanced security, and a stronger grid system. More importantly, passive defense principles ensure the security and stability of the critical infrastructure of operating solar power plants. Key principles include selecting locations with low natural hazard risks, designing buildings and structures that withstand weather conditions and natural disasters, and distributing load across the grid to reduce dependence on a single area. Moreover, integrating solar power plants with intelligent grids and implementing backup systems, like accumulative systems, can enhance their efficiency and safety.



● YJC

## Principles for protecting solar energy



● MEHR

The dispersion of solar power plants and passive defensive measures against attacks can only reduce their vulnerability and not completely avoid the shutdown of electricity production in wartime situations. Overall, this will not only increase the productivity of the plants but also reduce risks related to unexpected events and conflicts. One of the most outstanding features of solar power plants is their flexibility in the supply of electricity to diverse regions. Their installation in disadvantaged and remote areas guarantees the availability of stable electricity to communities that

have hitherto been deprived of such facilities. In addition, advanced storage technologies, like batteries, allow the use of electricity at times when there is low solar radiation. Microgrid systems, being local in nature, further distribute any generated electricity in the locality itself, directly reducing dependency on main transmission lines. This prevents widespread power blackouts during disasters or acts of war and increases stability in the grid. In view of the increasing importance of renewable energies worldwide, solar power plants are surely among the most ra-

tional and sustainable solutions to the supply of energy. Allowing for a reduction in dependence on fossil fuels and a decrease in environmental pollution, these plants will therefore increase energy security and help maintain key infrastructures. More specifically, the principles of passive defense and geographical dispersion protect solar plants against natural and human-induced threats. One of the ways to answer present needs and ensure that the future will be brighter, safer, and more sustainable for generations to come is investment in the development of solar power plants and related technologies.

Iran's energy heart beats well

## South Pars supplying more gas than committed

**PERSPECTIVE** The 13 refineries of Iran's South Pars are operating at full capacity to warm people's homes in various cities and villages across the country during the cold winter days. South Pars, the world's largest gas field, is one of Iran's most important energy sources, playing a vital role in supplying gas to the country during the cold season.

Located in the Persian Gulf and shared with Qatar, the field covers an area of 9,700 square kilometers, with 3,700 square kilometers belonging to Iran, situated 100 kilometers off the coast at a depth of 3,000 meters below the sea floor. The South Pars gas field holds 14.2 trillion cubic meters of gas, equivalent to 8% of the world's total gas reserves and 47% of Iran's known gas reserves.

To meet the country's gas needs during winter, extensive efforts have been made, and major repair operations have been carried out in various phases and platforms to ensure maximum gas production. The South Pars gas refineries, located in Assaluyeh and Kangan, comprise 24 gas phases, with phases 1-10 and 15-21 in Assaluyeh and phases 11-14, 19, and 22-24 in Kangan. The average daily gas production from South Pars has reached over 700 million cubic meters in recent years, indicating an increase in production capacity and efficiency. Given the country's growing energy needs, this production level is crucial for meeting domestic demands and exporting to global markets.



● THE CRADLE

### Maximum production to supply winter gas

The CEO of the South Pars Gas Complex stated in an interview with Mehr news agency: "To supply the country's gas

needs during the cold season, fundamental measures have been taken, and the South Pars refineries are operating at full capacity." Gholamabbas Hosseini noted that with 855 million

cubic meters of gas entering the national grid daily, the share of the 13 South Pars refineries in supplying the country's gas exceeds 585 million cubic meters per day.

Hosseini lauded the efforts and dedication of the South Pars Complex personnel and added, "Innovative measures have been taken and domestically manufactured parts and equipment

have been used to maximize gas production in South Pars." The CEO announced that the daily gas production and processing at Site 1 of South Pars exceed 333 million cubic me-

ters, with over 252 million cubic meters also being produced and processed at Site 2. Hosseini expressed readiness to continue producing and refining gas in South Pars, hoping that it

would be enough to get Iranians through the winter without issues.

He reported that the production of sweet gas in South Pars reached over 143 billion cubic meters in the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (started March 20, 2024), adding that all efforts are being made to keep producing gas sustainably and send it to the national grid. Hosseini stated that there was a 1.2 billion cubic meter increase in production over the first eight months of the calendar year compared to the same period the year before and noted that the country's energy basket is 90% dependent on gas.

He mentioned that the time needed for major repairs at the gas refineries has been reduced from 45 days to between 18

and 25 days and that planning for next year's repairs has been done.

The CEO emphasized the need to pay special attention to gas consumption and manage it because Iran's energy consumption intensity is 3.3 times the global average. He pointed out that the main reason for the recent gas imbalance was the high energy consumption in the country.

**South Pars's 70% share in gas production**

An official with the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) stated on the sidelines of a press visit to South Pars: "The share of gas in the country's energy basket is around 75%, with South Pars producing about 70% of the country's total gas." The majority of the country's gas is produced from the 22 phases

of South Pars in Assaluyeh and Kangan.

Mohammad-Reza Joulaei added that the current gas production exceeds the committed amount. He, however, emphasized that having alternatives to gas in power plants are essential. The middle manager maintained that the priority for gas supply is the household sector, followed by power plants and industries. Joulaei also mentioned that Iran's gas extraction from the shared South Pars field is currently higher than Qatar's and once again stressed the need for power plants to use other energy sources and invest in them.

**Necessity of consumption management**

An energy expert told Mehr that "unfortunately, energy consumption in [Iran] is very high,"

assessing the situation as unfavorable compared to other countries.

Mehdi Musapour emphasized that managing natural gas consumption is of particular importance due to the growing population and increasing energy needs, and that appropriate measures must be taken to achieve this goal.

Musapour further stressed the need to raise public awareness about the importance of energy conservation and methods to reduce consumption, adding that implementing new technologies to increase energy efficiency in industries and buildings is essential. He highlighted the crucial role of people in consumption management and suggested adopting laws and regulations that control energy consumption and provide in-



TASNIM

centives for reduction. South Pars not only supplies the main source of natural gas for industries and power plants in Iran but also plays a significant role in its energy security. Given the country's high dependence

on fossil fuels, continued production from this field can help reduce reliance on energy imports.

The article first appeared in Farsi on Mehr.



TASNIM

Iran's bid to reconnect with India  
**Renewed oil trade, strategic partnerships, and regional stability**

By Huma Siddiqui  
Journalist

**PERSPECTIVE**

Iran is making a concerted effort to strengthen its ties with India, particularly in the areas of trade, oil, and regional connectivity. Under President Masoud Pezeshkian, who assumed office in August 2024, Iran has prioritized resuming oil exports to India, while also seeking to enhance cultural and economic exchanges. This renewed push for deeper engagement with India comes at a crucial juncture, as both countries navigate the complex geopolitical landscape of the Middle East, with broader implications for regional stability.

**Iran's strategic move to reconnect**

The cornerstone of the India-Iran relationship for decades has been energy trade, particularly crude oil. However, since the US imposed heavy sanctions on Iran in 2018, India, one of Iran's largest oil importers, was forced to halt its purchases under pressure from Washington. This had a devastating impact on bilateral trade, particularly in energy sectors.

Iran is now pushing to resume oil exports to India, acknowledging the difficulties posed by the sanctions but stressing the need to revive this critical trade. "We used to have good economic ties with India before the sanctions were imposed in 2018. We understand why India has to follow the sanctions, but trade is falling year-on-year, which is not good," stated a senior Iranian official. The official expressed regret, adding, "It is a pity that Indian refineries, which operated for decades on Iranian oil, had to adjust to crude sourced from other countries."

Despite these setbacks, Iran aims to resume its oil exports without burdening India. "We will not create hardship for India, but we need to resume oil trade," the official affirmed. In addition to oil, Iran is keen to explore non-energy sectors for trade expansion, particularly in agricultural goods, which could offer a fresh pathway for growth in the relationship.

**Enhancing visa policies**

Cultural and people-to-people connections also figure prominently in Iran's outreach to

India. The Iranian government has stressed the importance of relaxing visa restrictions to make travel easier for both Indians and Iranians. The goal is to foster deeper cultural exchange, which could in turn help strengthen diplomatic ties.

"We need to talk to India on the visa issues. Iranians want to come to India, but they need visas. Similarly, we want more and more Indian tourists to visit Iran. As neighbouring countries, we should be attractive to each other," said the Iranian official. Simplified visa processes could significantly boost tourism and academic exchanges, deepening mutual understanding and fostering stronger ties between the people of both nations.

**Chabahar Port, regional connectivity**

A major part of Iran's vision for enhancing its ties with India involves the strategic Chabahar Port, located in southeastern Iran. This deep-water port on the Arabian Sea offers a critical trade route for India to Central Asia and beyond, circumventing Pakistan and opening up markets in Eurasia.

India has already made significant investments in developing the Chabahar Port, which is also key to the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), a multimodal trade route linking India, Iran, Russia, and Central Asia. "India should utilize the Chabahar port to its full potential and create a connectivity corridor from India, passing through Iran, and finally accessing the Central Asian and European

markets," the official noted. This would not only benefit both countries economically but also enhance their strategic and geopolitical standing in the region.

**Bilateral trade has room for growth**

Despite the challenges posed by sanctions, India remains an important trading partner for Iran. According to the latest data, Iran exported goods worth \$1.2 billion to India in the first eight months of the current Iranian calendar year (March–November 2023), with non-oil commodities playing a significant role. However, the total

value of trade between the two countries fell by 26 percent in 2023 compared to the previous year, primarily due to a sharp drop in the export of petroleum products.

"Iran's trade with India was strong before the sanctions and has been falling year after year. But we are optimistic that this can change, and we hope to increase trade in sectors beyond energy," the Iranian official explained. India continues to export a variety of goods to Iran, with rice, pharmaceuticals, and machinery remaining top exports, although exports of some items, like tea and rice, have seen a decline.

**Iran's strategic shifts: China, Afghanistan, and Russia**

As Iran seeks to reengage with India, it is also reorienting its broader foreign policy, including a pivot towards China and Russia. Iran has lauded China's efforts to bring stability to the region, particularly through the recent normalization of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia. "China's efforts to bring some kind of stability to the region are appreciated, especially in improving Iran's relationship with Saudi Arabia," said the Iranian official.

Additionally, Iran has made clear its stance on Afghanistan,

where the Taliban continue to exert control. Iran, while acknowledging the reality of the Taliban's rule, has emphasized the importance of a broad-based government in Afghanistan that includes all ethnic and political factions. "The Taliban are a reality in Afghanistan; we need to work together with them," the official noted. However, Iran has also criticized the Taliban's treatment of women, emphasizing that the deprivation of girls' right to education should never be justified.

On the geopolitical front, Iran is moving closer to Russia, with discussions underway for a strategic partnership, which is expected to be formalized in mid-January 2024. This partnership has significant implications for both countries' foreign policies, particularly in the context of their shared interests in countering Western influence.

**Path forward: opportunities, challenges**

The Iran-India relationship faces challenges but also presents significant opportunities. Iran's focus on resuming oil trade, diversifying into non-energy sectors, and expanding regional connectivity through Chabahar provides a solid foundation for bilateral cooperation. The Iranian official remains optimistic, stating, "We are committed to working with India to rebuild our economic and cultural ties, and we believe there is great potential for cooperation in the years ahead."

The article first appeared on The Financial Express.



The map compares the long standard route between Mumbai, India, and Moscow, Russia, with the shorter route offered by the International North-South Corridor (INSTC) through Iran's Chabahar Port. railfreight.com

# Persepolis in limbo over future of the bench

## Sports Desk

With the Iranian Super Cup game right around the corner, Persepolis is yet to know who will be in charge of the bench for the match against Sepahan on January 17.

The game will be the first of a hectic fixtures list for the Tehran Reds over 30 days, including vital encounters with title rivals Tractor and Sepahan in the Persian Gulf Pro League, as well as crunch matchups in the AFC Champions League Elite against Saudi heavyweights Al Hilal and Al Nassr.

The Persepolis job has been vacant since Juan Carlos Garrido was sacked after the 3-1 home loss to Mes Rafsanjan on Dec. 21 – the holders' fourth defeat in six games in the Iranian top flight.

Karim Baqeri, an assistant to the Spanish head coach, took the interim role for the games against Khaybar and Havadar, leading his team to back-to-back victories before the midseason break.

A club legend and widely regarded as one of the finest players in the history of the game in the country, Baqeri has been backed by many – including senior players in the squad – for the permanent role for, at least, the remainder of the campaign. However, Baqeri, who has been a constant member of the

coaching staff during the Reds' domestic dominance over the past nine years, has insisted time and again that he has no intention of working as the number one in the dugout, as he believes football fans in the country "show little patience with the Iranian coaches", while the club "deserves to have a high-profile foreign manager at the helm."

Rumors keep swirling around the Persepolis bench, with former Bayern Munich boss Niko Kovač and Spanish Rafa Benitez – a UEFA Champions League winner with Liverpool – among household names to have been reportedly approached by the club hierarchy over the past couple of weeks.

Foolad Khuzestan coach Yahya Golmohammadi, who steered Persepolis to three league titles in four years before parting ways with the club midway through last season, has also been tipped for a dramatic return to the Reds dugout.

Despite Golmohammadi's public dispute with Foolad CEO Houshang Nassrizadeh in recent weeks over the winter recruitment plans, the southern Iranian club is not willing to cut ties with the coach, whose contract runs through the end of the next season.

Golmohammadi himself is believed to be not interested in leaving Foolad after an impres-



● ALI SHARIFZADEH/IRNA

sive first half of the season saw his team stand fourth in the league table – four points adrift of top two Tractor and Sepahan and one behind Persepolis. Julien Stephan has been the lat-

est name to be brought up in the Iranian media, with several sources reporting on Wednesday that Persepolis is in talks with the Frenchman.

Stephan, 44, has been without

a job since being dismissed by Rennes in November, after the Ligue 1 side won only three of its first 10 league games, suffering five defeats to sit 13th in the 18-team table.

The pinnacle of Stephan's coaching career came in April 2019, when he steered Rennes to a shootout victory over Paris Saint-Germain in the French Cup final.

## France manager Deschamps to step down after 2026 World Cup



● KIERAN MCMANUS/BPI/SHUTTERSTOCK

**BBC** – France's World Cup-winning manager Didier Deschamps says he will step down

after next year's tournament in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

The 56-year-old is France's longest-serving coach, having been in charge since 2012.

He led Les Bleus to victory at the 2018 World Cup in Russia, as well as reaching the final of the 2022 tournament in Qatar and Euro 2016 on home soil.

"In 2026 it will be over. In my head it's very clear," Deschamps told French broadcaster TF1.

"I've done my time, with the same desire and passion to maintain France at the highest level.

"One has to be able to say stop, there's a life after this. The most important is for France

to stay at the top as they have been for many years."

France have yet to begin their 2026 World Cup qualifying campaign, with their group dependant on the result of their Nations League quarter-final against Croatia in March. Former midfielder Deschamps is only the third man after Mario Zagallo and Franz Beckenbauer to win the World Cup as both player and manager, having captained his country to glory in 1998.

He succeeded Laurent Blanc after France's quarter-final exit at Euro 2012 and secured qualification for the 2014

World Cup in Brazil, where Les Bleus were beaten by eventual champions Germany in the last eight.

In 2016 he led the team to the final of their home European Championship, but they were beaten by Portugal after extra time.

His crowning moment arrived two years later, as France lifted the World Cup for a second time following a 4-2 win over Croatia in Moscow.

A Nations League title followed in 2021 before they again reached the World Cup final in Qatar, only to be denied by Argentina on penalties following

a thrilling 3-3 draw.

Before taking charge of France Deschamps had spells in charge of Monaco, Juventus and Marseille, winning at least one trophy with each.

Prior to that he had enjoyed a stellar playing career at domestic and international level.

He won 14 major honours, including Champions League titles with Marseille and Juventus, and the FA Cup with Chelsea.

The defensive midfielder also earned 103 caps for France, captaining the national team to victory at the 1998 World Cup and Euro 2000.

## Sinner under a cloud, hopes to let racket do the talking

**REUTERS** – Defending champion Jannik Sinner should be riding the crest of a wave as he prepares for the Australian Open as the dominant force in men's tennis, but instead returns to the scene of his maiden Grand Slam title under a cloud.

On the court, the 23-year-old Italian has opened a gap to his rivals, ending last year as the clear world number one after a remarkable season in which he won eight titles and lost only six of the 79 matches he contested.

He crowned 2024 with the ATP Finals title and also led Italy to a successive Davis Cup crown.

Sinner gives the impression of a player with all the answers against whoever he comes up against, but the off-court questions he is likely to face about the doping case that surfaced in August might be harder to shrug off.

He was cleared of any wrongdoing after failing two drug tests in March – an independent tribunal convened by the International Tennis Integrity Agency (ITIA) accepting that the anabolic agent clostebol had

inadvertently entered his system from a member of his support team through massages.

Sinner, who has always maintained his innocence, was docked the 400 ranking points and prize money he earned for reaching the semi-finals at Indian Wells where the tests were carried out, but escaped a ban, raising eyebrows among some in the tennis community who cried double standards.

The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) has since lodged an appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) over the judgement and while Sinner focuses on trying to defend his title, he will do so knowing that his fate is yet to be decided and a damaging ban remains a possibility.

Australian player Nick Kyrgios, never one to sit on the fence, says the Sinner scenario, together with a similar situation involving Poland's Iga Swiatek, has been a 'horrific' look for the integrity of the sport.

Sinner will attempt to continue to let his racket do the talking but with the world's glare on the year's first Grand Slam, the

saga is unlikely to fade into the background. The two-time Grand Slam champion spent Christmas in the snow in northern Italy, conceding it was a tough time after the death of his aunt at the end of last year.

He has quickly warmed to the task of defending his Australian Open title since landing in Melbourne though, looking sharp in an exhibition match win over Australian Alexei Popyrin on Rod Laver Arena on Tuesday.

"Coming back here as the reigning champion feels good, it's a different sensation, but I'm genuinely looking forward to it. Let's see how I can perform," Sinner said after that win.

"In my mind, I know how much work we have put in, which hopefully will give me confidence and we will see how it goes." Sinner displayed commendable resilience to put aside his off-court distractions to win the U.S. Open last year and end the season in a rich vein of form.

He will need the same laser-like focus if he is to see off the many challenges he will face in Melbourne.



● CORINNE DUBREUIL/FFT

# More secure Iraq to benefit Iran: *Leader*

Pezeshkian calls for establishment of joint economic hub with Iraq

**International Desk**

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei in a meeting with visiting Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani said the more prosperous and secure Iraq is, the better it will be for Iran. Ayatollah Khamenei also said the unity among different religions and ethnicities of Iraq is very important and necessary for the Arab country. The Leader described Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces as one of the important components of power in Iraq, which he said should be further strengthened. Ayatollah Khamenei also pointed to the "illegal" presence of American forces in Iraq, saying that it is in contrary to the interests of the Iraqi people and government. He said that it seems that the Americans are trying to expand their presence in Iraq, underlining that, "This occupation must be resisted with seriousness." Earlier on the day, the Iraqi prime minister held separate talks with his Iranian counterpart Masoud Pezeshkian. Their

discussions covered topics such as trade, cooperation, and recent developments in Syria.

**Joint economic hub**

Pezeshkian said the geographical location of Iran and Iraq is unique for the establishment of a regional economic hub, emphasizing Iran's readiness to establish a joint economic zone. Iranians and Iraqis have lived side by side for centuries and the religious and cultural ties between the two nations provide a suitable basis for promoting political, economic, scientific, and cultural interactions between the two countries, Pezeshkian said. The Iraqi prime minister also emphasized his country's determination to implement the agreements signed between the two countries in railway and road projects, establishment of a joint economic zone in the border areas, as well as gas and electricity projects. "We are also interested in the participation of Iranian companies in the implementation of Iraqi infrastructure projects," Sudani said. Since taking office in July, the



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian (L) and Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed al-Sudani inspect a guard of honor before a meeting in Tehran on January 8, 2025. [president.ir](http://president.ir)

Iranian president has repeatedly underlined that his government's priority is the expansion of relations with neighboring countries. Iraq is a valuable partner, serving as a crucial market for Iranian goods, electricity, and gas exports and a destination for Iranian investments.

**Developments in Syria**

The two leaders also discussed the developments in Syria which is undergoing a major transition after militants took over the country in December. In a joint press conference with the Iraqi prime minister, Pezeshkian called for the withdrawal of Israel from the Syrian territory. "The need for the Zionist regime to withdraw from the territories it occupied and the importance of respecting religious sentiments (in Syria), particularly re-



garding Shia holy places and shrines, were among the concerns," Pezeshkian said. The Iranian president also warned of the "reactivation of terrorist cells" in Syria. Elsewhere in his remarks, the Iranian president said Iran is af-

ter peace, stability and security for the entire region, noting that the neighboring Iraq is experiencing a period of stability and expansion after vanquishing of the terrorist group of Daesh. "The Iraqi Republic is an important country in our neigh-

borhood and serves as Iran's strategic partner. We are pleased that our relations are underway at their most perfect level, and the extent of our mutual cooperation expands in various areas each day," the Iranian president stated.

## Ayatollah Khamenei: US made grave 'miscalculation' about Iran over past decades

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei said the United States has, on most occasions, committed mistakes concerning its attitude towards Iran throughout the past decades. Ayatollah Khamenei made the remarks during a Wednesday meeting with people from the north-central Iranian city of Qom on the occasion of the anniversary of a January 9, 1978 uprising in support of the late founder of the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Rouhollah Khomeini that preceded the 1979 victory of the country's Islamic Revolution, Press TV reported. "Under the [regime of Iran's former] Pahlavi [monarchy], the country used to serve as a formidable fortress for American interests," the Leader noted. "It was from the heart of this fortress that the Revolution was born and bubbled up. The Americans did not realize [this], were duped, lagged behind, and became obliv-

ious," Ayatollah Khamenei remarked. The Leader described the issue as "the Americans' miscalculation" vis-à-vis Iran. "After the Revolution, the Americans perpetrated mistakes concerning Iran throughout these several decades on most occasions," Ayatollah Khamenei observed. The Leader said his remarks were mostly addressed towards those "who are intimidated by the US's policies." Ayatollah Khamenei, however, dismissed existence of much of a cordial relationship between the Iranian nation and some European states. The Leader differentiated, though, between Iran's relationship with the European countries and the US. "The US has lost a massive political and economic wealth as a result of Iran's Revolution. And it has expended much fortune over the past 40-odd years towards



[khamenei.ir](http://khamenei.ir)

taking Iran out of the Islamic Revolution's grip," the Leader noted. "And it has failed to do so," Ayatollah Khamenei remarked, adding, "The US is after making up for its defeat. Therefore, it resorts to whatever sort of enmity towards Iran that it can." Ayatollah Khamenei said Washington had incurred "profound rancor" towards Iran. "The US had brought Iran under its possession, but the country was wrested out of its grip and

control. Therefore, its grudge towards the Islamic Republic and the Revolution is long-standing," the Leader noted. "The US [however] would not let go easily either. It has suffered defeat in Iran, and seeks to make up for this defeat." Ayatollah Khamenei's remarks were meant as a response to questions posed by some about why Iran would negotiate with the Europeans, but was not prepared to enter negotiations with the US.

## Iran rejects Macron's remarks on own role in region as 'baseless'

Iran on Wednesday rejected as "baseless" French President Emmanuel Macron's claim that Tehran was the main strategic and security challenge in West Asia. Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei described the comments as "baseless, contradictory, and speculative," and called for France "to reconsider its non-constructive approaches to peace and stability." Macron had said in a speech Monday that Iran is the "main strategic and security challenge for France, Europeans, the entire region and beyond". He added that Iran would be a key topic of discussion with US President-elect Donald Trump's administration, which will take office on January 20. The French president also said the acceleration of Iran's nuclear program,



Esmail Baghaei [IRNA](http://IRNA)

which the West suspects is aimed at making a nuclear bomb, is "bringing us very close to the breaking point." Baghaei blasted the comments as "deceitful," insisting that Iran's nuclear activities were "peaceful and within the framework of international laws." Tehran consistently denies it intends to develop atomic weapons. Iran is set to hold nuclear talks with France, Britain, and Germany on January 13 in Switzerland.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi  
Cartoonist



## Jailed Italian reporter in Tehran freed: *Italy*

An Italian journalist jailed in Iran for three weeks for "violating the country's law" was freed, Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's office said on Wednesday. "The plane taking journalist Cecilia Sala home took off from Tehran a few minutes ago" following "intense work through diplomatic and intelligence channels", Meloni's office said in a statement, according to AFP. "Our compatriot has been released by the Iranian authorities and is on her way back to Italy. Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni expresses her gratitude to all those who helped make Cecilia's return possible, allowing her to re-embrace her family and colleagues," her office said. Meloni personally informed Sala's

parents of her release by telephone, it added. The journalist, 29, who writes for the Italian daily Il Foglio and is the host of a news podcast produced by Chora Media, was arrested on December 19 and was kept in Tehran's Evin prison. Italy and Iran summoned each other's ambassadors last week after Rome warned that efforts to secure her release were complicated. Sala travelled to Iran on December 13 on a journalist's visa. She was arrested six days later for "violating the law of the Islamic Republic of Iran", said the country's Culture Ministry, which oversees and accredits foreign journalists. She had been due to return home the following day.



On Monday, Iran denied any link between Sala's arrest and that of Iranian national Mohammad Abedini, detained in Italy in December at the behest of the United States over alleged export violations linked to a deadly attack on US servicemen in Jordan. Iran has denied any link with the incident in Jordan.

# Envoy: Japan, Iran cultivate cultural ties via academic collaboration

## Arts & Culture Desk

In a recent address at the international symposium 'Art and the Space in Between', Japanese Ambassador to Iran, Tamaki Tsukada, emphasized the importance of cultural and academic collaboration between the two nations. He stated, "Regardless of political issues, an academic relationship between Iran and Japan has been established, and we welcome student exchanges between the two countries." The symposium aims to enhance comparative studies between cultures and facilitate the exchange of ideas in art and architecture along the Silk Road, IRNA reported.

Tsukada expressed his satisfaction with the event, noting that it allows the peoples of both countries to become more familiar with each other's cultures. He said, "We can utilize the historical connections and shared values between Iran and Japan." Tsukada further highlighted the need to strengthen student exchanges, aiming to promote Iranian culture and introduce it to other fields. He explained that understanding the cultural nuances of Iran has been a "remarkable" experience for many Japanese scholars. Elham Andaroodi, the symposium's secretary, noted that one of the primary goals is to identify

common themes in the architecture of Iran and Japan. She remarked, "Japan is positioned at the end of the Silk Road and serves as a gateway to technology, while Iran possesses a rich cultural and historical background." This synergy enables both countries to gain insights from each other's experiences, making mutual understanding essential. Andaroodi also pointed out that Japanese architecture has become a focal point of global innovation, mentioning that nine Japanese architects recently won prestigious awards. She encouraged participants to learn from Japan's journey of modernity built upon traditional roots, stating, "We must find

a connection to link our historical architecture with the needs of today's society." Discussing the similarities in transitional spaces within Iranian and Japanese architecture, Andaroodi highlighted the rich cultural and artistic heritage of both nations. She said, "We are very rich in the realm of transition and threshold, with elements like domes, courtyards, corridors, and gardens providing powerful connections between indoor and outdoor spaces." The symposium also coincides with an exhibition titled 'Journey along the Silk Road,' featuring works from renowned Japanese architects Arata Isozaki, Shigeru Ban, and Ryue Nishizawa.



This exhibition will run from January 7 to February 6 at the Kamal-ol-Molk Museum Gallery

and the Negarestan Garden in Tehran, welcoming researchers, students, artists, and enthusiasts alike.

# 'Kamal al-Fann', a caricatured call to resistance by Yemeni artist



## Arts & Culture Desk

A solo exhibition titled 'Kamal al-Fann', featuring 120 pieces by Yemeni artist Kamal Sharaf, was inaugurated at the Aali Gallery of the Art Bureau in Tehran on January 8, 2025. The opening ceremony was attended by Sharaf, who is currently in Iran, as well as numerous artists and families of martyrs, with the event focusing on the theme of resistance. Among the prominent attendees were Iranian graphic designers and caricaturists, including Masoud Shojai Tabatabai, the editor-in-chief of Iran Cartoon website, Masoud Nejabati, and Maziar Bijani, alongside Russian artists Alexandra and Alexander Faldin. The event also honored the family of martyr Mostafa Mohammad Mirzaei, the only Iranian martyr buried in Yemen.

Prior to the exhibition opening, a ceremony honoring Kamal Sharaf was held at the Mehr Hall of the Art Bureau, attended by notable figures such as Masoud Nejabati and Ali Hayati, as well as the mother of martyr Mostafa Mohammad Mirzaei. Masoud Shojai Tabatabai, in his remarks at the ceremony, expressed pride in hosting Sharaf and the Faldin artists, stating, "The works of Kamal Sharaf represent a positive contribution to the resistance front." He emphasized that while Sharaf's art may appear simple, it is technically sophisticated and distinctive. "This artist has a special focus on resistance and has not been able to overlook the events in Gaza and Lebanon," he added, noting that Sharaf's work serves as a testament to the struggle of the Palestinian people. Abdulrahman Rajeh, President of



the Yemeni Solidarity Association in Iran, also addressed the gathering. He expressed gratitude to the organizers of the event and acknowledged Iran for its support of Yemeni resistance. "Mr. Sharaf is one of the few Yemenis who has engaged in resistance caricature," he noted, highlighting Sharaf's recognition from senior Houthi leaders. Marzieh Hashemi, Secretary of the 15th Ammar Popular Film Festival, emphasized the importance of artistic expression in conveying the realities of Palestine and resistance, stating, "Every artist, especially in resistance countries, has a duty to address these realities." Following the ceremony, Kamal Sharaf shared his mixed emotions, stating, "I promise the mother of martyr Mohammad Mirzaei that I will visit his grave." He expressed both joy in partic-

ipating in the event and sorrow from a video shown during the ceremony. "The world not only watches the crimes of the last 15 months but also assists the criminals in their actions," he remarked. Sharaf elaborated on his perspective on caricature as a form of resistance, declaring, "I have viewed my work in caricature as a jihadist endeavor. I see myself as a soldier fighting against the enemy." He referenced Imam Khomeini's assertion that "America is the great Satan," affirming his commitment to using caricature as a tool for resistance. "Caricature is a language understood by all artists globally, regardless of the language they speak," he concluded. The exhibition 'Kamal al-Fann' is now open to the public at the Aali Gallery of the Art Bureau, showcasing the impactful works of the Yemeni artist.

# Alzheimer's disease onset age drops to 45 in Iran: Health official



## Social Desk

The President of the Iran Dementia and Alzheimer's Association, Masoumeh Salehi, raised an alarming concern regarding the decreasing age of Alzheimer's disease onset in the country. In a recent visit by Ali Rabiee, Iranian president's aide in social affairs, Salehi revealed that the association has identified 400 individuals aged 45 who are suffering from Alzheimer's disease. Salehi highlighted the detrimental impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the elderly population, stating that the restrictions, social isolation, and stress and anxiety caused by the pandemic have contributed to a rise in dementia cases, particularly Alzheimer's, both globally and in Iran, IRNA reported. According to IRNA, Salehi emphasized the need for

specialized support for Alzheimer's patients. The association is working towards providing insurance coverage and support for these individuals. She also announced plans to establish an imaging center and MRI facilities at the association's premises and to set up neurology and psychiatry clinics to improve access to services for patients. Ali Rabiee acknowledged Alzheimer's as a noncontagious disease with irreversible consequences for patients. He emphasized the importance of addressing social variables associated with noncontagious diseases and expressed his commitment to attending the association's monthly meetings to collaboratively devise strategies for addressing the concerns of dementia patients, including those with Alzheimer's.

# What is Iraqi ...

Therefore, weakening or destroying the military capabilities of such groups could be presented as an immediate objective for Washington and Tel Aviv. However, some evidence suggests that Washington has recently prevented direct Israeli attacks on Iraq, resulting in pressures on Sudani and the Coordination Framework to seize the opportunity to disarm the resistance groups. It is not unexpected that rumors about a political regime change in Iraq represent targeted efforts to pressure the premier and the Coordination Framework to accept fundamental changes, such as disarm-

ment or the integration of factions into the army. The issue of collecting weapons from the resistance groups and handing them over to the government, which has been seriously raised and emphasized by Shia religious authorities like Grand Ayatollah Sistani, the leader of the Hikmat movement, and Motallebi Sadr, reflects Iraq's concerns about being involuntarily drawn into regional conflicts. Baghdad, especially after the escalation of Israeli actions and heavy attacks on resistance groups in Gaza and Lebanon, and its direct confrontation with Iran, believes that these groups might un-

essarily drag the country into tensions that would offer no benefits to Iraq. Therefore, it is expected that one of the main pillars of Sudani's negotiations with senior Iranian officials will be persuading the resistance groups to disarm. This request is not only the demand of the Iraqi government but also enjoys the support of the Coordination Framework. In the current regional environment, Sudani and the Coordination Framework are striving to convince Iran regarding the new conditions in Syria and to align Tehran's perspective on the Arab country's developments and its

new leadership with that of other regional countries. After Tehran, Sudani will travel to Qatar. Given Doha's good relations with Tehran and the Syrian groups, it appears that the Iraqi premier will request Qatari authorities to facilitate, in line with these efforts, the groundwork for a relative rapprochement between Tehran and Damascus or at least a reduction in tensions between them. On the eve of Donald Trump's return to power, Sudani is undertaking serious diplomatic efforts to reduce regional tensions, as any instability in the region could have direct and negative conse-

quences for Iraq and even increase the likelihood of terrorism returning to the country. Ultimately, the successful holding of the upcoming Arab League summit in Baghdad, which will be the first summit without Bashar al-Assad's presence, holds special significance for Iraq. Issues related to Syria and the Gaza war will be among its main topics. Utilizing these opportunities, along with threats and active diplomacy, Sudani aims to strengthen Iraq's position, secure the maximum benefits for the country, and keep it away from potential regional threats.