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Brief Notes

Foreign Minister Meets Belarusian President in Minsk: Islamic Republic Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi met with Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko today to discuss deepening economic ties and cooperation in international forums, including the UN, SCO, and BRICS. Araghchi and his Belarusian counterpart, Foreign Minister Maksim Ryzhankow, signed three documents on "Strengthening the Role of International Law in International Relations," "Strategic Principles for Countering Unilateral Coercive Measures and Mitigating Negative Consequences," and a "Cooperation Program between Iranian and Belarusian Foreign Ministries for 2026–2030." Talks also touched on the North-South Transport Corridor and plans for regular direct flights between the countries.

New Artesh Air Defense Commander Appointed: Alireza Elhami has been appointed commander of the Artesh (conventional military, as opposed to the IRGC) Air Defense Force and the Khatam al-Anbiya Air Defense Base, replacing Alireza Sabahifard. Khatam al-Anbiya serves as the joint central command base that coordinates all air defense across the Artesh and the IRGC. Elhami had served as deputy commander of the Air Defense Force since 2019, previously serving as head of the Air Defense University and deputy head of operations at the Khatam al-Anbiya base.

State Media Peddles Conspiracy Theories Following Sydney Attack

State media and members of parliament offered conspiracy-laden commentary following the deadly Hanukkah attack in Sydney yesterday that killed at least 15 people.

Senior MPs pushed conspiracies, with Majlis National Security Committee chair Ebrahim Azizi claiming that the manner in which the attack was "immediately framed in some media outlets" raises "serious suspicions." Azizi went on to claim that the weakening of the "global Zionist lobby" following the "mass killing of civilians in Gaza" had pushed Israel to resort to "so-called false-flag scenarios."

Ahmad Naderi, a member of the Presidium (leadership) of the Majles, described the incident as part of a familiar pattern of "operations designed by the Zionist regime or its affiliated networks" in which blame is shifted to

"radical Muslims or Iran" for propaganda and geopolitical aims, adding that the regime "has never been anti-Jewish."

IRGC-controlled Fars News described the attack as a "murky story" writing: "It's not normal for individuals to open fire on hundreds of people at a public celebration," and described it as a result of "widespread anti-Zionist sentiments."

Mehr News blatantly accused Israel of conducting "false-flag" attacks, with a headline from this weekend reading: "The primary suspect in the attack on Jews in Australia is the Zionist regime."

"Reformist" news website Tabnak echoed the false-flag conspiracy, describing the operation as designed to "revive Israel's antisemitism narrative."

Some state-run English-language outlets have highlighted Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmaeil Baghaei's X post condemning the attack, stating that terrorism is unacceptable "no matter where it happens," attempting to whitewash the regime's response for Western audiences.

IAEA Allowed Limited Inspections at Sites 'That Were Not Attacked'

The head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), Mohammad Eslami, confirmed that the IAEA recently conducted inspections at nuclear-related sites, though he did not specify when these inspections occurred. Eslami said the Islamic Republic has "granted permission for inspections of sites that were not attacked."

The remarks came after IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi said in an interview today that the Agency had managed to resume very limited inspection activities, albeit excluding the three major sites hit during the 12-Day War.

Eslami reacted to Grossi's statement by saying, "The Agency, which has neither condemned the attacks nor issued any guidelines for this situation, has no right to claim inspections. Pressure from the three European countries, the U.S. and Israel is of no importance to us and will have no impact."

AEOI spokesman Behrouz Kamalvandi also clarified today, "At present, there are no inspections under way. The inspections that took place recently were carried out with the approval of the Supreme National Security Council, in line with the law suspending cooperation with the Agency. All of them concerned industrial matters that had not been targeted."

The Majles (Parliament), following the 12-Day War, passed legislation that bars any cooperation with the IAEA that isn't approved by the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC). In September, Cairo mediated a technical cooperation arrangement that restored limited access at some locations. Tehran announced on November 20 that the agreement had been terminated.

Supreme Leader Advisor Says Hezbollah 'Crucial Pillar' of 'Axis of Resistance'

Ali Akbar Velayati, senior advisor to Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, has reiterated Tehran's firm support for Hezbollah.

Speaking with Hezbollah's representative to Tehran, Abdullah Safieddine, Velayati described the group as a "crucial pillar" of the "Axis of Resistance," and said the regime, under the Supreme Leader's guidance, would continue to support them.

Safieddine warned Israel against "repeated ceasefire violations," pledging a strong potential response from Hezbollah while insisting that the group would not disarm.

The remarks come as Lebanon's new government seeks to disarm Hezbollah, a demand firmly opposed by both the terrorist group and the Islamic Republic.

Supreme Leader Advisor Says Tehran is 'Categorically Opposed' to Trump's Caucasus Plan

Ali Akbar Velayati, during a meeting with Armenian ambassador Grigor Hakobyan, warned of potential security consequences stemming from any increased U.S. presence near Iran's borders.

Velayati reiterated Tehran's opposition to border changes and expressed concern over the U.S.-brokered Armenia–Azerbaijan transit corridor, cautioning that economic frameworks can expand into military involvement.

Velayati highlighted Tehran's deep historical ties with Yerevan and called for continued bilateral cooperation, while Hakobyan described relations with Tehran as a foreign policy priority.

The U.S.-brokered Armenia–Azerbaijan peace agreement, signed in Washington on August 8, provides for a transit link connecting Azerbaijan to its Naxcivan exclave via Armenian territory. Under the deal, Yerevan has reportedly granted Washington 99 years of exclusive development rights for the corridor.

On the Radar

- A maritime delegation from the Islamic Republic has visited Port Sudan to discuss resuming commercial shipping activities after a seven-year suspension. The visit involved representatives of the Iranian shipping line HDS meeting Sudanese port officials to assess facilities and explore joint operations. HDS halted operations at Port Sudan in 2018. Sudan restored diplomatic relations with the Islamic Republic in October 2023 after severing ties with Tehran in 2016 due to hostilities between Riyadh and Tehran.

- Tehran has condemned the dismissal of an Iranian professor, Shirin Saeidi, at the University of Arkansas, saying that the reason for her termination was social media posts accusing Israel of committing "genocide" in Gaza. Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmaeil Baghaei said the case showed a "discriminatory approach" in the United States and contradicted the principles of freedom of speech and expression. Media reports said the professor had praised Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei during the 12-Day War. In addition, she reportedly used the University's letterhead to call for the release of Hamid Nouri, a convicted war criminal responsible for ordering the executions of thousands of political prisoners in Iran in 1988. Her X account has been suspended since her dismissal.

- Tehran has criticized a joint UAE–China statement backing Abu Dhabi's call for a diplomatic solution to the dispute over the Persian Gulf islands of Abu Musa, Greater Tunb, and Lesser Tunb. Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmaeil Baghaei accused the UAE of exploiting diplomatic engagement to advance territorial claims and denounced what he called the repetition of "baseless" claims in the final statement of Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's visit to the UAE on December 13. Baghaei reiterated that the three islands are "inseparable" parts of Iran's territory and that any conflicting claim infringes upon Iran's territorial integrity.

- Senior officials from the Islamic Republic met visiting Ethiopian parliament speaker Tagese Chafo to discuss bilateral ties, security in the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa, and plans for a joint economic commission. Several officials highlighted BRICS as a framework for expanding cooperation, while Araghchi stressed regional coordination to ensure stability without external interference. Majles Speaker Mohammad-Bagher Ghalibaf called for the opening of embassies, noting Addis Ababa lacks a diplomatic mission in Tehran.

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