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Bibi Wants Trump to Ensure Limit on Iran's Missiles, No Help to Proxies

Tehran warns of 'destructive' influence on diplomacy ahead of Netanyahu's US trip

Tel Aviv: Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu wants US President Donald Trump to expand the scope of high-stakes nuclear talks with Iran. The negotiations resumed last week against the backdrop of an American military buildup.

Israel has long called for Iran to cease all uranium enrichment, dial back its ballistic missile program and cut ties to militant groups across the region. Iran has always rejected those demands, saying it would only accept some limits on its nuclear program in return for sanctions relief.

It's unclear if Iran's bloody crackdown on mass protests last month, or the movement of major US military assets to the region, has made Iran's leaders more open to compromise, or if Trump is interested in broadening the already difficult negotiations.

Netanyahu, who will be in Washington through Wednesday, has spent his decades-long political career pushing for stronger U.S. action towards Iran.

DECISIONS BEING MADE

Netanyahu's visit comes just two weeks after Trump's special envoy Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law and west Asia adviser, met with the prime minister in Jerusalem. The US envoys held indirect talks in Oman with Iran's foreign minister on Friday.

"The Prime Minister believes that any negotiations must include limiting ballistic missiles and ending support for the Iranian axis," Netanyahu's office said over the weekend, referring to Iran-backed militant groups like the Palestinian Hamas and Lebanon's Hezbollah.

Years of nuclear talks have made little progress since Trump scrapped a 2015 agreement with Iran, with strong encouragement from Israel. Iran has shown little willingness to address the other issues, even after suffering repeated setbacks. But the meeting with Trump gives Netanyahu an opportunity to shape the process and may also bolster his standing back home.

"Clearly these are the days when decisions are being made, America is expected to complete its force buildup, and it's trying to exhaust the prospect of negotiations," said Yohanan Plesner, head of the Israel Democracy Institute, a Jerusalem-based think tank.

"If you want to have influence on the process, only so much can be done via Zoom."

IN ELECTION YEAR

Meeting with Trump gives Netanyahu an opportunity to bolster his standing at home

'UP TO US TO ACT INDEPENDENTLY'

Meanwhile, Iran on Tuesday, warned of "destructive" influence on diplomacy ahead of Netanyahu's visit.

"Our negotiating party is America. It is up to America to decide to act independently of the pressures and destructive influences that are detrimental to the region," said Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Esmaeil Baqaei in a weekly press briefing.

"The Zionist regime has repeatedly, as a saboteur, shown that it opposes any diplomatic process in our region that leads to peace."

Tehran and Washington resumed talks in Muscat on Friday, months after earlier negotiations collapsed following Israel's unprecedented bombing campaign against Iran last June.

"The June experience was a very bad experience. Therefore, taking these experiences into account, we are determined to secure Iran's national interests through diplomacy," Baqaei added. **Agencies**

Iran Official in Oman Amid US Nuclear Talks

Dubai: A top Iranian security official traveled on Tuesday to Oman, the west Asia sultanate now mediating talks between Tehran and Washington over the Islamic Republic's nuclear program aimed at halting a possible American strike.

Ali Larijani, a former Iranian parliament speaker who now serves as the secretary to the country's Supreme National Security Council, likely carried Iran's response to the initial round of indirect talks held last week in Muscat.

Larijani's entourage shared photos of him meeting with Omani Foreign Minister Badr al-Busaidi

Larijani's entourage shared photos of him meeting with Omani Foreign Minister Badr al-Busaidi, the chief intermediary in the US-Iran talks, with what appeared to be a letter sheathed in plastic and sitting alongside the Omani diplomat.

Iran has in the past communicated its positions in writing when dealing with the Americans. Iranian media had said Larijani would deliver an important message on the trip.

Larijani also met with Oman's Sultan Haitham bin Tariq for nearly three hours, the state-run IRNA news agency reported. Neither Iran nor Oman offered any details on what had been discussed in Larijani's meetings.

Larijani was later to travel to Qatar, which hosts a major U.S. military installation that Iran attacked in June after the U.S. bombed Iranian nuclear sites during the 12-day Iran-Israel war.

Iran and the U.S. held new nuclear talks last week in Oman. Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, speaking Sunday to diplomats at a summit in Tehran, signaled that Iran would stick to its position that it must be able to enrich uranium. **AP**

9.5B Trips China's Lunar New Year Travel Could Shatter Records

Beijing: Liu Zhiquan was waiting for a 30-plus hour train journey to Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan province, some 2,000 kilometres from Beijing, where he works in construction.

He's one of the hundreds of millions expected to travel to their hometowns as part of the world's largest movement of humanity, or "chunyun" as it's called in China, ahead of the Lunar New Year on Feb.17.

"Things feel worse this year than last. The economy is bad and it's getting harder to make money," he said.

Liu chose a slower train to save money: a high-speed train would take just nine hours but costs more than twice as much. Nonetheless, he chose to make the 30-hour journey to be home for the festival, the one time of year workers across the country take breaks and spend time with their loved ones.

China's government estimates that 9.5 billion trips will be made during the 40 day-period around the festival, a record high, according to information from the National Development and Reform Commission.

Some 540 million of those trips will be made via train, and 95 million by air.

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The rest will be on the road. In a country where workers are expected to put in long hours — including on weekends — and get few days of annual leave, the Lunar New Year festival is a precious time. At a train station in Beijing, passengers were crowded in the waiting areas with large bags and suitcases as they waited for their trains. Others snacked on instant noodles, an easy snack as stations provide hot water for free.

Tian Duofu, a young woman who recently started working full time in Beijing, said she was looking forward to the nine-day holiday, which begins Feb. 15. "It has become more difficult for a big family to get together. After I started working, I realized such a long holiday is rare and we see each other less and less in person, which makes the Spring Festival significant."

"The new year is the festival of the year, and if we don't go back home, we won't be able to enjoy the festival atmosphere," said Tian Yunxia, a woman from Henan province who runs a breakfast stall in Beijing. "I want to go home to see my children, my grandchildren and my husband." **AP**

PBoC Vows Financial Aid to Boost Demand

Beijing: China's central bank said on Tuesday it will step up financial support to boost domestic demand, as industrial overcapacity and lacklustre consumption weigh on business confidence and dampen the outlook for growth.

The economy is stable but faces challenges such as "supply being strong while demand being weak", the People's Bank of China said in its fourth-quarter monetary policy implementation report. Chinese policymakers have repeatedly pledged to boost domestic consumption to tackle the imbalance between supply and demand. Growth in China's retail sales, a gauge for consumption, lagged behind overall GDP expansion in 2025 and the country's export-driven growth faces uncertainties in a volatile geopolitical environment.

The central bank said it would guide financial institutions to strengthen support for domestic demand, and guide private capital to participate in expanding consumption and investment to jointly stabilise growth. It also pledged to direct more financial resources to support expanding services consumption.

Driving stable economic growth and a reasonable recovery in prices should be important considerations in monetary policy, the central bank said. **Bloomberg**

Starmer to Lose 3rd Wicket With Wormald Set to Quit

UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer is set to lose a third senior official from his government within days amid expectations that Cabinet Secretary Chris Wormald is preparing to resign, people familiar with the matter said.

Wormald was appointed to his role as the UK's top civil servant little over a year ago, making his tenure the shortest on record.

His departure is likely to be welcomed by many in the governing Labour Party and present an opportunity to bring in a more effective replacement, rather than be a sign of further instability for Starmer's administration, government officials told Bloomberg, speaking on condition of anonymity in order to air their private views.

Wormald's departure would follow those of Starmer's chief of staff, Morgan McSweeney, and his communications adviser, Tim Allan, who quit their posts in a tumultuous 48 hours that saw the government on the brink of collapse on Monday.

That outcome was deferred when the PM secured the public support of each member of his cabinet on Monday afternoonm as well as that of former deputy prime minister Angela Rayner, who is seen as one of his potential successors. Starmer followed that up with a well-received speech to his party's Members of Parliament that saw him further shore up his position.

Nonetheless, Wormald's expected exit so soon after the departures of McSweeney and Allan underscores persistent questions about Starmer's judgment. His 19-month old government has seen a series of high-profile exits after short periods, most notably the premier's original chief of staff Sue Gray, who left her role just three months after the general election.

When he appointed Wormald in 2024, Starmer demanded "the fundamental re-wiring of the British state." That raised eyebrows because Wormald, a former health department official, was a career civil servant who had worked in Whitehall for three decades and was not seen as someone who was likely to shake up the system.

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Starmer will now need to make a series of senior appointments to his political and civil service teams that will shape his ability to navigate the coming weeks. While he appeared to have stabilized his position on Monday, Labour members of parliament said he may still face a challenge after a parliamentary by-election later this month or following the local elections in May.

The prime minister appeared to acknowledge the shortcomings of his previous appointments when he addressed a private meeting of Labour MPs on Monday evening. Starmer said he wanted his operation to be more inclusive and better at listening to their concerns, according to people familiar with the matter.

That was a sentiment echoed by Energy Secretary Ed Miliband, who told the BBC on Tuesday morning that "we need a more inclusive team." **Bloomberg**