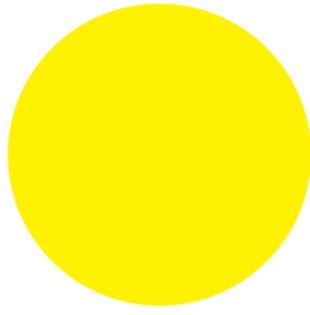


Tehran, Dushanbe sign 13 MoUs to further cement ties



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Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian (L) is welcomed by his Tajik counterpart Emomali Rahmon as he arrives in Tajikistan's capital Dushanbe on January 15, 2025. president.ir

New chapter unfolding in Iran-Russia ties with strategic treaty

Cooperation to turns sanctions into opportunities



By Sadeq Dehqan
Staff writer

INTERVIEW

Experts consider Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian's inaugural trip to Russia a historic event, believing it will usher a new phase in relations between the two nations. On January 17, during his visit to Moscow, Pezeshkian is set to meet with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin and other high-ranking officials and sign off on a comprehensive strategic cooperation treaty between the two countries.

According to the Iranian Foreign Ministry, the strategic partnership agreement has been under negotiation

between Iran and Russia for the past four years, with various drafts swapped around between the parties. The contents of the treaty were finalized this past summer and are set to be inked during this trip. The treaty covers a wide range of subjects, including economic collaboration, transportation, energy, healthcare, agriculture, joint efforts to take on shared challenges, mitigating the impact of natural disasters, combating terrorism and organized crime, renewable energy and discussions related to various modes of transportation—road, rail, air, and maritime—as well as the transfer of technical expertise in different fields.

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Tehran-Moscow treaty indicative of willpower to resist coercion



By Tahmina Abdul Vase
RUDN university specialist & lead expert on Asia

OPINION EXCLUSIVE

On January 17, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian will visit Moscow for negotiations with Vladimir Putin. A strategic agreement consisting of 47 articles is expected to be signed, covering politics, economics, energy, defense, and security. Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei said that the agreement would update and supplement the 2001 treaty, taking into account modern realities and challenges. For Russia, this document symbolizes the deepening of cooperation in key areas such as energy, transport infrastructure, defense, science, and technology. The inclusion of provisions on

joint work in the field of peaceful nuclear energy and cybersecurity confirms the intention of the parties to develop cooperation in high-tech areas. The agreement will be a step towards transforming Russian-Iranian relations into a full-fledged strategic alliance. Although this does not mean the creation of a formal military-political union like NATO, the document will contribute to strengthening mutual trust and coordination in international affairs. The signing of the agreement is taking place against the backdrop of Donald Trump's second presidency in the United States. In the context of a tough sanctions policy against Russia and Iran, this treaty sends a signal to Washington about the readiness of Moscow and Tehran to resist external pressure and build alternative mechanisms for interaction.

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Tehran, Dushanbe sign 13 MoUs to further cement ties

In a meeting of Iranian and Tajik economic actors held in Dushanbe, attended by Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Reza Salehi Amiri and Tajik officials, 13 bilateral cooperation memorandums were signed.

According to IRNA, Samad Hassanzadeh, head of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture (ICCIMA), expressed gratitude for the hospitality and attention of Tajik officials and its people during a joint meeting with Sultan Rahimzade, head of Tajikistan's State Investment Committee, on Wednesday in Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan.

Hassanzadeh emphasized that strengthening ties between Iranian and Tajik trade delegations and economic actors could significantly impact bilateral relations and the development of cultural and tourism activities.

Hassanzadeh noted that expanding economic relations between the two countries requires addressing certain ambiguities and shortcomings to enable investors to operate with greater confidence and ease.

He highlighted Tajikistan's five free trade zones as advantageous for Iranian businesses and called for preferential tariffs in specific industrial sectors, such as cotton and clothing, to enhance trade.

He also pointed to Iran's leading position in handmade carpet production, stating that Iranian investors could help develop Tajikistan's handicraft market.

Hassanzadeh assured that Iranian products in food industries, copper, petrochemicals, and construction materials meet the highest international standards, ensuring Tajik consumers can trust their quality.

The head of the ICCIMA stressed the need to develop banking relations between Tajikistan and Iran to facilitate trade. He also called for improved transportation infrastructure, including customs and logistics, to streamline cross-border movement.

Hassanzadeh highlighted the capabilities of Iranian engineering and technical service companies, which are

equipped with advanced global engineering standards, to excel in road construction, bridge and tunnel projects, and other large-scale ventures.

He emphasized the importance of transparent investment laws, noting that Iran provides guarantees for foreign investors to protect their capital. The ICCIMA head also mentioned that while investors from various countries are interested in Iran's energy and petrochemical megaprojects, the Islamic Republic prioritizes partnerships with neighboring countries, especially those with cultural commonalities.

Hassanzadeh invited Tajik economic actors to participate in Iran's international exhibitions and recommended that both countries dispatch trade and tourism delegations.

He highlighted opportunities in food industries, construction materials, steel, glass, tiles, ceramics, and other sectors, offering Tajik businesses six-month credit facilities with bank guarantees for exports.

Sultan Jafarzade, acknowledged Iran's capabilities and expressed optimism about the growth of businesses in Tajikistan, particularly in construction materials, handicrafts, and textiles.

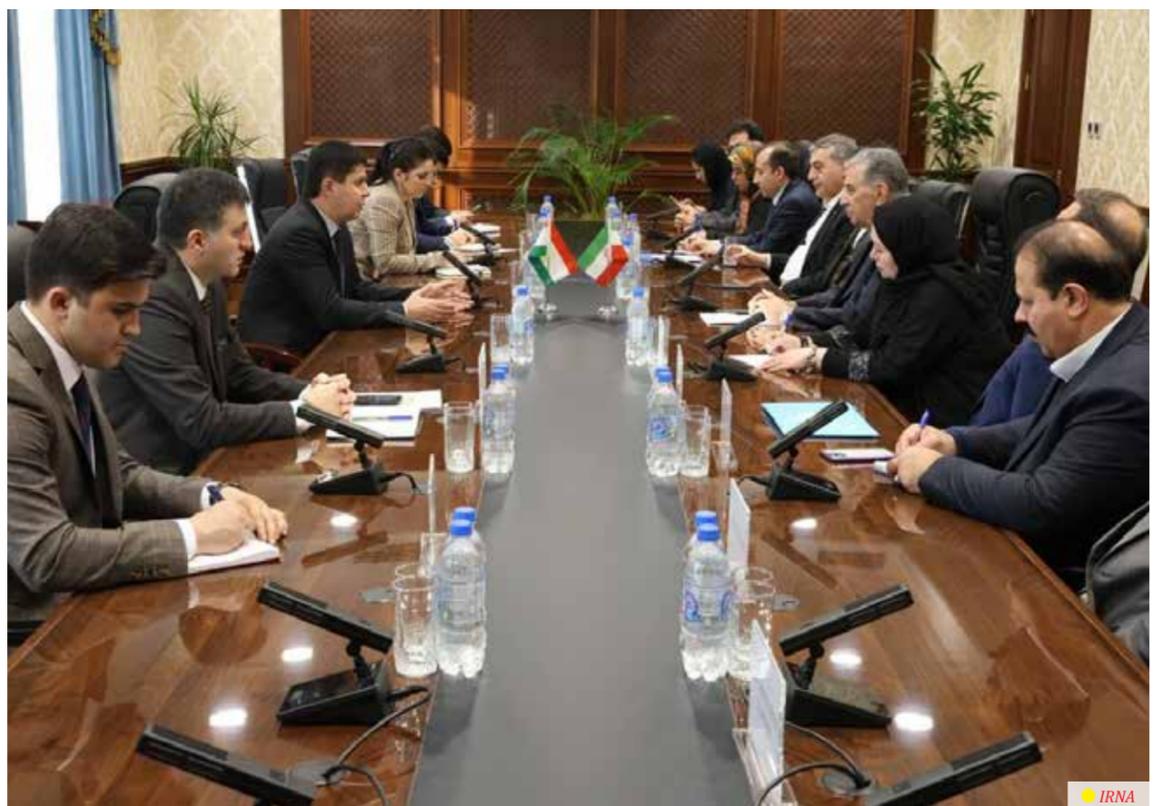
He emphasized the potential in transportation and called for organizing the Iran Chamber of Commerce to encourage Iranian companies to enter the Tajik market.

Jafarzade noted that the signing of 13 MoUs during the Iranian trade delegation's visit to Dushanbe would inject new energy into bilateral relations and boost economic, cultural, and political exchanges between the two countries.

Facilitating Tajik rail freight through Iran

During the visit, Iranian economic actors met with Tajikistan's Director General of International Transport to discuss the facilitation of Tajik rail wagons for transporting Iranian cargo to Tajikistan.

The meeting, chaired by Rozi Nurullah, Tajikistan's director general of international transport, and attended by Hamed Asgari, deputy international director of the ICCIMA, highlighted



Iran's economic capabilities and called for enabling Tajik wagons to transport export goods to Tajikistan, given the challenges of Iranian wagons operating in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) region.

'Iran should become Tajikistan's top trade partner'

In a meeting with Zavqi-Amin Zavqizoda, Tajikistan's minister of economic development and trade, the Tajik official emphasized the importance of strengthening economic ties, citing the deep cultural connections between the two countries.

He noted that numerous agreements had been signed between Tajikistan and Iran during the administration of Iran's late president Ebrahim Raeisi. Zavqizoda stressed the need to implement these agreements, revealing

that trade between Iran and Tajikistan reached \$387 million in 2024, a sixfold increase but still below potential.

He called for a long-term action plan to enhance bilateral relations, noting that joint investments totaled \$500,000 last year, which does not align with existing capacities.

The minister announced plans to send a trade delegation to Iran to sign joint agreements and explore investment opportunities.

He highlighted Iran's capabilities in producing pharmaceuticals, decorative stones, and rebar, expressing Tajikistan's interest in diversifying imports and engaging in joint ventures.

Zavqizoda expressed hope that Iran would rise from its current position as Tajikistan's seventh-largest trade partner to the top spot, a goal he believes can be achieved through ongoing talks

and agreements, including those involving Iran's president.

Hassanzadeh, in turn, emphasized mutual needs, cooperation, and joint cultural and social activities between Iran and Tajikistan, calling for increased collaboration in exports, imports, and investments.

He noted the presence of numerous economic actors from across Iran in the delegation and highlighted Iran's technological advancements in pharmaceuticals, engineering services, and tourism, as well as its capacity to modernize Tajikistan's elevator industry.

Hassanzadeh also discussed the importance of facilitating currency transfers, improving transportation, and providing investment insurance, reaffirming the Iran Chamber's readiness to cooperate with Tajik businesses and investors.

Iranian buildings mandated to use solar panels



Buildings with more than four floors or a total floor area exceeding 1,000 square meters must now install solar panels to obtain construction permits, according to Mohsen Zabihi, a

deputy head of Iran's Power Generation, Transmission, and Distribution Management Company (Tavanir).

In a Wednesday report by IRNA, Zabihi outlined mea-

sures to encourage landlords to adopt solar energy, noting that a memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed in mid-August between Tavanir and the Iran Construction Engineering Organization mandates the use of solar panels in new buildings. Under the agreement, construction permits for buildings over four stories or with a total floor area exceeding 1,000 square meters will be conditional on the installation of solar panels.

Zabihi emphasized that the MoU aims to promote renewable energy use, environmental protection, and non-operational defense measures.

The Iran Construction Engineering Organization has been tasked with drafting guide-

lines for implementing the solar panel requirements, which have already been distributed to provincial engineering organizations.

Zabihi explained that the capacity of solar systems in each building will depend on available rooftop space.

Solar panels can also be installed in building courtyards and parking areas, he said, warning that failure to comply with the new regulations will result in the denial of construction permits and electricity connections by distribution companies.

Additionally, distribution companies, acting on behalf of the Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Organization of Iran (SATBA), will sign 20-year guar-

anteed power purchase agreements with building owners after the solar power plants are operational.

Rooftop solar power plants will be connected to the national grid, allowing building residents to receive electricity separately. However, for safety reasons, these plants will disconnect from the grid during power outages.

Hybrid inverters now enable the use of solar energy for emergency power needs, such as elevators and public lighting.

Plans to build 200 solar power plants

Zabihi also announced a target to build 3-megawatt solar plants before the peak demand period in 2025.

These projects aim to reduce the gap between electricity production and consumption.

He added that the implementation process is underway, with the plants expected to become operational soon.

Representatives from SATBA provided details on the contracts and project specifics during the meeting.

He also outlined the construction process and steps involved. Distribution companies were instructed to expedite land acquisition for the 200 solar plants and make it available to contractors promptly.

Iran's renewable energy capacity has reached approximately 1,520 megawatts, with plans to increase it to 1,800 megawatts by the end of the year.

Tehran-Moscow treaty ...

For Iran, this is a step towards expanding strategic autonomy in relations with the West, and for Russia, it is a way to strengthen its position in the Asian region and establish cooperation with Middle Eastern countries. Joint initiatives, such as the use of national currencies and the creation of new transport corridors, could reduce the influence of the US dollar and strengthen the positions of both coun-

tries in the global economy.

The agreement will impact future relations between Russia and Iran, becoming a platform for joint projects that stimulate economic growth, diversification of trade, and infrastructure development. A key element may be the International North-South Transport Corridor, creating new logistics opportunities and strengthening the connectivity of Eurasia. The document will also open up pros-

pects in the military-technical sphere. Joint exercises, the exchange of experience, and the transfer of technology will help both countries adapt to new security challenges.

Iran and Russia have the potential for developing a strategic partnership. Their interests converge in ensuring stability in the Middle East, combating international terrorism, and the sustainable development of the Eurasian region.

Overcoming sanctions and international pressure is possible through close coordination of actions and the effective use of resources.

The meeting of the leaders of Russia and Iran will be an important step towards creating a new format of interaction based on mutual respect and shared responsibility for global challenges. The signing of the strategic agreement will strengthen the positions of both coun-

tries on the international stage and will be an example of successful resistance to unilateral pressure aimed at containing their development.

Thus, the upcoming signing of the Treaty on a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between Russia and Iran reflects the desire of both countries to deepen cooperation and jointly counter external challenges, opening new horizons for bilateral relations.

Persian miniature; a gateway to Iran's cultural heritage

Persian miniature is more than just a visual art genre; it serves as a gateway to Iran's vibrant cultural heritage. This intricate form of artistic expression, characterized by vivid colors, delicate details, and rich symbolism, captures the essence of Persian kings, heroes, and mystics. Persian miniatures do more than illustrate literary masterpieces; they act as cultural messengers, shaping global perceptions of Persian art and culture. The art form embodies a fusion of various influences, resulting in a sophisticated visual language.

This article explores the history, evolution, and impact of Persian miniature art, tracing its journey from early beginnings to its flourishing across several historical periods. It delves into the unique significance of this art form and examines its influence across cultural boundaries, from Central Asia to Europe. Through this exploration, we gain a deeper appreciation of the artistic depth, cultural heritage, and enduring themes of Persian miniatures that continue to resonate today.



Origins of Persian miniature

The roots of Persian miniature can be traced back to the pre-Islamic period, but it was during the 13th century, under the Mongol Empire, that it began to flourish distinctly. The Mongol rulers introduced significant Chinese influences, including advanced paper-making techniques, which played a crucial role in the development of illustrated manuscripts. This cross-cultural exchange laid the foundation for a unique visual tradition that fused disparate cultural elements, surfiran.com wrote.

The Mongol conquests not only reshaped political landscapes but also served as a conduit for artistic innovation. The Chinese influence introduced by the Mongols significantly shaped the aesthetics of Persian miniatures, evident in the meticulous rendering of natural elements such as clouds and landscapes, as well as the strategic use of perspective. These new elements were seamlessly blended with existing Iranian artistic conventions, creating a distinctive and multicultural art form. Persian artists absorbed these influences and adapted them to align with Iranian cultural values, resulting in an entirely original art form.

The Ilkhanid rulers were instrumental in advancing Persian miniature art, sponsoring elaborate manuscripts like "The Jami al-Tawarikh" (Compendium of Chronicles) by Rashid al-Din. This work exemplifies the synthesis of Chinese and Mongol styles, establishing a hybrid visual language that would define Persian miniatures and set the groundwork for their future development.

Height of Persian miniature

The Ilkhanid period marked the formal establishment of Persian miniatures as a key aspect of Iranian cultural production. Illustrated manuscripts from this era, such as the "Jami al-Tawarikh," incorporated diverse stylistic elements, merging Mongolian aesthetics with Persian narrative traditions to create a dynamic visual language that combined symbolic imagery with naturalistic representation.

The Timurid dynasty in the 15th century heralded a golden era for Persian miniature. The city of Herat, under the patronage of Timur's descendants, emerged as a cultural hub, with rulers investing heavily in illustrated manuscripts. This environment allowed the miniature tradition to reach unprecedented artistic heights. One of the most iconic



artists of this period was Kamal ud-Din Behzad, whose miniatures are celebrated for their intricate compositions, vivid storytelling, and emotional depth. Works like "Yusuf and Zulaikha" showcase the elegance and complexity of Persian miniature painting, with Behzad's mastery in arranging figures and conveying emotional nuance setting a benchmark for future artists.

The Timurid period was characterized by artistic innovation, refining techniques such as architectural cutaways and layered compositions. The Herat School emerged as the foremost training center for miniaturists, significantly shaping the practice of miniature painting across Persia and beyond, influencing the Mughal courts of India.

Schools of Persian miniature painting

Iran gave rise to several regional schools of Persian miniature, each contributing unique stylistic and thematic elements to the broader tradition. Among these, the Shiraz, Tabriz, and Herat schools stand out as particularly influential.

Shiraz School

Established in the 13th century, the Shiraz School is known for its symmetrical compositions and decorative detail. During the 14th and 15th centuries, it gained renown for illustrating literary works, particularly Ferdowsi's "Shahnameh."

The miniatures from Shiraz typically feature straightforward, frieze-like compositions that convey order and clarity, significantly influencing other regions. The manuscripts produced in Shiraz were widely circulated, helping to spread Persian cultural and literary traditions throughout the region.

Tabriz School

Emerging in the late 13th century, the Tabriz School is distinguished by its blend of Chinese and Byzantine influences. Known for vibrant colors and sophisticated compositions, it reached its zenith under the patronage of Shah Ismail I and Shah Tahmasp I during the Safavid dynasty. A notable example is Shah Tahmasp's "Shahnameh," a masterpiece that embodies the height of Persian miniature art through intricate detailing and expressive human figures. The Tabriz School created a significant cultural center that harmoniously integrated diverse artistic elements, with monumental compositions reflecting the grandeur of the Safavid court.

Herat School

The Herat School, prominent during the Timurid period, is celebrated for its elaborate compositions, emotional sensitivity, and vivid narrative portrayals. Under the patronage of Sultan Husayn Bayqara, the Herat School achieved remarkable artistic heights. Kamal ud-Din Behzad emerged as its leading figure, setting a high standard for miniature art through his depictions of complex human emotions and dynamic scenes. This school emphasized emotional depth, transforming Persian miniature from mere decorative art into a powerful cultural narrative. The innovations of the Herat School extended beyond Persia, influencing artists at the Mughal courts in India and thereby spreading Persian aesthetics widely.

Persian miniature as a vehicle for literature and culture

Persian miniature art is deeply intertwined with the rich tradition of Persian literature, serving as a visual companion to classic poetry and enhancing the storytelling experience. Through these illustrations, the complexities of Persian narrative literature became more accessible and engaging for readers. Poets such as Ferdowsi, Nezami, Sa'adi, Hafez, and Jami often inspired miniature artists, whose works illuminated these literary masterpieces. For instance, Ferdowsi's "Shahnameh" (Book of Kings) provided endless inspiration for artists, who depicted epic battles, heroic deeds, and dramatic encounters. The heroic tales of Rostam and Sohrab were vividly illustrated through dynamic compositions and vibrant colors, conveying not only key narrative moments but also the emotional weight and moral dilemmas faced by the characters.

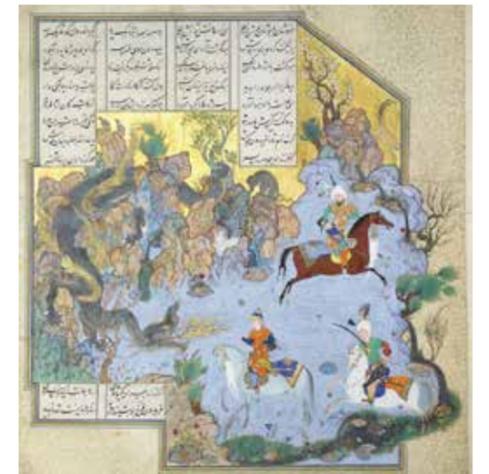
During the Safavid period, another artistic form gained popularity: the creation of album miniatures, or muharraq. These albums featured collections of single-page illustrations, often depicting royal figures, romantic scenes, or historical events, independent of accompanying texts. This creative freedom allowed artists to explore diverse themes, making these albums prized possessions throughout the Persianate world.

The influence of muharraq extended to the Mughal and Ottoman empires, where Persian miniature traditions were adapted and incorporated into local styles, reflecting the far-reaching cultural impact of Persian art. The portability of these albums enabled Persian miniatures to be appreciated far beyond Iran, spreading Persian aesthetics to distant courts and highlighting both the painter's technical skill and the patron's refined cultural taste, thereby cementing the prestige of Persian miniature art throughout the Islamic world.

Influence on other cultures

The impact of Persian miniature painting extended far beyond the borders of Iran, profoundly influencing the artistic traditions of neighboring regions, especially in Mughal India and the Ottoman Empire.

The Mughal emperors, tracing their lineage to the Timurids, invited Persian artists to their courts. The collaboration between Persian artists and local Indian talent led to the birth of the Mughal miniature style, which blended Persian elements with indigenous Indian themes and European influences. Mughal miniatures retained the vibrant colors and elaborate compositions characteristic of their Persian counterparts but were also marked by an increased naturalism and inclusion of local flora and fauna.



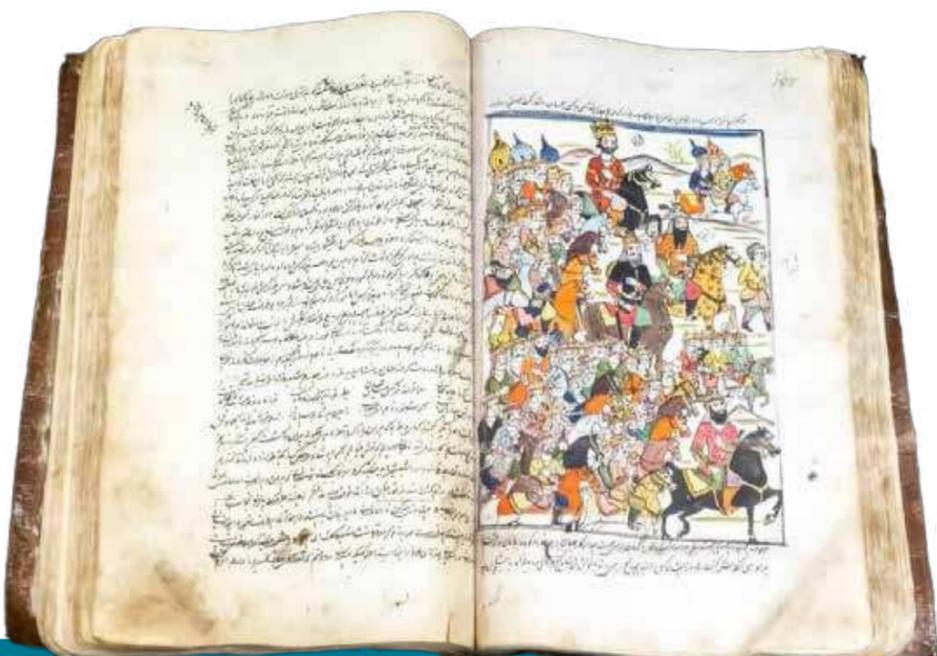
In the Ottoman Empire, Persian miniatures influenced Ottoman manuscript painting. The Ottomans borrowed compositional techniques, vibrant palettes, and figural styles from Persian examples. Persian-trained artists such as Shah Quli, who relocated to Istanbul, played a significant role in establishing miniature painting at the Ottoman court. The cross-cultural exchange between Persian, Mughal, and Ottoman art traditions resulted in a shared aesthetic language that reflected a synthesis of regional influences, enriching the visual arts across the Islamic world.

Decline and revival

Persian miniature began to decline during the late Safavid period, as new artistic preferences emerged, and Western influences started to shape Persian tastes. By the 18th century, the tradition of Persian miniature had significantly diminished, with many artists turning to different media or adapting their skills to meet new demands.

However, the 20th century witnessed a resurgence of interest in Persian miniature. Artists such as Hossein Behzad sought to revive traditional miniature techniques while incorporating a modern sensibility. Behzad, inspired by the masterful works of Behzad, reintroduced the emotional richness and intricate detailing that had once characterized the art form. This revival was also supported by the establishment of art institutions in Iran, which ensured that the skills and knowledge of traditional miniature painting were preserved for future generations.

Today, Persian miniature continues to thrive, with contemporary artists both respecting traditional practices and experimenting with new themes and techniques. Exhibitions in museums worldwide, including National Museum of Iran and New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, have helped to promote Persian miniature to an international audience. Digital platforms and online archives also play a significant role in making these artworks accessible to a broader public, ensuring that the beauty and intricacy of Persian miniature can be appreciated by people around the world.



US scenario for West Asia

A plan for Middle East: Israel's strategy against Iran

International Desk

The issue of territorial expansion, known as the "Greater Israel" project, is directly related to what Americans referred to as the "New Middle East" initiative in the 1990s. Undoubtedly, the developments in the Middle East over the past few decades can be interpreted and analyzed in light of these designs. Given the increasing significance of this topic, it will be addressed in a series of separate notes. Below, you will find the first part of this collection:

A few months ago, the release of an image depicting the "Greater Israel" emblem on the uniform of an Israeli soldier sparked outrage among the people of Arab countries. In this image, the promised land of Israel stretches from the Nile to the Euphrates, encompassing areas from Medina to Lebanon, and parts of Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, all of Jordan, and Palestine. The anger stirred among Arab populations likely stems from the image's circulation on social media; however, the notion of Israel's expansion has been repeatedly articulated by the regime's leaders in various forms. "Theodor Herzl," the founder of Israeli regime, discussed the idea of "expanding Israel from the Nile to the Euphrates" in his memoirs prior to the establishment of the regime.

In January 2024, the "Middle East Monitor," a think tank that gathers information from various sources, released a video featuring Israeli politician and analyst Avi Lipkin, in which he asserts during a television program, "Ultimately, our borders will extend from Lebanon to Saudi Arabia, and then from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates. Who is on the other side of the Euphrates? The Kurds. We are friends with the Kurds. Therefore, we have the Mediterranean behind us and the Kurds in front. I believe that after that, we will take Mecca, Medina, and Mount Sinai and cleanse these places."

Oded Yinon, an advisor to Ariel Sharon, the 11th Prime Minister of Israel, wrote an important article in 1980 entitled "A Strategy for Israel in the 1980s," in which he discusses numerous geopol-



Experts believe that changing the geographical borders in the region, in cooperation with Israel and the United States, does not necessarily mean expanding the territorial borders of a regime called Israel. Rather, due to demographic issues,Israel aims to weaken Middle Eastern countries by dividing them into smaller sections so they do not pose a security threat to this regime.



litical ideas related to the region and the conflicts Israel faces with its neighbors. Yinon notes that the creation of a "Coptic-Christian state" in Egypt could lead to the downfall and dissolution of that country, which in turn could even cause the collapse of Libya and Sudan.

The text continues that the complete dissolution of Lebanon into five provinces serves as a prelude for the entire Arab world, including Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and the Arabian Peninsula, which is currently unfolding. Israel's long-term goal on the eastern front is the dissolution of Syria and Iraq and, subsequently, unique ethnic or religious regions like Lebanon; whereas the dissolution of the military power of these countries is viewed as an immediate short-

term objective."

Yinon further elaborates that Syria will be fragmented into several countries based on its ethnic and religious structure, akin to modern-day Lebanon, resulting in the establishment of an Alawite Shia state along its coast and a Sunni state in the Aleppo region. This goal will ultimately guarantee peace and security in the region and is currently within Israel's reach.

The Middle East Political and Economic Institute, run by some former security officials from Eastern Europe, reported on July 6, 2024, before the Israeli army's attack on Lebanon, under the title "Greater Israel: an Ongoing Expansion Plan for the Middle East and North Africa," stating, "Although not new, the Greater

Israel project appears to receive renewed attention in the light of the most recent war from Gaza, that reportedly led to the death of more than 34,000 and wounding of over 78'000 Palestinians, and the prospect for a potential war in Lebanon. This recent Gaza development appears to at least pause the Abraham Accords with Saudi Arabia (signed in 2020), but should Israel pursue its "Greater Israel" project, whose maps match Herzl's territorial demands and clearly hints at extending its territory in Saudi Arabia, including Neom and according to Avi Lipkin Mecca and Medina, the envisioned regional peace becomes an unclear concept."

In statements made by Israeli officials and analysts, there is no fundamental or long-term concept indicating a potential limitation on Israel's territorial expansion. Therefore, based on the analyzed data, it is difficult to distinguish between the potential strategic patience planned for the realization of "Greater Israel" and the possibility of an agreement between Tel Aviv and Saudi Arabia, along with other neighbors, to form some kind of union considering the map recently displayed by Israeli soldiers.

The regional geopolitical dynamics seem to be characterized by various forms of conflict, which, in light of the active "Greater Israel" project, likely points to the normalization of relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel, as well as an increase in confrontation between Iran and its allies on one side, and Israel, the United States, and their allies on the other and Turkey plays a significant role in this confrontation. Laura Kelly, a senior reporter for



A plaque used to reserve the seat of the delegation from Israel, is seen during the UNESCO Extended 45th session of the World Heritage Committee in Riyadh on September 11, 2023.

● FAYEZ NURELDINE/AFP

The Hill, writes that one year after Hamas's Oct. 7 attack, "Israel is reshaping the Middle East by force", taking the fight to Iran and its allies "with the help of the United States".

This comes as Netanyahu stated in a cabinet meeting that "the October 7 war is about our existence and acts as a savior. I want this war to be officially recognized as such. We are changing the security reality in our region for our children and our future to ensure that what happened on October 7 does not happen again."

Randa Slim, a senior expert and the Director of the Conflict Resolution and Track II Dialogues Program at the Middle East Institute, also states that in the past, their Israeli counterparts have said that the security and political institutions in Tel Aviv have always believed that what is referred to as the great war will be inevitable.

Despite all of this, Netanyahu's ultimate goal remains unclear; he is continually escalating conflicts on multiple fronts. Simultaneously, he is pursuing air and ground operations in southern Lebanon while continuing military actions in the Gaza Strip and security measures in the West Bank, and he has also included attacks on Yemeni resistance in his agenda.

Jonathan Lord, senior fellow and director of the Middle East Security program at the Center for a New American Security said, "When it comes to reshaping the Middle East, I think the Israelis are certainly trying to reshape the security threats in closest proximity to themselves".

"You can't stay at full mobilization forever. This will rob your society. It will destroy your economy."

Experts believe that changing the geographical borders in the region, in cooperation with Israel and the United States, does not necessarily mean expanding the territorial borders of a regime called Israel. Rather, due to demographic issues, the Zionist regime is likely to make every effort to annex Gaza and the West Bank to the territory it currently controls, and in another attempt to secure its safety, it aims to weaken Middle Eastern countries by dividing them into smaller sections so they do not pose a security threat to this regime.

The article was provided by the Persian service of the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA).



Smoke rises from the site of an Israeli airstrike in Dahiyeh, Beirut, on Oct. 2, 2024.

● HASSAN AMMAR/AP

MEPEI: Trump's possible moves in Mideast

International Desk The Middle East Political and Economic Institute (MEPEI) has analyzed the approach of Donald Trump's second term as President of the United States towards the Middle East and North Africa. The institute's report suggests that Trump's focus on counterbalancing China's growing influence in these regions will become a central theme. Over the past few years, Beijing has emerged as a significant economic and diplomatic partner for Persian Gulf nations and other regional players. China's mediation to bring Saudi Arabia and Iran closer last year highlighted its readiness to challenge US influence in the area. Trump's second administration is likely to confront this challenge head-on, leveraging economic incentives, military cooperation, and strategic partnerships to reaffirm US dominance in the region. The full text of the report follows:

US President Donald Trump points past Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as they discuss a Middle East peace plan proposal during a joint news conference in the East Room of the White House in Washington, January 28, 2020.
● BRENDAN MCDERMID/REUTERS



With Trump poised to take office as the next president, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) once again find themselves at a critical juncture. Trump's first term left a lasting impact on the region, characterized by an unorthodox mix of transactional diplomacy, various initiatives, and the disruption of established norms. For some regional powers, his policies presented opportunities for realignment and strategic advancement. However, for others, they brought uncertainty and disappointment. As his return to the White House approaches, regional leaders are gearing up for a potential shift that could reshape alliances, redefine priorities, and recalibrate relations with Washington.

During his first term, Trump's approach to the Middle East prioritized two main objectives: Strengthening ties with key allies and recalibrating US engagement to align with a clear "America First" agenda. His administration's landmark achievement, the Abraham Accords (signed in 2020), facilitated the normalization of diplomatic relations between Israel and several Arab countries, including the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan, marking a historic breakthrough. While previous US administrations focused on resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a pathway to regional stability, Trump flipped the script. By sidelining the Palestinian issue and concentrating on common security and economic interests—especially in countering regional threats—he ushered in a new era of regional cooperation that had eluded his predecessors. For Persian Gulf leaders, Trump's policies were a welcome shift. His administration's close alignment with Saudi Arabia and the UAE bolstered their strategic ambitions and solidified regional leadership. Trump's decision to prioritize bilateral relations over multilateral commitments allowed the Persian Gulf states to pursue their interests more assertively, from Yemen to Libya, without fear of significant US pullback. He proved to be a reliable partner for the Persian Gulf monarchies, understanding their security concerns, particularly during a time when oil markets and energy policies had taken on new geopolitical weight. Trump's legacy in Middle East

and North Africa policy was also marked by unpredictability. For instance, his decision to move the US embassy to Al-Quds (Jerusalem), while celebrated by Israel and its supporters, alienated Arab and Muslim communities, undermined the trust of Arab and Muslim communities. Similarly, his abrupt decisions regarding US troop movements in Syria raised concerns about Washington's long-term commitment to regional stability. Trump's transactional diplomatic style, which often downplayed grand humanitarian and strategic goals, left both allies and adversaries uncertain about the true priorities of the United States.

The region Trump left behind in 2021 is, remarkably, quite different today. The Middle East and North Africa are increasingly defined by shifting alliances and the emergence of new power centers. Under the leadership of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Saudi Arabia has solidified its role as a heavyweight in the region. Riyadh's growing independence from Washington in engaging with broader partners, including China and Russia, is evident. At the same time, the UAE has emerged as a dynamic player in both economic and geopolitical spheres, establishing its reputation as a bridge between East and West. Meanwhile, despite ongoing political crises and persistent tensions with the Palestinians, Israel continues to bolster its position as a regional actor.

Trump's second term will undoubtedly revolve around the Abraham Accords, a success he regards as both a personal and political victory. Expanding normalization agreements to include Saudi Arabia is likely to become a priority, representing a historic advancement aligned with both US and regional objectives. While Riyadh has cautiously expressed its openness to such agreements, including US security guarantees and access to advanced technology, including nuclear capabilities for peaceful purposes. Trump's pragmatic and deal-making approach could position him to provide the necessary assurances to Saudi Arabia, potentially achieving a diplomatic feat with profound implications for the region. Energy security will also emerge as a key focus for

Trump. With renewed pressure and changing demand patterns in global energy markets, his return could recalibrate US relations with OPEC producers. His previous presidency demonstrated a clear understanding of oil and gas' role in global power dynamics; he may seek to strengthen US ties with major energy players like Saudi Arabia and the UAE to ensure favorable outcomes for American interests. This could manifest in new partnerships, trade agreements, or even strategic interventions in global oil markets to counter the influence of rivals like Russia. The potential ramifications of this focus on energy security include fluctuations in international energy prices, shifts in geopolitical alliances, and increased competition among energy-producing countries.

In addition to energy, Trump's focus on counterbalancing China's increasing influence in the Middle East and North Africa is set to become a central issue. In recent years, Beijing has emerged as a significant economic and diplomatic partner for Persian Gulf countries and other regional players. China's mediation to bring Saudi Arabia and Iran closer together last year underscored its readiness to challenge US influence in the region. Trump's second administration is likely to con-

front this challenge directly, employing economic incentives, military cooperation, and strategic partnerships to reaffirm US dominance in the area. For Trump, addressing China will be a regional priority and a cornerstone of his broader foreign policy agenda.

However, Trump's return could also stir up new waves of uncertainty. His aversion to multilateral frameworks and preference for bilateral agreements may undermine the partnerships that the United States established during the Biden administration. Additionally, his often-controversial rhetoric and actions could exacerbate regional divides, alienating key players while emboldening others. A sustainable, long-term strategy could enhance Washington's ability to serve as a stabilizing force, especially in conflict-ridden areas such as Syria, Libya, and Yemen.

For leaders in the Middle East and North Africa, the prospect of Trump's return presents both an opportunity and a challenge. Those who benefited from his so-called transactional diplomacy may welcome his comeback, viewing it as a chance to advance their national interests in a more flexible, results-oriented environment. Conversely, others might perceive his renewed presence as a destabilizing factor that threatens to undo hard-won progress.



For leaders in the MENA, the prospect of Trump's return presents both an opportunity and a challenge. Those who benefited from his so-called transactional diplomacy may welcome his comeback, viewing it as a chance to advance their national interests in a more flexible, results-oriented environment. Conversely, others might perceive his renewed presence as a destabilizing factor that threatens to undo hard-won progress.

threatens to undo hard-won progress. It is essential to consider the potential reactions of these leaders, as their responses will shape the region's political landscape. Ultimately, Trump's next moves in the Middle East will depend on his ability to adapt to the evolving dynamics of the region while remaining true to his core foreign policy instincts.

In conclusion, the Middle East continues to be a stage where global powers vie for influence, while local actors maneuver to maintain their positions in an increasingly multipolar world. Whether Trump's second presidency will be a game changer or yet another source of volatility remains uncertain. It is crucial to note that he will face significant challenges, including navigating complex regional dynamics, managing potential backlash from his policies, and balancing the interests of various regional powers. Nevertheless, it is clear that his return will once again place the United States at the center of Middle Eastern and North African politics, reshaping alliances and challenging the status quo in ways that will resonate throughout the region and beyond.

The article was provided by the Persian service of the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA).

A Palestinian demonstrator argues with Israeli forces during a protest in Jordan Valley in the Israeli-occupied West Bank on January 29, 2020.
● RANEEN SAWAFTA/REUTERS



President: Iran 'in principle' open to talks with new US administration

'I do hope that Trump will go for peace in the region'

National Desk

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian expressed the Islamic Republic's readiness for negotiations with the second administration of his American counterpart, Donald Trump, on the country's nuclear issues and removal of illegal US sanctions as he took Washington to task for breaching its commitments in the past and seeking to subvert the Iranian government.

Pezeshkian made the statement in a long interview with NBC News in Tehran on Tuesday, reiterating that Iran's nuclear program is peaceful and the Islamic Republic is not after "nuclear weaponry."

"The problem we have is not in dialogue. It's in the commitments that arise from talk and dialogue that we'll have to commit to," Pezeshkian told NBC News host Lester Holt.

"We upheld all the commitments that we had to commit to," when Iran held talks with major powers about its nuclear program, the Iranian president added. "But unfortunately, it was the other party that did not live up to its promises and obligations." Stressing that Iran in principle is open to dialogue with the second Trump administration, Pezeshkian said, "We have this doubt that, no matter how much we engage in conversation and dialogue, they are trying to topple the government, not solve the problems."

He also reiterated that Iran does not aim to develop nuclear weapons despite allegations by the United States and its Euro-

pean allies.

Under the 2015 nuclear agreement, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Iran agreed to certain restrictions on its civilian nuclear activities in exchange for the lifting of sanctions targeting its economy.

Trump's unprovoked and illegal withdrawal from the JCPOA in 2018 placed the fate of the deal in limbo. Tehran had remained compliant with the agreement—as repeatedly verified by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)—and continued to honor its terms for a year after the US withdrawal.

However, with European powers failing to counter US pressure, Iran began to reduce its nuclear commitments under the terms of the agreement.

During his first term, Trump implemented the so-called maximum pressure campaign against the Islamic Republic and several rounds of negotiations under President Joe Biden failed to bring the United States back into compliance with the landmark agreement.

'We do not fear war'

Pointing to Trump's threats that US ally Israel could strike Iranian nuclear facilities less than a week before his return to the White House, Pezeshkian asserted that Tehran would react to any action.

"You see, naturally enough, we will react to any action. We do not fear war, while we do not seek it either," he said, adding, "I solemnly hope that this will not transpire because it will be



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian (R) speaks with NBC News host Lester Holt in an interview in the capital Tehran on January 14, 2025.
● president.ir

to the detriment of all the actors, not only and merely us."

Pezeshkian said Iran's adversaries were accusing Tehran of trying to build a nuclear bomb "to fabricate some sort of a pretext," stressing, "This is not true."

Iran 'never' plotted to assassinate Trump

The Iranian president also dismissed the media stories that the Islamic Republic had been involved in a plot to assassinate Trump during last year's US elec-

tion campaign.

Asked about the reported plot against Trump outlined by US authorities, Pezeshkian said, "This is another one of those schemes that Israel and other countries are designing to promote Iranophobia. ... Iran has never attempted to nor does it plan to assassinate anyone."

Asked whether Iran is willing to promise that there will be no attempt on Trump's life, Pezeshkian said, "We have never attempted this to begin with, and

we never will."

The Iranian president also stressed Tehran's efforts to ensure peace in the region.

"I do hope that Trump will go for peace in the region and the world not, conversely, contribute to bloodshed or war," he said in part of the interview with NBC when asked about his message for the incoming US president. Queried whether Iran had a role to play in brokering a possible ceasefire deal in Gaza, Pezeshkian said, "We do whatever we can

in order for peace to prevail in the region."

On the recent regional developments and the notion that the Axis of Resistance has suffered damages, the Iranian president said Tehran's position had not been weakened.

"I do not see any link," he said, adding that, "Comparing to last year inside the country, we're more coherent. We're more robust. We have better participation. We have a more solid security in the country."

New chapter unfolding ...



Ebrahim Rezaei

Major milestone in ties

Ebrahim Rezaei, the head of the Iran-Russia Parliamentary Friendship Group and spokesman for the National Security and Foreign Policy Committee of the legislative chamber, shed more light on the comprehensive cooperation agreement in an interview with Iran Daily.

"In my opinion, the signing of this treaty is a major milestone and a giant leap forward in bilateral relations. It is the result of several years of negotiations between the two countries and holds great importance for the development of their ties."

According to Rezaei, the treaty includes a preamble and 47 ar-

ticles, which must be passed by the Iranian Parliament and the Russian Duma.

"The agreement deals with vital areas such as political, security, commercial, economic, energy, scientific and technological cooperation, nuclear collaboration, inter-regional partnerships, defense cooperation, environmental issues, combating organized crime, money laundering and terrorism," the lawmaker said.

He noted that the treaty emphasizes respect for the territorial integrity of both countries, suggesting that the agreement serves as a very positive and key foundation

for building up relations and unlocking substantial cooperation potential between the two nations.

"Given the many shared interests and things the two nations have in common in various fields, the agreement can be a helping hand in numerous aspects."

Rezaei, referring to the Western sanctions against Iran and Russia, said, "Both countries are in the same boat, facing sanctions, and by joining forces, they can turn the tide and make the most of these collaborations to meet their needs."

Regarding their current trade status, he explained that trade volume between Iran and Russia is estimated at around \$5 billion. Official sources have indicated that trade between the two countries has picked up this year. However, customs data indicates that the trade volume has not budged much this year.

Rezaei said that Iran could fill many of its needs, such as grain, from Russia while simultaneously supplying Russia with agricultural products, particularly during the second half of the year and winter season.

He added that prior agree-

ments in the energy sector, particularly in gas cooperation, were quite fruitful during the term of the late Iranian president Ibrahim Raisi, culminating in a \$40 billion agreement when he last visited Russia a year ago, which "we are awaiting its implementation."

Rezaei also highlighted the importance of Iran-Russia cooperation in developing and strengthening the North-South Corridor, stating, "There is untapped potential between the two countries in various segments of this corridor. To make the most of this opportunity, the completion of rail, maritime and land corridors should be fast-tracked."

He continued that one of the key priorities in developing relations between the two countries was the construction of these corridors, which both nations need to follow through on earnestly.

The lawmaker noted that there was also huge potential for cooperation in the fields of nuclear energy and power plant construction and promising work had already begun in these areas. "However, these efforts must pick up pace."

Additionally, Rezaei said that Iran and Russia had successful-



Mostafa Nakhaei

ly worked together in security matters and counterterrorism and such cooperation could be carried over to other areas.

Clear framework to be set up for cooperation

Mostafa Nakhaei, a member of the Energy Committee of the Iranian Parliament, also weighed in on the cooperation agreement between Iran and Russia, telling Iran Daily that various collaborations had come about between the two nations over the years, yielding positive results.

However, he said that Pezeshkian's visit to Russia could lead to a major leap in cooperation,

opening up a new chapter in their relations.

"Both countries need to step up their collaboration to address their mutual needs and signing the strategic partnership treaty could establish a clear and structured framework for this joint cooperation, providing greater transparency in their relations and collaboration methods."

He added that expanding cooperation between Iran and Russia could yield important outcomes, especially in the energy sector, as both countries were major players in the global energy scene, making this collaboration crucial and decisive.

Pezeshkian: Iran seeks cooperation with regional states to offset US pressure

International Desk

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian said his government is seeking to expand cooperation with regional countries to offset the US pressure on regional countries as he began a three-day visit to Tajikistan and Russia. Pezeshkian arrived in Tajikistan's capital, Dushanbe, on Wednesday and was warmly welcomed at the airport by his Tajik counterpart Emomali Rahmon. Before leaving Tehran for Dushanbe, Pezeshkian said his visit to Tajikistan is in line with his government's policies in expanding relations with neighboring countries. The president said his visit is aimed at expanding cooperation with Tajikistan in the fields of agriculture, industry, trade, and transportation. Pezeshkian is expected to sign agreements with his Tajik counterpart in the fields. At the invitation of Rahmon, the trip is Pezeshkian's first visit to

the Eurasian region since he took office in July. The Iranian president will then travel to Russia to meet Russian President Vladimir Putin in the capital Moscow where they are set to sign a long-term strategic cooperation agreement on Friday. "During the visit to Russia, a comprehensive document on strategic cooperation between the two countries will be signed, which includes enhancing cooperation in economy, science, industry, agriculture, culture, and security," Pezeshkian said. He said that Iran plans to sign similar long-term agreements with other regional countries like Iraq. Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, who is accompanying the president during his visits, said strengthening cooperation in the security field is one of the important aspects of the 20-year comprehensive strategic partnership agreement. Araghchi said Iran and Russia

have valuable experiences in fighting terrorism and extremism. The comprehensive agreement between Iran and Russia is not only in the interests of the two countries, but also in the interest of world peace. Back in 2001, Tehran and Moscow signed a long-term cooperation deal, officially known as the Treaty of the Foundation of Mutual Relations and the Principles of Cooperation. It was initially set for 10 years but was extended up until 2026. Iran and Russia are both subject to illegal Western sanctions. They have over the past years deepened their cooperation in various fields. The Russian Federation has signed similar agreements with the likes of China, Belarus, India and a host of former Soviet Union countries. Iran has also signed a long-gestating 25-year cooperation accord with China as both countries remain under United States sanctions.



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian (L) is welcomed by his Tajik counterpart Emomali Rahmon as he arrives in Tajikistan's capital Dushanbe on January 15, 2025.
● president.ir

Iran FM: E3 appears serious about resuming nuclear talks



Iran's foreign minister Abbas Araghchi said on Tuesday that European powers appeared serious about finding ways to revive nuclear negotiations after talks in Geneva. "The talks with the three European countries are aimed at exploring how we can return to the nuclear negotiations," said Araghchi in an interview with state TV. He said the discussions were "positive and we felt the seriousness ... and (the European parties') desire for a negotiated solution." "We do not know whether the new US administration intends to return to the negotiations,"

he added. Officials from Iran held talks on Monday and Tuesday with counterparts from Britain, France and Germany, known as the E3, which both sides described as "frank and constructive". The discussions took place a week before US President-elect Donald Trump, who pursued a "maximum pressure" policy of intensified sanctions against Iran during his first term in office, was due to return to the White House. Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Kazem Gharibabadi said the discussions revolved around lifting sanctions as well as other issues. On Tuesday, European Union diplomat Enrique Mora said he held a "constructive meeting" with Iranian officials on "exploring ways for a diplomatic solution to the nuclear issue." Mora said the talks touched on "Iran's unacceptable military support to Russia." Ukraine and its allies in many Western capitals have accused Tehran of supplying Moscow

with weapons for use in the Russia-Ukraine war. Iran has repeatedly denied the allegations. On Tuesday, Araghchi said European countries had "no valid reason for this concern," referring to Iran's policy on Ukraine. "We are ready to talk about this issue to address the concerns of the Europeans," he added. The talks were the second round in less than two months, following a meeting in Geneva last November. In 2015, Iran and world powers – including France, Britain and Germany – reached an agreement that eased international sanctions on Tehran in exchange for curbs on its nuclear program. But the United States, during Trump's first term in office, unilaterally withdrew from the accord in 2018 and reimposed biting economic sanctions. Tehran adhered to the deal until Washington's withdrawal, but then began rolling back on its commitments. Iran has repeatedly expressed willingness to revive the deal.

Iran unveils first advanced 'signals-intelligence' destroyer



National Desk

The Iranian Army unveiled an advanced reconnaissance ship, state media said on Wednesday, as military forces conducted drills nationwide focused on safeguarding the country's nuclear facilities. "The country's first signals intelligence ship, named Zagros, is added to the Navy's combat operations," state TV reported. The Iranian-made vessel is equipped with "electronic sensors," interceptors, and other cyber and intelligence capabilities, the report said. Zagros's launch comes days into major military exercises conducted by the army and the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, which are set to continue until mid-March and are focused on protecting key nuclear sites including Natanz, Fordow and Khondab. Navy chief Admiral Shahram Irani said that the new spy ship "will be the watchful eye of the Ira-

nian Navy in the depths of the seas and oceans." "In light of all the orders of prudence that we are issued through the [relevant] chain-of-command, we try incessantly for the result of our performance to serve as a source of pride for the Islamic Republic's establishment," the commander remarked. Irani finally said all of the ship's equipment was of Iranian production, adding that the Navy had managed to meet the country's defensive demands on the back of its intelligence command as part of its efforts to ensure stable naval security across various bodies of water, including the Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean, as well as other waterways. Iran's Armed Forces have been continuously enhancing their military hardware and combat readiness in recent years. The forces have vowed to defend the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity in the face of the threats that are posed by the Iranian nation's enemies.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



Hamas approves Gaza truce deal: Report

Hamas has approved a Gaza truce and hostage release deal, Palestinian sources close to negotiations said Wednesday, after mediator Qatar expressed hope an agreement to end the war could be reached very soon. After months of failed bids to end the deadliest war in Gaza's history, negotiators were making a final push in Qatar to seal a cease-fire, AFP reported. Qatar's Foreign Ministry spokesman Majed al-Ansari had said on Tuesday that negotiations were in their "final stages", and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met with top security officials to discuss the deal late that night, his office said. Two Palestinian sources close to the talks told AFP on Wednesday that

Hamas and its ally Islamic Jihad had approved the draft agreement. Israel's onslaught on Gaza has killed 46,707 people, most of them civilians, according to figures from the territory's health ministry that the UN considers reliable. Pressure to put an end to the fighting had ratcheted up in recent days, as mediators Qatar, Egypt and the United States intensified efforts to seal a deal and enable the release of the hostages. Israeli cabinet spokesman David Mencer said the first phase of a deal would see 33 Israeli hostages freed, while two Palestinian sources close to Hamas told AFP that Israel would release about 1,000 Palestinian prisoners in exchange.

A source close to Hamas said that the initial hostage release would be "in batches, starting with children and women". Negotiations for a second phase would commence on the truce's 16th day, an Israeli official said, with media reports saying it would see the release of the remaining captives. Under the proposed deal, Israel would maintain a buffer zone inside Gaza during the first phase, according to Israeli media. Among the sticking points in talks have been disagreements over the permanence of any cease-fire, the withdrawal of Israeli troops and the scale of humanitarian aid for the Palestinian territory.

Iran eyes more foreign tourists to rake in \$6b in five years

Persian-Tajik Cultural Research Institute opens

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, Reza Salehi Amiri, announced a comprehensive five-year plan aimed at generating \$6 billion in revenue and attracting 200,000 tourists each year.

The minister made this declaration during a meeting with a high-ranking Iranian trade delegation and Tajik officials, highlighting the importance of strengthening tourism ties between the two nations, IRNA reported.

Speaking at an economic symposium, Salehi Amiri underscored Tajikistan's role as a crucial link for Iran to access the Caucasus and Eurasia, emphasizing the substantial economic potential of such collaboration.

He stated, "The identity of both nations is one, and what both people take pride in is rooted in this shared identity."

The necessity of transforming this cultural connection into economic collaborations, the minister highlighted.

To boost tourism, he announced am-

bitious plans to increase the number of tourists traveling between the two countries. "We aim to elevate the number of tourists from 8,500 to 100,000," he declared, outlining strategies to enhance the introduction of tourism attractions and cultural values to both nations.

He remarked, "Last year, Iran welcomed 1.2 million health tourists, generating \$2 billion. We aim to triple that revenue and significantly increase our tourist numbers."

In addition, the minister announced plans to facilitate visa waivers between the two countries, with discussions on this matter expected to conclude during the visit of the Iranian president to Tajikistan.

The symposium also resulted in multiple cooperation agreements signed between Iranian and Tajik companies, providing opportunities for direct negotiations among economic stakeholders. Salehi Amiri concluded that strengthening tourism ties will not only fortify cultural relations but also contribute to

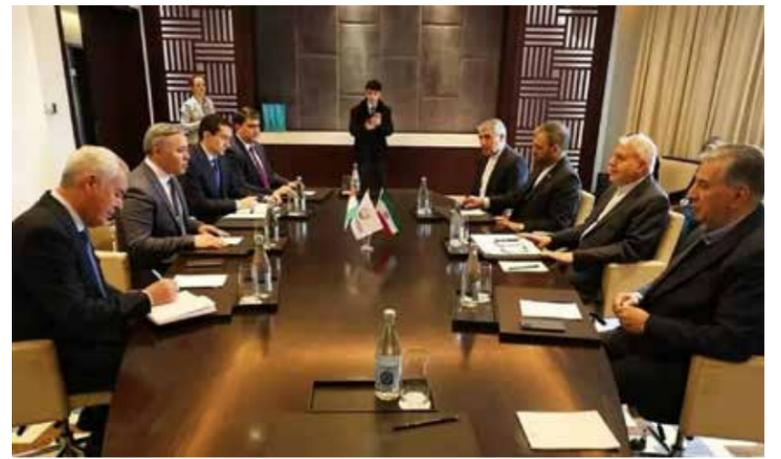
economic development and job creation in both nations.

On the sidelines of the economic delegation's visit, a Persian-Tajik Cultural Research Institute opened to aims to enhance cultural and economic ties between Iran and Tajikistan.

The institute was officially opened with the presence of Reza Salehi Amiri, Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, Matloba Khan Sattar Yan Aman Zadeh, Tajikistan's Minister of Culture, and Samad Hassanzadeh, President of the Iran Chamber of Commerce.

During the opening ceremony, Salehi Amiri remarked, "Today is a blessed day for the two nations of Iran and Tajikistan. The sweet Persian language is one of the main elements of the cultural identity that binds us."

He underscored that despite global conflicts, "what remains enduring is the connection of the Tajik and Iranian people through the Persian language." He further noted that the legacy of poets like Ferdowsi is crucial for maintain-



ing this cultural heritage. The minister expressed belief that the establishment of the Persian-Tajik Cultural Research Institute "can pave the way for further collaboration," introducing the first research project focused on exploring the linguistic roots

of both nations. He stated, "I will task the Faculty of Linguistics of the Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies to complete this project, with copies of the findings presented to the presidents of both countries, underscoring our lasting bond."

Minister: World recognizes Iran through literature

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Abbas Salehi, highlighted the significance of literature as a defining feature of Iranian identity. "Iran, if devoid of literature, ceases to be Iran; the world recognizes us through our literature," he stated, underscoring the global perception of Iran shaped by its rich literary tradition.

He made the statement in the meeting of the Board of Trustees of Iran Book and Literature House, ILNA reported. Salehi praised the cultural depart-

ment's extensive programs within Iran Book and Literature House.

He noted, "The cultural department carries out its primary tasks, from festivals to various initiatives."

Salehi elaborated on the unique position of Iran Book and Literature House, contrasting it with other cultural institutions within the ministry.

He explained that while various cinematic works are produced by the Farabi Cinema Foundation and the Iran's Cinema Organization, the House of Book and Literature serves as the central hub for cultural activities.

Describing the board members as a "rational and leadership body" of the cultural department, Salehi emphasized the importance of their role, stating, "The position of the cultural department in the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance is crucial and does not equate with other departments."

The minister further stressed the vital connection between literature and civilization, asserting that "books are the substance of civilization," and urged the attendees to recognize their responsibility in preserving this essential cultural foundation.

Looking ahead, Salehi outlined a busy schedule for the Iran Book and Literature House, mentioning upcoming awards and festivals, culminating in the Tehran International Book Fair.

"The coming months will be very productive for all of you," he remarked, encouraging the board members as they prepare for their responsibilities in the realms of literature and upcoming events. During the session, board members engaged in discussions to analyze the challenges facing the book sector and offered insights on potential solutions.



Iran ranks eighth globally in halal market: Official



Social Desk

Iran ranks eighth in the global halal market, announced the head of the Halal Research Center of Iran Food and Drug Administration, Hossein Rastgaar.

He stated, "This ranking reflects the significant advancements the country has made in this industry." Rastgaar highlighted that there are still many opportunities for growth and improvement in various sectors. "There is vast potential for increasing the production and export of halal products in the country," he added, noting that this could substantially contribute to strengthening the national econ-

omy and enhancing non-oil exports, ILNA reported. He pointed to the global growth of the halal market, mentioning that halal products are increasingly welcomed on the international stage, with many non-Muslim countries entering this market. He cited that Nestlé has launched over 100 halal product lines worldwide, indicating a robust upward trend in the industry.

Rastgaar emphasized that despite Iran's current lower ranking in the halal food sector, there is potential for improvement. "By enhancing infrastructure and developing related sectors such as pharmaceuticals, fashion, and halal tourism, we can capture a larger share of the global market and strengthen our position," he said.

Furthermore, he praised Iran's performance in other halal market segments, including Islamic finance, halal tourism, and pharmaceuticals.

He noted that Iran ranks third in Islamic finance, 15th in halal tourism, and 11th in pharmaceuticals, demonstrating that the country can achieve remarkable growth in these areas by leveraging its existing capacities.

"The halal market presents a golden opportunity for economic development and the internationalization of Iran's brand," Rastgaar concluded. "We must utilize all of the country's resources to enhance our position in this valuable market."

Iranian animation 'Let's Make Peace' to be screened at Swiss film festival

Arts & Culture Desk

The Iranian animated series 'Let's Make Peace' directed by Abdollah Alimorad continues its international showing as it is scheduled to hit the silver screens at the 26th edition of the Black Movie International Independent Film Festival in Switzerland.

The festival, taking place from January 17 to 26 in Geneva, showcases independent and diverse films from Africa, Asia, and Latin America, alongside innovative European productions. It aims to present films that are rarely seen in Swiss cinemas, Mehr News Agency reported.

'Let's Make Peace' is a stop-motion animation with a unique, wordless narrative, making it a truly international work. The animation has already made its mark at various international festivals, winning several awards.

The Black Movie International Independent Film Festival focuses on contemporary cinema and seeks to present innovative films that reflect the social realities and aesthetics of our time. Soureh Cinema International is handling



the international distribution of 'Let's Make Peace'.

'Let's Make Peace' has already been screened at the 16th Big Cartoon Animation Festival of Russia, the 14th Ahmedabad International Children Film Festival in India, the 2nd T-Short Animated Film Online Festival in Germany, the 5th edition of the Tbilisi International Animation Festival of Georgia, the 12th Hsin-Yi Children's Animation Awards in Taiwan and Greece's Ionian Contemporary Animation Festival (ICONA). Also, the short animation has already won the best animation award from the Bridge of Peace film festival in France and was selected as the best animation by the Animur International Animated Film Festival in Russia.