



Islamic Republic of Iran
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

MFA DIGEST

CENTRE FOR PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

Happy

Yalda Night



Issue #96 December 16— 30, 2024

Issue #96, December 16— 30, 2024

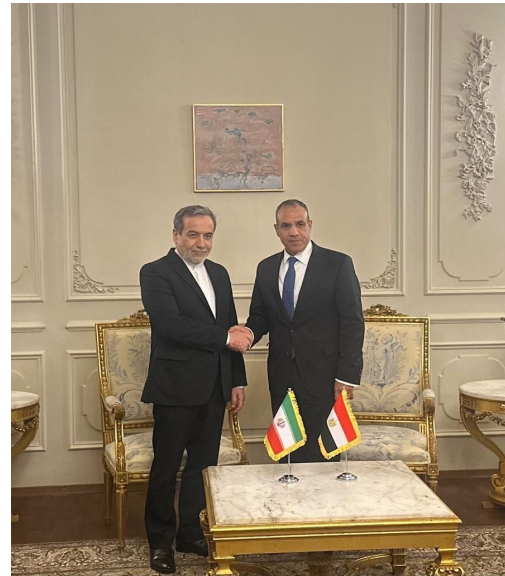


MFA NEWSLETTER

The Islamic Republic of Iran's Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araghchi met with his Turkish counterpart Hakan Fidan, his Egyptian counterpart Badr Abdelatty, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Pakistan Muhammad Ishaq Dar and Malaysian Higher Education Minister Zambri Abdul Qadir on the sidelines of the D-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation ministerial meeting in Cairo.



Meeting with Turkish FM



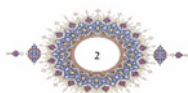
Meeting with Egyptian FM



Meeting with Pakistan FM



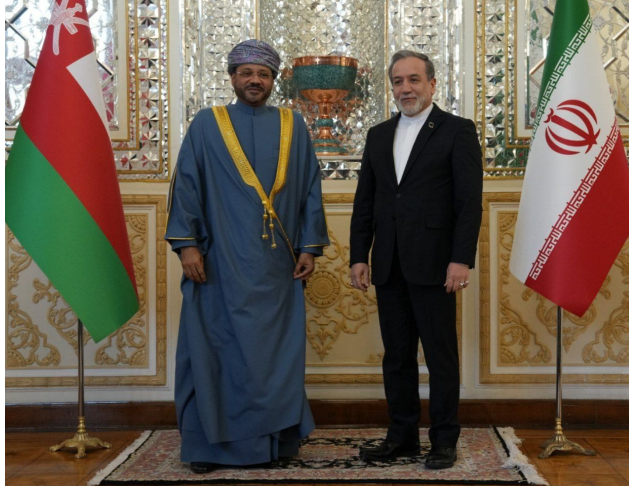
Meeting with Malaysian FM



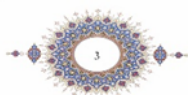


MFA NEWSLETTER

Omani Foreign Minister Badr al-Busaidi who traveled to Tehran for consultations with senior Iranian officials held talks with his Iranian counterpart Seyed Abbas Araghchi.



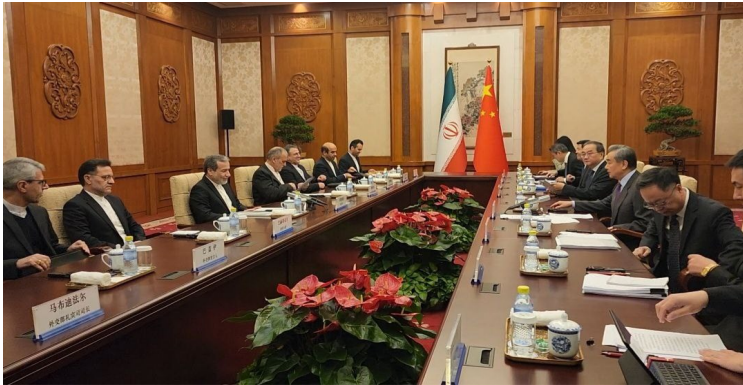
Iranian Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araghchi met and held talks with Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of the United Arab Emirates Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed.





MFA NEWSLETTER

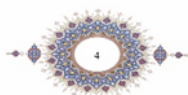
Iranian Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araghchi who was leading an official delegation to China met with Nurlan Yermekbayev new Secretary-General of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Wang Yi a member of China's Central Committees Political Bureau and Chinese Foreign Minister in Beijing.



Meeting with Chinese FM



Meeting with SCO Secretary-General





Special Occasion

Yalda Celebration



Yalda Night, also known as Shab-e Chelleh, is one of the most ancient Persian festivals annually celebrated on December 21 by Iranians all around the world.

Iran is one of the oldest countries in the world. Usually, being a country with centuries of history behind it means having lots of celebrations, ceremonies, and customs being held annually.

Shab-e Yalda (Yalda's night) or Shab-e Chelleh is the Iranians' way to confront the coldest season of the year. This Iranian festival, which is celebrated every year on the night of

December 20 or 21 in the Gregorian calendar, has a very long history and is among the most important Iranian festivals and ceremonies.

Historical backgrounds

The history of Shab-e Yalda dates back to Zoroastrian tradition when the darkest and longest night of the year was considered an unfavorable date and so, people needed to protect themselves from evil.

It is quite an ironic name for a date when darkness dominates the night longer than any night in the year, but it is full of hope and meaning at the same time. In fact, people of ancient times, including Aryan tribes from India and Iran, India and Europe, realized that the shortest days are the last days of autumn and immediately after the first night of winter the days gradually get longer and the nights shorter, so they called this night the birth of the Sun (Mehr) and considered it as the beginning of the year. Some believe that Christian Christmas also has its roots in this belief.





Special Occasion

Hafiz Reciting



Almost all Iranians keep a copy of Hafez's book of poems called Diwan at their homes. It's the great Hafez who steals the spotlight of most of big celebrations. The eldest member of the family recites poems from Diwan of Hafez— diwan is a collection of poems by a poet – with a Sufi tune in the background, creating a spiritual ambiance.

Yalda Ceremony

Broth, sweets, dried fruits, and nuts that are

used specifically for the occasion are also set on the table and consumed during the gathering.

Fruits are an essential part of Yalda festivities. Pomegranates occupy the most important place on the table – symbolizing rebirth and revival. Melons and other fruits signify fertility, light and goodness.

A food indigenous to Iran, pomegranate is believed to be a symbol of life and resilience, for it blossoms during the harshest climate of winter.

There is an ancient myth saying that eating watermelon on Yalda night makes the person immune to cold winter weather as well as the next summer's heat. In old times summer watermelons were buried under branches and leaves in a cold place to keep them fresh until the Yalda night.

Yalda, or the Winter Revolution; the last day of autumn, whatever you name it, is a traditional celebration of all the people to keep alive the longest night of the year.

The ancient fiesta is widely celebrated in





Society & Culture

"HEKAYAT-E VAFA" STORY NARRATES ENDURING FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN IRAN, PAKISTAN



The House of Culture of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Karachi unveiled in the ceremony a book "Hekayat-e Vafa" (Story of Loyalty), which narrates an intimate story about the long-standing friendship between Iran and Pakistan.

The book authored by Wafa Yazdan Manesh, a faculty member at Tehran University, considers the cultural, social, and historical connections between Iran and Pakistan.

Throughout the travelogue, the author shares his personal experiences and insights drawn from her travels to Pakistan and interactions with the Pakistani people.

During the ceremony, Saeed Talebinia, the Head of the House of Culture of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Karachi, stated that Iran and Pakistan are like two souls in one body. He emphasized that the Persian language, as a shared heritage, has the potential to regain its prominence in Pakistan.

IRAN, TAJIKISTAN HIGHLIGHT PERSIAN LANGUAGE AS KEY CULTURAL LINK

In a meeting with Tajikistan's ambassador to Tehran, Iran's Minister of Education emphasized the shared heritage between the two nations, highlighting Persian language as their most significant cultural connection.

Alireza Kazemi, Iran's Minister of Education, met with Tajikistan's Ambassador to Tehran, Nizomiddin Zohidi, to discuss the deep cultural and historical ties between the two countries. "Our strongest bond is the Persian language, though we also share connections in culture, history, and traditions," Kazemi noted, emphasizing the profound ties between the nations.

Kazemi expressed satisfaction with the presence of Tajik Persian-speaking students in Iran, assuring that the Ministry of Education is committed to providing them with necessary educational services. "Any concerns or issues in this regard will be promptly addressed," he added.

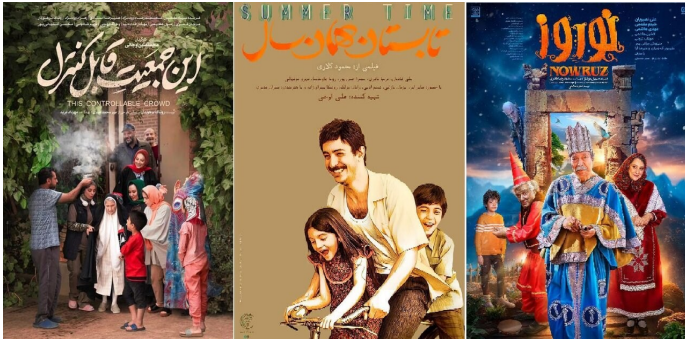
Ambassador Zohidi, highlighted shared values, including culture, history, and religion, as the foundation of enduring relations between Iran and Tajikistan. "These commonalities and cultural achievements will continue to bind us," he said.





Society & Culture

12 IRANIAN FILMS TO BE SCREENED AT DHAKA INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL



Twelve films from Iran will participate in the 23rd Dhaka International Film Festival (DIFF), due to be held in Dhaka, Bangladesh, from January 11 to 19, 2025.

The Iranian films have been selected to be shown in different sections of the festival, which is organized by the Rainbow Film Society.

In the Asian Film Competition section, three films from Iran will compete for the top awards. They include “Summer Time” directed by Mahmoud Kalari, “Projectionist” by Ghorbanali Taherifar, and “Melody” by Behrouz Sebt Rasoul. The latter is a joint production of Iran and Tajikistan.

There will be five Iranian films in the Cinema of the World section including “This Controllable Crowd” by Mohammad Matin Ojani, “Barren” by Mansour Vosoughi, “Maybe Somewhere Else” by Ali Tasdighi, “Winter Threshold” by Soudabeh Beizaei, and “Maria” by Mahdi Asghari Azghadi.

In the Children Films Section, “Nowruz” by Soheil Movaffagh, “Jockey” by Hadi Shariati, and “Miro” by Hossein Rigi will be shown.

22ND CHENNAI INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL HOSTING 7 IRANIAN FILMS

Seven films from Iran are present at the 22nd Chennai International Film Festival (CIFF), which is underway in Chennai, India.

This year’s edition of the festival, which was launched on December 12, hosts two Iranian films in the World Cinema Competition section and five films in the World Cinema section, which is non-competitive, IRNA reported.

“In the Arms of the Tree” directed by Babak Khajehpasha and “Sima’s Unfinished Narration” by Alireza Samadi are vying for the main award in the World Cinema Competition section among 10 other films.

Iran’s submission to the 2025 Academy Awards in the Best International Feature Film category, “In the Arms of the Tree” depicts Kimia and Farid, who have been married for 12 years. A complex crisis in their life destroys the beautiful world of their children, children who know nothing but simplicity and kindness in life.

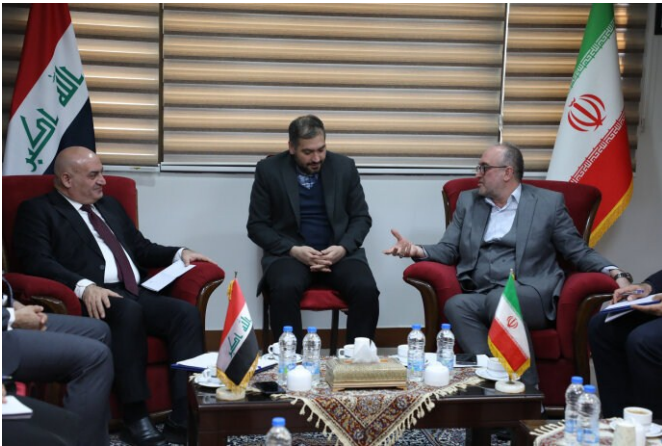




SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

IRAN, IRAQ STRENGTHEN SCIENTIFIC, TECHNOLOGICAL COOPERATION

In a meeting between the Head of the Center for



International Scientific Cooperation of Iran's Ministry of Science and the Deputy Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research of Iraq, the two nations emphasized expanding scientific and technological collaborations.

Omid Rezaeefar met with Haidar Abd Zahid in Tehran to discuss the implementation of joint decisions by their countries' scientific cooperation committee. He highlighted the importance of forming specialized working groups, particularly in innovative and technological fields, and aligning efforts with approved legal frameworks to accelerate collaboration.

Rezaeefar underlined the growing need for scientific and technological advancement in the Islamic world, particularly in the Resistance Axis, amid current regional developments. He described Iran's valuable experience in these fields as a guiding resource for friendly nations.

Haidar Abd Zahid also stressed the importance of expanding scientific and technological ties and praised initiatives like the proposed "Science Week" between the Republic of Iran and Iraq as a significant step forward.

Iran and Iraq, neighboring countries with shared borders, religious traditions, and cultural ties, have developed extensive economic and political relations since the fall of Iraq's Ba'ath regime.

KAZAKHSTAN INTERESTED IN EXPANDING MEDICAL TIES WITH IRAN

The high capabilities of Babol University of Medical Sciences in the health and tourism sectors have made Kazakhstan interested in cooperation with the university, Yerbol Akhmetov, Kazakhstan's consul general in Gorgan has said.

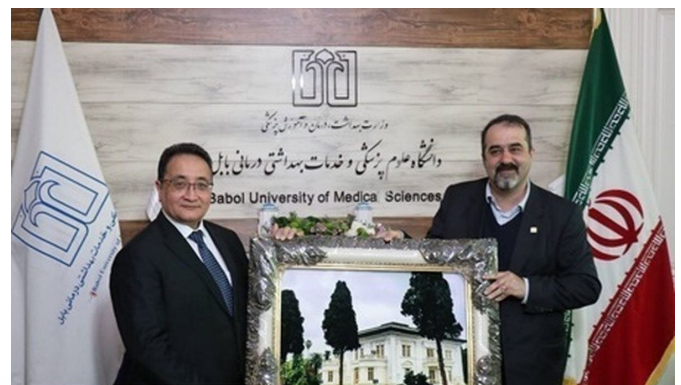
The official made the remarks on Sunday, in a meeting with Hossein Qorbani, the chancellor of Babol University of Medical Sciences, Mazandaran province, the health ministry's website reported.

During the meeting, the officials conferred on fostering ties. Dispatching skilled physicians to Kazakhstan, attracting Kazakh students, treating Kazakh patients, holding short-term educational courses, conducting joint research projects, and enhancing scientific, and educational interactions were among the main focuses of the meeting.

The officials also highlighted exchanging students and professors, organizing scientific conferences, as well as providing sabbatical leaves for students and staff.

"Since the collaboration will encompass cultural, political, social, business, science, and technology sectors besides medical ties, a memorandum of understanding will be signed to follow up on reached agreements more seriously," Akhmetov added.

Qorbani, for his part, expressed Babol Medical University's readiness for cooperation with Kazakhstan, highlighting the capabilities of hospitals affiliated with the university in kidney transplant, bone marrow transplant, cochlear implantation, infertility treatment, genetics, dialysis, joint replacement surgery, radiation oncology, and dentistry.



FOOD DIPLOMACY

IRANIAN FOOD: KHORESH-E ALOO ESFENAJ (GOLDEN SOUR PRUNE AND SPINACH)



Khoresh Aloo Esfenaj is one of the most delicious traditional Persian dishes that the combination of spinach, golden plums, saffron, and meat makes its taste unique.

Khoresh Aloo Esfenaj is rich in vitamins and nutrients that are useful for strengthening the immune system.

The most time to consume this stew is during the cold seasons of the year, autumn and winter when spinach is abundant. Spinach is also used in Nargesi recipe.

Ingredients:

Lamb, Aloo Bukhara, Salt, pepper, and turmeric, chopped spinach, onion





TRADE & ECONOMY

TEHRAN, RIYADH TO FOSTER CO-OP IN ICT SECTOR



The head of the Information Technology Organization of Iran, Mohammad-Mohsen Sadr, and the head of Saudi Arabia's Communications, Space & Technology Commission, Mohammed Altamimi, have explored the potential for enhancing collaborations between the two countries in different fields.

The officials met on the sidelines of the Saudi Arabia Internet Governance Forum (Saudi IGF) which took place from December 15 –19.

The two sides expressed interest in boosting joint activities in the information, communication and technology (ICT) sector, and exchanged views on existing capacities in the two countries, Mehr news agency reported.

Utilizing mutual infrastructures, sharing experiences in native information technology, and messaging platforms, expanding cooperation in post-services, and optical fiber, conducting joint projects in artificial intelligence, as well as joint activities by start-ups and knowledge-based firms were among the main focuses of the meeting. The officials also emphasized using the Iranian private sector's capacities in Saudi-Arabia's ICT projects.

A memorandum of understanding will be provided to follow up on the agreements.

IRAN'S EXPORTS TO EU RISE 6% DESPITE OVERALL TRADE DECLINE

Iran's exports to the European Union increased by six percent in the first ten months of 2024, despite a one percent drop in overall trade volume between the two sides, according to Eurostat data. Total trade between Iran and the EU reached €3.77 billion from January to October 2024, compared to €3.81 billion in the same period in 2023.

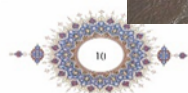
EU exports to Iran amounted to just over €3 billion, a two percent decrease year-on-year. In contrast, Iranian exports to the EU grew from €654 million in 2023 to €695 million in 2024.

In October 2024, bilateral trade totaled €300 million, marking a 19 percent decline from €369 million in October 2023. This figure is the lowest monthly trade volume since January 2021.

Iranian exports to the EU in October rose nine percent to €65 million, while EU exports to Iran fell 24 percent to €235 million.

Germany retained its position as Iran's largest trade partner within the EU, with a trade volume of €1.23 billion. Italy followed with €585 million, the Netherlands with €512 million, Belgium with €281 million, and France with €234 million.

The data underscores mixed trade dynamics amid ongoing economic and geopolitical challenges.





TRADE & ECONOMY

IRAN TO JOIN EURASIAN ECONOMIC UNION AS OBSERVER MEMBER SOON



Russia's Deputy Prime Minister Alexei Overchuk announced that Iran is set to become an observer member of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) in the near future.

Russia's Deputy Prime Minister Alexei Overchuk revealed that this key development will be discussed during this week's summit of EAEU leaders in St. Petersburg. He highlighted that observer membership would grant Iran access to the union's vast market of 190 million people.

During a joint working visit to Tehran with Vitaly Savelyev, another Russian Deputy Prime Minister, Overchuk emphasized the strategic importance of this step in strengthening trade relations between Iran and the five member states of the EAEU.

"The observer status is designed to avoid imposing binding commitments on the observing country, while still allowing it to participate in the union's frameworks and gain insights into its activities," Overchuk noted.

He further remarked that by combining a free trade agreement with observer membership, Iran would secure a strong position within the EAEU, benefiting significantly from access to its expansive market.

BOOM IN IRAN-PAKISTAN TRADE RELATIONS

In 2023, trade relations between Iran and Pakistan surged, with an 8% increase from the previous year, reaching a trade volume of \$2.7 billion, underscoring the growing economic cooperation between Tehran and Islamabad.

Economic experts are optimistic about the 8% increase in Iran-Pakistan trade in 2023, predicting even greater growth ahead. This encouraging trend is supported by several strategic actions from both countries. These include frequent high-level visits, an ambitious \$10 billion trade target, the development of border markets, the initiation of barter trade mechanisms, and the organization of numerous trade fairs to showcase their products. By the end of March 2025, these efforts could potentially lead to unprecedented trade volumes between the two nations.

Pakistan, with a population of over 240 million, ranks among the largest markets in the region. Its primary exports to Iran encompass agricultural products, textiles, and industrial raw materials. On the other hand, Iran's significant contributions to this trade relationship include petrochemical products and agricultural goods.





SPORTS

IRANIAN BOXER FARZAN AHMADI NAMED BEST ASIAN SCHOOLBOY BOXER OF 2024



Iran's rising boxing star, Farzan Ahmadi Afzadi, has been crowned the Best Asian Schoolboy Boxer of 2024, an honor bestowed by the Asian Boxing Confederation as part of its prestigious "Best of the Asians" initiative.

The announcement, made on Sunday, recognizes Ahmadi's exceptional performance earlier this year at the Asian Junior Boys & Girls and School Boys & Girls Boxing Championships held in the UAE. Competing in the 61 kg weight category, the young athlete clinched the championship title, showcasing remarkable skill and determination in the ring.

Ahmadi's achievement underscores Iran's growing presence in the world of boxing and the country's commitment to nurturing talent across all age groups. His triumph also serves as an inspiration for aspiring young boxers across Asia.

IRAN'S SHARIFI SNATCHES GOLD AT 2024 ASIAN YOUTH & JUNIOR CHAMPIONSHIPS

Iran's Haniyeh Sharifi of Iran won a gold medal at the 2024 Asian Youth & Junior Championships on Sunday.

Sharifi lifted 88kg in snatch and 112kg in clean and jerk for an aggregate lift of 200kg in the women's youth 71kg weight class.

Kazakhstan's Danilova Kira and Ysmanova Bibinur won the silver and bronze medal with 199kg and 170kg, respectively.

Iran's Reyhaneh Karimi claimed a bronze medal with 211kg in the women's junior 71kg. Phattharathida of Thailand (221kg) and Indonesian Indah Afriza (219kg) claimed gold and silver, respectively.

Zahra Hosseini snatched a bronze in the women's youth 64kg with 183kg. South Korea's Dayeon Lee (193kg) and Kazakhstan's Tanibergenova Altnay (192kg) won gold and silver, respectively.





SPORTS

SUPER HEAVYWEIGHT LIFTER YOUSEFI ATTRACTS WORLD'S ATTENTION

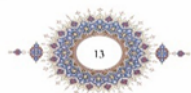


Alireza Yousefi, the 21-year-old Iranian weightlifting sensation, has captured the world's attention with a stunning performance at the 2024 IWF World Championships. Yousefi's clean and jerk of 262kg not only secured him a gold medal but also positioned him as a serious contender for future Olympic glory.

The Iranian team, comprised largely of young and promising athletes, exceeded the expectations in Bahrain. With a blend of experience and youthful exuberance, the squad clinched multiple medals, including a gold for Yousefi. The team's success has breathed new life into Iranian weightlifting, which has faced challenges in recent years.

Yousefi's lift was particularly remarkable as it challenged longstanding records in the super-heavyweight category. For years, Lasha Talakhadze of Georgia had dominated the division with his unparalleled strength. Yousefi's impressive performance indicates that he has the potential to become a phenomenon in the future of weightlifting.

The Iranian team's success in Bahrain has raised hopes for a brighter future for the sport in the country. With a talented pool of young athletes and a supportive federation, Iranian weightlifting is well-positioned to achieve greater heights in the coming years.





DISCOVER IRAN IN PICTURES

Tafresh Underground City, Largest Man-made Ancient Cave in Middle East

Dastkand Tafrash, an ancient underground city is located in Tafrash, covering an estimated area of 150 hectares. Tafresh Underground City is a historical and Civilizational Identity of Iran. The underground city of Tafresh is located in the Torkhoran region of Markazi Province and is one of the notable historical and civilizational tourist attractions in Iran. Given this area, Dastkand Tafresh can be considered the largest underground city in Iran and even in the Middle East. During the excavation of the Dastkand, several pottery pieces, bones, stone mortars, and signs of life have been discovered, and so far, the age of this underground city has been attributed to the Seljuk period.

