

**Business and politics in Muslim world**

**Weekly report on Iran**

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**M Rashid**

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## **Summary**

Political Front

### **Nuclear Scientist Assassinated**

A powerful bomb blast killed one of Iran's leading nuclear scientists yesterday morning in a leafy north Tehran district as he left home for work.

### **Iran Six to Meet This Week in New York**

The Iran Six will meet this week in New York, U.S. State Secretary Hillary Clinton told journalists on her way to Hawaii on Monday

### **Engineer Gets 4 Years for Working Illegally for Iran**

A chemical engineer who federal prosecutors said "worked with and at the express direction of" Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and his close advisers to bolster that country's petrochemical industry was sentenced to four years in a federal lockup.

### **MOTTAKI: Israel Won't Dare Attack Iran**

Iran's Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki has said that Israel is not in a position to dare to attack Iran.

### **Ankara Eager to Continue Ties With Tehran**

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said his country is keen on continuing its "excellent relations" with Iran, reiterating support to the country's peaceful nuclear program.

### **France Tells Iran to Acquit Reiss**

France served notice Tuesday that it expects an Iranian court to acquit a French academic when it delivers a verdict this week in her trial on charges of taking part in opposition protests.

### **Iran Urges Use of National Currencies in Energy Deals With Russia**

Iran and Russia should switch to their national currencies in joint oil and gas projects, an Iranian oil official suggested on Wednesday as part of bilateral talks on a long-term plan of energy cooperation.

### **Salehi: Nuclear Fuel Import Decision Stands**

Amid speculations about the fuel supply for a nuclear research reactor, the head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran said Tehran still prefers to import the fuel from other countries.

### **Concern Over Rising Pak Violence**

Iran expressed hope that Pakistan will stop foreign interference in its internal affairs and said closer cooperation among regional states can go a long way in guaranteeing stability in this part of the world.

### **Germany, UAE Discuss Nuclear Issues**

The United Arab Emirates and Germany held talks on the Iranian nuclear program and other international issues, saying Tehran must do more to allay the international community's concerns about its atomic drive.

### **Reiss Trial to Resume**

The trial of French academic Clotilde Reiss who was arrested during the post-election unrests, is to resume in Tehran on Saturday.

### **Iraq Seeking IAEA Explanation On Planned Iran Plant**

The Iraqi government on Monday called for "explanations" from the UN nuclear agency on a reported plan for Iran to build a nuclear reactor near the border between the two countries.

### **Swiss Firm Stops Fuel Supply**

Glencore has ceased gasoline supply to Iran to avoid fallout from US sanctions on companies supplying fuel to the Islamic Republic, ending three decades of business that began with its founding firm, trade

### **Economic MoU With Syria**

A memorandum of understanding (MoU) on expanding economic cooperation was signed by the Minister of Housing Ali Nikzad and Syria's Minister of Economy and Trade Amer Husni Lutfi in Tehran on Monday.

### **MKO, Marxists Provoked Tehran Clashes**

The rapporteur of Majlis' National Security and Foreign Policy Committee said operatives of the banned Mujahedin Khalq Organization (MKO) and Marxist groups were also responsible for the recent disturbances in Tehran

### **Commander: Terrorist Attacks Aim to Hinder Iran's Progress**

The terror attack on an Iranian academic figure displays enemies' inability to deter Iran's progress, especially in the field of nuclear technology, a senior commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) said yesterday.

### **Judiciary Chief Blasts Double Standards on Human Rights**

Judiciary Chief Ayatollah Sadeq Larijani lambasted the double-standard attitude of the western states towards the issue of human rights.

### **Security Bodies Urged to Find Assassination Agents**

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has condemned assassination of Tehran University professor while ordering security bodies to find the perpetrators of the crime as well as their foreign supporters.

### **Iran Ready to Send Aid to Haiti**

The Islamic Republic of Iran is ready to send its humanitarian aid to the quake-stricken people of Haiti, an official said yesterday.

### **Majlis to Review Tie Breakup With Britain**

Head of Parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, Alaeddin Boroujerdi has said his committee's report about downgrading relations with Britain will be studied after its recess.

### **Iran Condemns Publishing of Defamatory Caricature**

Foreign Ministry spokesman Ramin Mehman-parast yesterday condemned publishing of a defamatory caricature of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) in a Norwegian daily.

### **Ahmadinejad Urges Unity among Regional States**

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said the Islamic Republic of Iran and Oman enjoy common and close approaches toward different issues.

### **Larijani Blames US, Israel for Assassinating Iran's N. Scientist**

Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani took the US and the Zionist regime responsible for the Tuesday terrorist attack on a nuclear physics scientist and university lecturer.

### **Jalili: Iran Progress Untouched by U.S. Policies**

Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Saeed Jalili underlined that the United States' confrontation policy against the Iranian nation will not affect Tehran's progress.

### **Iran Favors Stronger Pro-Palestinian Front**

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has stressed the right of Palestinian people, saying the Israeli perpetrators of crimes against the Palestinians should be brought to justice.

### **PRESIDENT: Nuclear Achievements to Bring Down Enemies**

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said here Thursday that Iran's nuclear achievements will make the enemies surrender.

## **China to Send Lower-Level Envoy to Talks on Iran**

China has decided to send a lower-level official to talks among major powers in New York on Saturday about possibly imposing new sanctions on Iran over its nuclear programs, the U.S. State Department said on Thursday.

## **PENTAGON: No Evidence Iran Seeks Nukes**

The Pentagon's top intelligence official says there is no evidence that Iran is planning to build nuclear weapons.

## **Iran-Saudi Arabia Come to Blows Over Yemen**

Saudi Arabia has denied being involved in a military offensive against Houthi fighters in Northern Yemen after Iran's president slammed the country over the issue.

## **Washington to Keep Door Open for Talks With Tehran**

The United States will continue talking to Iran, but wants Moscow's cooperation in sending Tehran a signal that defiance of international demands will not go unpunished, a senior U.S. envoy has said.

## **Economy Politicized**

Iran's economy has long been overshadowed by political squabbling and the only solution to this economic challenge is to keep politics out of economy, a senior economic official says.

## **Iran to Get Access to Georgian Ports Through Armenia**

Armenia and the Asian Development Bank signed a credit agreement to finance the North-South highway crossing from Armenia to the Georgian ports of Poti and Batumi.

## **MPs Push for Less UK Ties**

Dozens of lawmakers have demanded cutting of relations with Britain, which Tehran has often accused of interfering in its internal affairs.

## **Khamenei says scientist's killing show enemies' ill motives**

Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said on Friday that the assassination of an Iranian nuclear scientist earlier this week showed that the country's enemies were seeking to hamper its scientific progress.



## **Amnesty International calls on Iran to free Baha'is on trial**

Amnesty International called on the Iranian authorities on Wednesday to release seven Baha'is who are being tried on charges that include spying for Israel.

## **Iran launches new website on its nuclear program**

Iran's Foreign Ministry on Wednesday launched a new website to cover the latest developments about the country's nuclear program.

## **EU says concerned by trials of Baha'is in Iran**

The Council of the European Union on Tuesday voiced "serious concern" about the trial of seven Baha'is in Iran.

## **Turkey PM calls for "just" stance on Iran nuclear dispute**

Turkey's Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Wednesday renewed his criticism of the West's approach towards Iran's nuclear program, saying Tehran was being treated unfairly.

## **Iran speaker accuses Obama of supporting terrorism**

Iran's parliament speaker, Ali Larijani, lashed out at US President Barack Obama on Wednesday over the killing in Tehran of a nuclear scientist, which he said was carried out by the US Central Intelligence Agency and Israel's Mossad.

## **US envoy says time for new Iran sanctions drawing closer**

The US ambassador to the European Union said on Wednesday that the Obama administration's offers of engagement toward Iran were not open-ended, warning Tehran that it may face new sanctions.

## **France calls on Iran to acquit French academic**

France said on Tuesday that it expects an Iranian court to acquit a French academic who is standing trial on charges related to the protests following June's disputed presidential election.

## **Iran's Ebadi says seven Baha'is must be acquitted**

In an exclusive telephone interview with WashingtonTV on Tuesday, Shirin Ebadi, one of the lawyers defending the seven detained Baha'i leaders in Iran, whose first trial hearing took place today in Tehran, said that if "justice" were to prevail, the only verdict that could be reached over this case was one of "acquittal".

## **US voices hope China will support Iran sanctions**

The United States voiced hope on Tuesday that China would back new sanctions against Iran over its nuclear program, after Beijing said the time was not right for such measures.

- **Economic Front**

### **Auto Prototype Unveiled**

The industrial prototype of “Saipa 111” was unveiled in Fars Province, concurrent with inauguration of the 8th International Auto Exhibition, and Technical and Engineering Services International Fair.

### **Moscow Hails Tehran’s Stand on GECF**

Russian energy minister appreciated Iran’s position on the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF).

### **Non-Exports Satisfactory**

During the first eight months of the current Iranian year (March-November 2009), Iran’s non-oil exports have been in an appropriate state, amounting to \$12.63b, without consideration of the LNG exports. The said figure takes into account the luggage trade, totaling \$31.78m in the said period.

### **Water and Sewage Co. Glitters in Festival**

Fars Province Rural Water and Sewage Company, which had attended the 1st Festival of Research and Technology in Water and Sewage Industry in Tehran was named as the superior stall in the festival and the Ministry of Energy bestowed the Plaque of Honor to this accredited Company.

### **IKCO to Make 300,000 Economy Engines Per Year**

Iran Khodro Company (IKCO) plans to produce more than 300,000 economy engines during the next Iranian calendar year (starting March 21, 2010).

### **Iran Inks Investment Agreement With 67 Countries**

The Islamic Republic of Iran has signed an agreement with sixty-seven countries around the world for mutual support for investment.

### **\$20b Invested in Gas, Oil**

Investment in the oil and gas sectors has reached 20 billion dollars during the first three quarters of the current year to March, a deputy minister of oil said yesterday.

## **WTO Endorses Iran Commercial Regime**

Minister of Commerce Mahdi Ghazanfari has announced the acceptance of Iran's commercial regime by the World Trade Organization (WTO).

## **Asia, Europe Firms Finance Iran LNG**

Iran is dipping into the Oil Stabilization Fund and teaming up with Asian and European companies to finance a 1.1-billion-dollar liquefied natural gas project, a senior official said yesterday.

## **Guardian Council Approves Subsidy Bill**

Iran's Guardian Council has approved a targeted subsidies legislation aimed at gradually cutting the government's energy and food financial supports.

## **1m Houses Under Construction**

Minister of Housing and Urban Development Ali Nikzad said Thursday that one million persons are illegible and have registered for Mehr Housing Plan in the country.

## **Sanctions Can't Affect FDI**

International sanctions do not leave any direct impact on Iran's attraction of foreign direct investment, a deputy minister of economy has said.

## **Soren Sedan Enters Turkish Market**

The Iran Khodro Industrial Group (IKCO), a leading automobile manufacturer in Iran, has increased its presence in the Turkish auto market by introducing its latest model, the Soren sedan.

## **Target-Oriented Subsidy Plan "Bare Necessity for Development"**

Economy Minister Shamseddin Hosseini said Wednesday the implementing plan for goal orientation of subsidies is a bare necessity for our country's development.

## **Iran Bans Kinow Import From Pakistan**

Iran has placed an unannounced ban on the import of citrus fruit (kinnow) from Pakistan in the garb of lack of pursuance of Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) by the Pakistani exporters, which binds them to dispatch export consignment through refrigerator containers only.

## **Iran to Invest \$440m in Tyre Factory**

Irans's Industrial Development and Renovation Organization (IDRO) has reportedly earmarked \$440 million dollars for the construction of a tyre factory in the country's western Kordestan province.

## **Azerbaijan to Supply Gas to Iran Until April**

Azerbaijan will supply Iran with over two million cubic meters of gas daily until April 1, Azerbaijan's state oil company's chief said Wednesday.

## **Iran, Implantology Society Hold 1st Conference**

The first meeting of Iranian Implantology Society was held in the conference hall of Inqilab Hotel in Tehran, capital of Iran. A group of Iranian dentists and implantologists participated in the conference.

## **Iran, Middle East's top producer of wide steel plates**

Iran's Khuzestan Oxin Steel Company has manufactured the first 4.5-meter wide and 12-millimeter thick steel plate which is second to none in the Middle East.

## **Oman FM Discusses...**

Alawi and Manouchehr Mottaki met on Tuesday and the latter called for greater momentum in completing joint economic ventures between the two Persian Gulf neighbors.

## **Taiwan places firm on watch list following sales to Iran**

Taiwan has placed a local firm on a watch list after it sold specialized equipment to Iran, an official in Taiwan said on Wednesday, according to AFP.

## **Living Index Upbeat**

The Islamic Republic of Iran is the Middle East's 7th best country to live, according to the 2010 Quality of Life Index, published by travel magazine International Living. Among the world's 194 and Middle East's 11 countries, Iran has been ranked 150th and 7th best country to live in 2010,

## **Azeri Gas on the Map**

Along with the traditional markets of gas sale such as Georgia and Turkey, this year Azerbaijan starts supplying gas to new markets--Russia and Iran. Next week Azerbaijan and Iran are expected to sign a long-term five-year contract, with a possibility to prolong the supply of Azerbaijani gas to the country.

## **IOC Paying in Euro for Imports**

State-run Indian Oil Corp (IOC) has introduced a clause in its latest crude buy tender, shifting away from US dollar in favor of the euro in paying for imports through Iranian vessels,

## **2009 Economic Projects at \$313b**

The value of Iran's economic projects has increased remarkably in 2009.

Iran's planned and operational economic projects in 2009 stood at \$313 billion, as against \$27 billion in 2008, the Middle East Business Intelligence (MEED) reported.

## **Social Front**

### **Sixteen to Be Tied Over Recent Unrests**

The Judiciary announced that it has forwarded the cases of sixteen individuals indicted in connection with frenzy in Ashoura day on December 27 to the Revolution Court.

### **Iran cancels performances of British troupe at Fajr festival**

Iran has cancelled the performances of a British play on Friday.

"Grand Inquisitor" was to be staged by veteran British stage director Peter Brook at the 28th Fajr International Theater Festival, which will take place in Tehran from January 22 to 31.

### **26 Movies at Fajr Fest**

Twenty-six films will compete in the Iranian Films Section of the 28th Fajr International Film Festival.

Bahram Bahramian's 'Aal', Azizollah Hamidnejad's 'Anahita', Ebrahim Hatamikia's 'In the Color of Purple', Mohammad-Ali Basheh-Ahangar's 'The Wakefulness of Dreams', Bahram Tavakkoli's 'Walking in Fog', Ali Shah-Hatami's 'The Ducks Flying' and Rambod Javan's 'Adam's Son, Eve's Daughter' are among the films, Mehr News Agency wrote.

### **Qanoun Maestro Passes Away**

Veteran Iranian musician and Qanoun maestro Simin Aqarazi passed away at the age of 71 in Tehran.

Aqarazi was one of the first female Qanoun players in the country who had a great role in promoting the traditional instrument.

### **Houston to Let in Light of Sufis**

The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston plans to open an exhibit on mystical Sufi and Islamic arts to explore some of its facets through the lenses of artists.

### **Persian Art Sparkles at Istanbul Palace**

If you've always been interested in Persian history a visit to Istanbul might be a good backup choice. Through Feb. 5, the museum at the city's Topkapi Palace--former home of the Ottoman sultans--is hosting 'Ten Thousand Years of Iran's Civilization and Two Thousand Years of Joint Heritage', an exhibition featuring some 150 objects from the National Museum of Iran, as well as pieces from Turkish museums,

## **Norway Caricature Condemned**

Foreign Ministry spokesman, Ramin Mehmanparast condemned the publishing of a defamatory caricature of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in a Norwegian newspaper.

## **Iran to try 16 over protests on Ashura**

Iran will soon put on trial 16 people arrested in connection with anti-government protests on the Shiite holy day of Ashura last month,

## **Iran court upholds death by stoning verdict for two Azeris**

A court in Iran's West Azarbaijan Province has upheld the sentence of death by stoning for two Azeri Iranians, the Human Rights Activists News Agency reported on Friday.

## **Iranian director to show film about protests at Venice festival**

Iranian film director Hana Makhmalbaf will preview her film about the protests that followed Iran's disputed presidential election, at the Venice Film Festival,

## **Iran police chief says SMS, e-mails under control**

Iran's police chief warned protesters on Friday not to use text messages and e-mails to organize anti-government rallies, saying those who do so will be punished.

## **Iran's Mousavi sacked from post at arts academy**

Iranian opposition leader Mir Hossein Mousavi has been stripped of his post as president of Iran's Academy of Arts, local media reported on Tuesday.

## **Iran election named top Twitter topic in 2009**

Iran's disputed presidential election was the most popular topic of 2009 on the micro-blogging service, Twitter, it said on Tuesday.

## **Car of Iran pro-reform leader hit by gunfire – website**

The armored car of one of Iran's pro-reform leaders, Mehdi Karroubi, was hit by gunfire in the northwestern city of Qazvin, the official website of his Etemad-e Melli party said on Friday.

## **Rights group slams arrests of women's rights activists in Iran**

The International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran on Tuesday condemned the widespread arrests of women's rights activists and female journalists in Iran, and called for their immediate release.

## **Transfer of capital will help ease Tehran's problems: Larijani**

Transferring the political center from Tehran is aimed at easing the problems facing the city, Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani said during a television program aired Wednesday night.

## **Iran threatens to cut cultural ties with Britain over Cyrus Cylinder loan**

Iran's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization (CHTHO) director, who is also a vice president, said on Thursday that Iran would cut cultural ties with Britain if they cannot come to an agreement with the British Museum concerning the Cyrus Cylinder loan.

## Detailed Report

Political Front<sup>1</sup>

### **Nuclear Scientist Assassinated**

Masoud Ali-Mohammadi, 50, was described by colleagues as a respected Tehran University nuclear physicist.

Ali-Mohammadi was described as a "revolutionary university professor martyred in a terrorist operation by counterrevolutionary agents affiliated" with the United States and Israel.

"Considering the kind of attack and previous threats by security and terrorist services close to America and the Zionist regime, probably this terrorist attack was sponsored by those services," said a report on the news website, Tabnak.

The West and Israel have vowed to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons capability.

The Fars news agency said Ali-Mohammadi was as a former member of the Revolutionary Guard.

Ali Moqari, president of the science department at Tehran University, told the Mehr news agency that Ali-Mohammadi "had no political activity."

A graduate of Tehran's Sharif University of Technology, Ali-Mohammadi began teaching quantum physics and electromagnetic theory at Tehran University in 1995. He has written books on nuclear science and advised PhD candidates on their dissertations.

Forensic experts were conducting post-mortem examinations, but that no suspects had been arrested.

Officials blamed Israel and the United States for the bombing. "Signs of the triangle of wickedness by the Zionist regime (Israel), America and their hired agents, are visible in the terrorist act," the Foreign Ministry said.

"Such terrorist acts and the apparent elimination of the country's nuclear scientists will definitely not obstruct scientific and technological processes," it added.

A spokesman for Iran's Atomic Energy Organization, Ali Shirzadian, said Ali-Mohammadi was not working for the organization, Fars reported. Tehran University's

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<sup>1</sup> [www.iran-daily.com/](http://www.iran-daily.com/)



website showed his recent research papers were on the nature of "dark energy," a highly theoretical area of cosmology.

Mark Fitzpatrick, chief proliferation analyst at London's International Institute for Strategic Studies, was quoted by Reuters as saying Israel had in the past killed people working on nuclear programs it perceives as hostile.

Fars quoted a foreign-based group, the Iran Monarchy Association, as claiming responsibility for Tuesday's bombing. It did not say how it obtained the statement.

## **Iran Six to Meet This Week in New York**

A diplomatic source told RIA Novosti the meeting would take place on Saturday.

A meeting of the Iran Six - Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia and the United States - was scheduled for December 22, but was canceled by request of China.

The Iran Six have been trying to persuade Tehran to halt uranium enrichment it says it needs for electricity generation for economic and diplomatic incentives. Iran Six envoys last met in Geneva on October 1.

Iran, which is already under three sets of United Nations sanctions for refusing to halt uranium enrichment, recently announced plans to build 10 new uranium enrichment facilities. Western powers suspect it of pursuing an atomic weapons program.

Britain's envoy to the UN Mark Lyall Grant said in late December that the UN Security Council could introduce new sanctions against Iran by late February unless Tehran accepts the Iran Six's offer on its controversial nuclear program.

## **Engineer Gets 4 Years for Working Illegally for Iran**

Ali Amirnazmi, 66, formerly of Berwyn, was convicted by a federal jury after an eight-day trial in February 2009 of conspiracy, bank fraud, lying to federal officials and of violating the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA).

The law makes it a crime to willfully violate U.S. trade sanctions with designated countries, such as Iran.

Authorities said that Amirnazmi, who owned TranTech Consultants, a firm that specialized in databases for chemical companies, conspired from 1996 to July 2008 to transfer a chemical-procurement software system he developed, ChemPlan, to Iran to train young Iranians to close technological gaps between Iran and its adversaries.

At his sentencing hearing, Amirnazmi, who has been in federal custody since his arrest in July 2008, was defiant and maintained that he "never intended to break any U.S. laws" and had "no reason to lie."

Assistant U.S. Attorney Stephen A. Miller said that Amirnazmi, whom he likened to a narcissist, suffered from a "profound sense of entitlement."

Miller had argued for a guideline sentence of eight years.

## **MOTTAKI: Israel Won't Dare Attack Iran**

According to Fars news agency, following a meeting with this Omani counterpart, Yousuf bin Alawi on Wednesday, the Iranian foreign minister attended a joint press conference, responding to the questions of domestic and foreign reporters.

In response to a question about the Zionist regime's possible attack on Iran's nuclear installations, Mottaki said: "The topic of study of feasibility of a military attack against Iran is a subject that has been on the agenda of the propaganda campaigns of Zionist and American circles at different times and under different pretexts and goals, especially during the reign of George Bush."

He noted: "Almost during the last two years of Bush administration term in office, a series of data were delivered each week, trying to somehow imply to Islamic Republic of Iran that a few operations are due to take place. Meanwhile, Obviously, Islamic Republic of Iran will stand firm against any potential attack."

He considered such moves as politically motivated and part of a propaganda campaign.

Mottaki further said: "A number of Western states wrongly interfered in the affairs related to Iran's election and launched specific propaganda campaigns. Meanwhile, with divine blessings, prudence of the Supreme Leader of Islamic Revolution, and resistance of the Iranian nation all these hatched plots and conspiracies were foiled."

In response to a question about a fall or severance of ties with Britain, Mottaki noted: "Members of the Parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Committee hold meetings with the council of Foreign Ministry's deputies once a while. Meanwhile, one of these meetings was held on Tuesday and in this meeting we discussed different topics of importance in connection to foreign ties, regional developments, and relations with Britain."

He emphasized: "If we reach a conclusion in regard to a fall in relations with a country, we will have no doubts in implementing it."

Elsewhere, during this press conference, Mottaki elaborated on his talks with his Omani counterpart, and noted: "We and our Omani friends continuously hold consultations and negotiations in regard to promotion of bilateral ties and analysis of regional conditions and international developments. We have, for the first time, defined many domains for cooperation between the two countries and hope that by finalization of decisions and implementation of them we would be able to fulfill significant interests of both nations."

Omani Foreign Minister, for his part, commented on the presence of foreign forces' navy in Persian Gulf and Oman Sea, saying that the two areas should be free of any foreign presence.

"The presence of foreign forces in the area runs counter to international rules and regulations and is totally unacceptable," the Omani official said.

Asked about his talks with Mottaki on the issue of Palestine, Alawi said, "There is no solution to the Palestinian crisis except restoring Palestinians' rights through establishing a Palestinian government with Qods as its capital."

Touching on Yemen crisis, Alawi expressed his country's support for the Yemeni government, while calling for a solution to the ongoing crisis in the country.

The foreign minister also called for efforts to boost bilateral ties while welcoming the presence of Iranian companies in various projects in his country.

### Ankara Eager to Continue Ties With Tehran

Davutoglu said during a speech in King's College London that access to nuclear technology for peaceful purposes is the right of any independent nation, adding that Turkey is against the development of nuclear weapons, particularly in the Middle East.

The Turkish Foreign Minister added that diplomatic talks should continue between Iran and members of the 5+1 Group (United States, Britain, France, Russia, China and Germany) as developing peaceful nuclear energy "is a right for all".

He also said Turkey is interested in continuing its "historical relations" with Iran.

"We have excellent relations with Iran and we want to continue this relation based on mutual respect and common interests as our border with Iran has remained unchanged for the past 350 years."

Davutoglu added that Turkey is supporting four main principles with regards to the settlement of current disputes in the Middle East.

He explained that in the volatile region of the Middle East, security and economic prosperity should be guaranteed for all while high-level political dialogue should take place among engaged parties based on "multicultural co-existence".

Davutoglu said his country is opposed to any sort of polarization in the Middle East between "extremists and modernists", adding that Israel is preparing the grounds for the spread of extremism in the region.

“Nobody can justify the Israeli occupation [of Palestinian lands] and humiliation [of the Palestinian people]. Palestinian children cannot go from one village to another while their dignity is undermined by Israel.”

The Turkish Foreign Minister further said his country is playing a crucial role in regional and European developments as a member of the United Nations Security Council and the G-20.

“Turkey can promote EU’s economic potentials as the country has much political and economic dynamics to turn into a global actor.”

Davutoglu said Turkey is holding two regional summits on Afghanistan on 25 and 26 January in the -up to the London conference on 28 January.

He told a press conference in London on Tuesday that the two meetings will help for the success of the London conference.

“Through our trilateral mechanism in Turkey on the 25th between Turkey, Afghanistan and Pakistan we aim to have a much broader cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistan,” Davutoglu added.

“The next day, 26th, we will have a regional conference in Turkey to assure this regional ownership and in London we will be having an international commitment composed of all these factors.”

An international conference on Afghanistan will be held on 28 January in London in a bid to set new goals for the presence of international forces in Afghanistan and devise a probable timetable for the withdrawal of Western troops.

## **France Tells Iran to Acquit Reiss**

Clotilde Reiss, a 24-year-old who was arrested on July 1 and charged with acting against Iran's national security, is to hear the verdict in Tehran on Saturday, a Tehran prosecutor said.

"We expect that her innocence will be recognized by Iranian justice and we want Clotilde Reiss to return to France as soon as possible," said foreign ministry spokesman Bernard Valero.

"I have one certainty, which is that our compatriot is innocent," he added.

Reiss is accused of supporting opposition protests that erupted after President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was re-elected in June.

She was arrested shortly before she was to fly home after a six-month study and teaching assignment.

The young Iran expert's lawyer Mohammad-Ali Mahdavi Sabet said this week he hoped the court hearing on Saturday will be her last.

## **Iran Urges Use of National Currencies in Energy Deals With Russia**

"We want our national currencies to be used in our projects," Deputy Petroleum Minister of Iran Hossein Noghrehkar Shirazi said, adding this measure would facilitate the financing of large projects.

The move is also seen as an attempt to find an alternative to the U.S. dollar whose credibility has been weakened by the global economic crisis and reduce dependence on the greenback as the world's major reserve currency.

Shirazi is attending a meeting of the Russian-Iranian working group on cooperation in the oil, gas and petrochemical spheres in Moscow, which is intended to map out a plan for both countries' energy cooperation in the coming 30 years.

Shirazi also said that Iran planned to double gas output in the next five years to 1 billion cubic meters a day, increase oil production by 1 million barrels per day to 5 million bbl/d, and build new oil refineries and petrochemical plants.

Russian Deputy Energy Minister Sergei Kudryashov said Iran and Russia, who together account for 18% of the world's oil and 40% of global gas reserves, "are fated to cooperate in implementing large-scale projects."

Kudryashov said that major Russian energy companies Gazprom Neft, Gazprom, Sibur and energy engineering company Stroytransgaz were participating in the talks with Iran.

the unrests.

## **Salehi: Nuclear Fuel Import Decision Stands**

Amid speculations about the fuel supply for a nuclear research reactor, the head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran said Tehran still prefers to import the fuel from other countries.

"Iran has the potential to enrich uranium to 20 percent. We should inform the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) about the issue at the first step and then start making necessary changes in the production line and enriching uranium," ISNA quoted Ali Akbar Salehi as saying on Sunday. "However, Iran prefers to buy the needed fuel from abroad," he added. Explaining the reasons behind Iran's decision to import rather than produce the fuel at home he said, "We want to interact with countries."

Fuel Production Potential  
"We have the potential to produce the fuel but prefer to draws on this ability at a time when we decide to expose western intentions to public opinion in Iran and the world," Salehi said.

He noted that the issue of fuel exchange is still on the table. "We want concrete guarantees that we will receive the 20 percent enriched uranium in exchange for our uranium."

"The simultaneous fuel swap on Iranian territory is the guarantee that we want." After the 1979 revolution in Iran, Western companies working on Iran's nuclear program refused to fulfill their obligations even though they had been paid for the project in full. Tehran and Paris had signed a deal, under which France agreed to deliver 50 tons of uranium hexafluoride (UF<sub>6</sub>) to Iran, a promise which was never fulfilled. Despite a 10 percent stake in France's Eurodif nuclear processing plant, Paris for three decades has refused to deliver enriched uranium to Iran. In January 1978, Germany's Kraftwerk Union, which, according to a 1975 contract, was obliged to complete the Bushehr nuclear power plant, stopped working on the nuclear project while 50 percent of one reactor and 85 percent of another were complete. Iran had paid Germany in full, totaling billions of dollars, for the two nuclear facilities in Bushehr.

Salehi pointed to IAEA regulations regarding supplying fuel to member states and said, "The IAEA charter does not oblige member states to ask the agency to supply them with nuclear fuel. Neither are we obliged to obtain our much-needed, 20-percent-enriched uranium through a swap deal." Tehran earlier announced that it will start enriching uranium to 20 percent should the western sides refuse to supply the needed fuel. The development comes as Tehran's research reactor, which produces radio medicine for cancer patients, is running out of fuel after years of operation, prompting Iranian nuclear officials to call on the IAEA to provide the required fuel. To maintain the pressure on Iran and force the country to accept a western-backed offer for its nuclear fuel needs, world powers have drafted a German-sponsored resolution at the IAEA demanding that Iran stop constructing the new Fordau nuclear facility near Qom.

The offer requires Iran to send abroad most of its low enriched uranium (LEU) to be further processed and then returned to the country for use in the medical reactor. Iranian officials rejected the proposal arguing that there were no guarantees they would receive the fuel. Western governments in the past failed to adhere to their nuclear commitments to Tehran. However, Iran later agreed to exchange its uranium if it takes place inside the country. The US rejected the offer and said the deal is final and unchangeable. Iran's nuclear program was launched in the 1950s with the help of the United States, as part of the 'Atoms for Peace' program.

Ready for 20% Uranium  
A senior lawmaker also said that Iran will enrich uranium up to 20 percent purity to power the research reactor should western countries refuse to supply the fuel for a research reactor that produces medicine for 800,000 people. The parties engaged in negotiations with Iran to supply the 20 percent [enriched] fuel are advised to stop the procrastination. If they don't Iran will begin 20 percent enrichment," chairman of the Parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Committee told IRNA on Sunday. Alaeddin Boroujerdi rejected the allegations by the West and its media that Tehran is

ready to swap uranium in a third country, such as Turkey. "Iran's stance that the nuclear fuel swap must take place on Iranian territory will not change. The West should try to find a way out of the current stalemate rather than creating a brouhaha," he said.

## **Concern Over Rising Pak Violence**

Iran expressed hope that Pakistan will stop foreign interference in its internal affairs and said closer cooperation among regional states can go a long way in guaranteeing stability in this part of the world. In a telephone talk with his Pakistani counterpart Asif Ali Zardari, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said violence in Pakistan affects all neighboring countries because their security is intertwined, Presstv reported. Ahmadinejad expressed hope that the Pakistani people will stand up to foreign interference in their domestic affairs and restore peace, stability and unity to the Muslim country.

"All nations in the region are deeply saddened by the wave of bomb blasts, which usually claim the lives of innocent civilians," he said, adding that foreign powers seek to create unrest in the region with their divisive policies. According to APP, Ahmadinejad also condoled loss of lives in the recent terror attacks across Pakistan, in particular the colossal loss of innocent life in Lakki Marwat and Karachi.

The two leaders also discussed bilateral relations and the situation in the region. Zardari and Ahmadinejad agreed to enhance cooperation between the two neighbors in fighting militancy.

The Pakistani president stressed that foreign forces have always been sought to undermine and destabilize the strategic region. "Pakistanis with the help of regional states, particularly the Islamic Republic of Iran, will neutralize the enemies' plots," Zardari was quoted as saying. Three days of violence killed 48 political party workers in Pakistan's financial capital, Karachi, a security official said. The targeted killings by unidentified gunmen began after the headless body of a worker from the city's dominant political party, the Mutahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), was discovered on Thursday, officials said on Sunday. At least 48 workers belonging to different political parties have lost lives in the targeted killings in the city since Thursday, wire services reported.

## **Germany, UAE Discuss Nuclear Issues**

The United Arab Emirates and Germany held talks on the Iranian nuclear program and other international issues, saying Tehran must do more to allay the international community's concerns about its atomic drive. Following a meeting in Abu Dhabi, UAE Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed

Al-Nahayan said he hoped Iran would cooperate with the UN nuclear agency. "We are very concerned about Iran's behavior with regard to its nuclear program," he claimed after talks with his visiting German counterpart, Guido Westerwelle, AFP reported.

"That is based on its lack of cooperation with the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency). We want more active cooperation from Iran. That would be in the interest of the world, the region and Iran itself." The sheikh claimed that the UN Security Council could soon pass a fourth round of sanctions to try to force Iran to abandon its nuclear work. "We hope that Iran will behave so cooperatively that sanctions will not be necessary," he said.

"We in the United Arab Emirates as a neighbor state are particularly affected by what Iran is targeted by but also everything it does." He claimed that his country could serve as an "example" for the transparent use of nuclear energy, pointing to a 20.4-billion-dollar deal with South Korea to build four nuclear power plants in the tiny Persian Gulf emirate. Westerwelle, who is on a tour of Persian Gulf states and whose country is one of six working to convince Tehran to cooperate with the IAEA, said he and Abdullah were in "broad agreement."

The ministers also discussed the security of Yemen amid reports that Westerwelle planned to visit the strife-ridden country on Monday, and negotiations to end a continuing hostage crisis there. Westerwelle declined to comment directly on either issue.

## **Reiss Trial to Resume**

The trial of French academic Clotilde Reiss who was arrested during the post-election unrests, is to resume in Tehran on Saturday. "The third court session has been set for January 16 in Branch 15 of the Revolutionary Court," her lawyer Mohammad Ali Mahdavi-Sabet told ISNA on Monday. Reiss, 24, who was arrested on July 1 and released on bail in August, is staying at the French Embassy awaiting the outcome of her case. Sabet did not specify if a verdict was expected on Saturday but said after a December 23 court session that "the final part of pleadings concerning the accusations ... will be made at the next hearing." Reiss is accused, among other things, of taking part in a western plot against the Islamic Republic.

According to the Foreign Ministry she also is accused of carrying out "a series of offenses, such as illegal residence, participation in illegal protests and intelligence gathering for the French Embassy". On December 18, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was quoted as saying that her release depends on France's approach and behavior. "Iran is willing to release Clotilde Reiss, who was arrested for taking part in the post-election protests...But this depends on the approach and behavior of French officials," he said without elaboration.

Paris has been among the strongest opponents of Iran's nuclear program and has



repeatedly backed the United States and Israel in its hostility against and confrontation with the Islamic state.

## **Iraq Seeking IAEA Explanation On Planned Iran Plant**

The Iraqi government on Monday called for "explanations" from the UN nuclear agency on a reported plan for Iran to build a nuclear reactor near the border between the two countries. "The Iraqi government has asked for explanations from the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) on information concerning the construction of an Iranian nuclear reactor near the border with Iraq," it said, AFP reported.

"Iraq will take the necessary diplomatic measures, in cooperation with the IAEA, to suppress the dangers and complications arising from the construction of nuclear installations near the border," it claimed in an official statement.

Tehran announced on November 29 it plans to build 10 new uranium enrichment plants.

## **Swiss Firm Stops Fuel Supply**

Glencore has ceased gasoline supply to Iran to avoid fallout from US sanctions on companies supplying fuel to the Islamic Republic, ending three decades of business that began with its founding firm, trade sources said. The firm, which only did a small portion of its trade with Iran, has stopped shipments since November as it gears up for a potential public listing, traders familiar with the country's monthly gasoline imports told Reuters. Swiss-based commodities trader Glencore declined to comment on the matter. "There is growing concern about the legislation the US is pursuing with regards to Iran," said a trade source, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to make public statements. "This could make it very tricky for Glencore and other companies doing business with Iran."

The US House of Representatives passed legislation in December authorizing President Barack Obama to levy sanctions on companies that directly provide gasoline to Iran, along with firms that provide insurance and tankers to facilitate fuel shipments. "At the end of the day for Glencore, this is a small return business, again risk outweighs the reward," an Asia-based trader said. The bulk of Glencore's business with OPEC-member Iran in recent years has been to supply the world's fifth-largest crude oil exporter with gasoline. The European trader has been supplying no more than 17,000 barrels per day (bpd) of gasoline per month to Iran, a small portion of the Islamic Republic's typical monthly import program of between 10 and 12 cargoes, or some 102,000 bpd. Past suppliers such as international oil major BP had also halted their gasoline exports to Iran due to pressure from the US and British governments. But the supply gap could be easily filled by traders such as independent firms Trafigura and Vitol, Malaysia's national oil company Petronas and Chinese companies

## **Economic MoU With Syria**

A memorandum of understanding (MoU) on expanding economic cooperation was signed by the Minister of Housing Ali Nikzad and Syria's Minister of Economy and Trade Amer Husni Lutfi in Tehran on Monday. Speaking at the end of a three-day session of the Joint Economic Cooperation Development Committee, Nikzad referred to the strong cultural-political bonds between the two nations. "Political collaboration between the two countries is effective and the two sides now intend to expand economic relations." The next meeting of the joint committee between Iran's first vice president and the Syrian prime minister is slated for March in Damascus. Nikzad said two-way trade in the current Iranian year (ends March 20) reached \$336 million, and "Iranian companies sold \$1.6 billion worth of technical services in different fields."

The services were in a variety of sectors, namely cement plants, auto assembly lines, construction of silos, power plants and banks. Lutfi, for his part, emphasized that such meetings help strengthen economic cooperation. "Even though we have seen many developments in Tehran-Damascus economic relations, we are still far from reaching the desired level."

## **MKO, Marxists Provoked Tehran Clashes**

The rapporteur of Majlis' National Security and Foreign Policy Committee said operatives of the banned Mujahedin Khalq Organization (MKO) and Marxist groups were also responsible for the recent disturbances in Tehran. "Those who were on the streets on Ashura to foment the violence were typical enemies of the country, including MKO members, Marxists, and those who are inherently hostile to the Islamic Revolution and the ruling system," Kazem Jalali told the Fars News Agency on Sunday.

Anti-government protests were held in Tehran on December 27. The occasion (Ashura) coincided with commemorations for the martyrdom anniversary of Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) grandson Imam Hussein (AS). Police used tear gas to disperse the protesters, who vandalized public property and set trash bins on fire, provoking clashes with security forces. Seven people died during the unrest. The deputy police chief, Ahmad-Reza Radan, said after the incidents that the police had not fired on the protesters and rejected accusations that they were responsible for the deaths.

In response to the Ashura riots, millions of Iranians took to the streets on December 30 and demanded the prosecution of the rioters. The riots were the latest in a wave of unrests that took place in Tehran and other cities after the disputed mid-June presidential elections. Officials in Tehran have also accused western powers, particularly the US and Britain, of instigating and supporting

## **Commander: Terrorist Attacks Aim to Hinder Iran's Progress**

His remarks alluded to a Tuesday terror attack on an Iranian university professor and nuclear scientist, Masoud Ali Mohammadi.

The London-based armed opposition of the Islamic Republic, the Kingdom Association, has in a statement claimed responsibility for the attack.

"The assassination of martyr Ali Mohammadi indicates that the enemies of Islam and the Revolution are severely angry at the Islamic Iran's scientific progresses, specially in the nuclear field, and fulfill hostile measures to stop these progresses," Commander of IRGC Forces in the northern city of Karaj Seyed Hamzeh Mirtaqi told FNA.

Mirtaqi also reiterated that such brutal terrorist attacks do not affect the will of the Iranian people to fully attain their rights to use peaceful nuclear energy and will make them more resolved on this path.

He warned the enemies that they should wait for an impending harsh response from the Iranian nation.

Iranian officials put the blame on the US and Israel for performing such crimes through their hirelings affiliates inside Iran.

Meantime, Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ramin Mihman-Parast in a statement on Tuesday condemned the attack and took Israel and US hirelings inside Iran responsible for the terrorist operation.

## **Judiciary Chief Blasts Double Standards on Human Rights**

"The West has always employed double-standard attitudes and behaviors towards the issue of human rights," Ayatollah Larijani said in meeting with the members of the Human Rights Committee of the parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Commission here in Tehran on Tuesday.

He reminded that the issue of human rights has been used as leverage against the Islamic Republic of Iran during the last years.

Ayatollah Larijani called on experts to challenge West's double-standard approach and attitude towards human rights issues through reasoning and contrastive analysis of the West's secular views.

"Practically, we should display that the West, which pretends to be an advocate of the human rights, has violated the human rights throughout the world in the worst possible way," the judiciary chief noted.

## **Security Bodies Urged to Find Assassination Agents**

According to the Presidential Office website on Tuesday, the Government in a statement said that inhuman act of assassinating Tehran University professor Masoud Alimohammadi indicated that enemies of Iran have entered the blind phase of criminal acts.

"The criminal agents of such a crime should know they cannot escape justice and sooner or later will receive their punishment", said the statement.

It strongly condemned martyrdom of the university professor and condoled with the bereaved family and the academic society.

Dr. Masoud Alimohammadi, professor of physics in Tehran University, was assassinated on Tuesday morning in front of his house. He was killed in a remote-control bomb blast.

## **Iran Ready to Send Aid to Haiti**

Director-General of the International Affairs Department of Iran's Red Crescent Society, Abdolraouf Adibzadeh, told IRNA that the IRCS is making efforts to have contact with Haiti's Red Cross to provide relief aid for Haitian people.

A big earthquake measuring 7.3 on the Richter scale rocked Haiti Tuesday, causing serious damage to the country and killing possibly thousands of Haitians.

## **Majlis to Review Tie Breakup With Britian**

According to IRNA, Boroujerdi noted: "This committee has studied the topic of fall in relations with Britain throughout several meetings in the past few months in the presence of Foreign Ministry officials."

He added: "This committee emphasizes on reduction in ties with British government. Therefore, this subject was studied in a meeting with foreign minister and his deputies on Tuesday night."

He noted: "During the recent unrests in Tehran, the British Embassy was involved in organization of riots and for this reason a number of this embassy's diplomats were expelled from Iran."

He said: "These measures go to show the interferences of British government in Iran's affairs in violation of the Vienna Convention."

He reiterated that meanwhile the final decision on the level of relations with British government depends on the view of the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC).

## **Iran Condemns Publishing of Defamatory Caricature**

Such illogical moves run counter to religious values, divine religions, and international code of conducts, Human rights declaration and freedom of speech, he said.

It is not justifiable to hurt the feelings of 1.5 billion Muslims under the pretext of freedom of speech, he said.

Such blasphemous measures which arouse the anger of Muslims in the past will not help bring understanding among world nations, he said.

The Norwegian government is responsible for promotion of such provocative acts which are blatant violations of human rights, he said.

## **Ahmadinejad Urges Unity among Regional States**

During a meeting with Oman's Foreign Minister Yusuf Bin Alawi Bin Abdullah who is visiting Iran, he announced Iran's readiness to promote its all-out relations and cooperation with Oman.

Talking about regional developments, President Ahmadinejad described Palestine crisis as the most important issue of the world and region adding if Arab countries put the Zionist regime under pressure to stop violating Palestinians' rights, the crisis would be settled.

"The Zionist regime's measures are not signs of power. Extremism is sign for weakness which would reach to its end in the case of facing with resistance," President said.

Oman's Foreign Minister Yusuf Bin Alawi, for his part, reiterated promotion of bilateral relations, adding the Islamic Republic of Iran plays a strategic economic role in the region and could be a bridge which connects Central Asia to the Persian Gulf.

On the Palestinian issue, he said Arab countries have concluded that negotiations would not bear any result.

The Zionist regime has blocked the way of peace, he said, urging Arab countries to seek a new solution for the case

## **Larijani Blames US, Israel for Assassinating Iran's N. Scientist**

"We received some explicit information several days ago that Israel's Intelligence Agency (Mossad), in collaboration with CIA, was seeking to stage a terrorist attack in Tehran," Larijani said at an open session of the parliament on Wednesday.

Iranian university professor and nuclear scientist Masoud Ali Mohammadi was assassinated in a terrorist bomb attack here in Tehran on Tuesday.

The London-based armed opposition, the Kingdom Association, in a statement claimed responsibility for the attack.

Larijani linked the opposition group to CIA and Mossad, and stressed, "May be the CIA and the Zionist regime have imagined that they can hoodwink others by issuing a vague statement (by the Kingdom Association)." (

He termed the "hasty" resort of the US and Israel to "such a rootless group" for covering their crimes "a new disgrace" for US President Barack Obama.

Earlier on Tuesday, Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ramin Mihman-Parast, in a statement, condemned the attack and took the Zionist regime of Israel and US hirelings inside Iran responsible for the terrorist operation.

The spokesman described the attack as an inhumane behavior violating all international rules and norms.

### **Jalili: Iran Progress Untouched by U.S. Policies**

Speaking in a meeting with visiting Omani Foreign Minister Yusuf bin Alawi bin Abdallah yesterday, Jalili reiterated the Islamic Republic of Iran's determination to make continued progress, and said nothing can change or affect Tehran's determination.

"The United States' approach will not affect this trend and the Iranian nation has prepared itself to make progress in all dimensions with vivacity and strength," he added.

Referring to the possible impact or role of the U.S. President Barack Obama's "change" slogan in the country's foreign policies, Jalili asserted that the untruthfulness of these claims was proved after Washington repeated such behaviors as use of force, militarism and sanctions against other nations.

He also pointed to the Tuesday terrorist attack on a nuclear physics scientist and university lecturer and put the blame on the U.S. and its hirelings in Iran.

Resorting to terrorist attacks indicates the decline in the United States' power in confronting the Iranian nation, he said.

### **Iran Favors Stronger Pro-Palestinian Front**

In a phone conversation with his Syria counterpart Basahr al-Assad, Ahmadinejad said: "Leaders of the Zionist regime should face trial and rights of the Palestinian people should be restored."

He emphasized the anti-arrogance front must continue stronger than ever.

Ahmadinejad added that the Zionist regime is in a weak position and reiterated that the global front against imperialism must become stronger.

The president also touched on bilateral ties between Tehran and Damascus during the past 30 years has changed the regional balance in favor of the two countries.

For his part, Assad praised the strategic relations between his country and Iran, saying that their common enemies would never damage the amicable ties.

The President slammed 'certain countries' for their efforts to impose a compromise on the Palestinian people, but did not name any certain country<sup>2</sup>

### **PRESIDENT: Nuclear Achievements to Bring Down Enemies**

Addressing groups of students visiting war fronts, he added that Iran has reached a point in the nuclear field that if enemies come together with their allies, they will not be able to prevent its progress.

Stating that the Iranian nation favors logic and dialogue, the chief executive said that the era of impolite rhetoric is over and if the enemies want to repeat their past strategies, they will face more crushing responses.

On the second day of his third provincial visit to Khuzestan province, Ahmadinejad said that all of the Iranian youth are like Martyr Ali Mohammadi.

“The Iranian nation is determined to conquer the high peaks of progress,” he noted.

The president added that the Iranian nation will never allow the arrogant powers to materialize its goal of dominating Middle East.

Referring to martyrdom of Ali Mohamamdi, a physics scientist, he said that he was engaged in scientific studies and the enemies want to hinder Iran’s progress.

The 50-year-old professor was killed in a booby-trapped motorbike blast on Tuesday in front of his house in Qeytariyeh neighborhood in northern Tehran.

He was a committed revolutionary professor at the Physics Faculty of Tehran University.

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<sup>2</sup> /www.irannewsdaily.com

## **China to Send Lower-Level Envoy to Talks on Iran**

The development caused some consternation among others in the group, which includes Britain, China, France, Russia, the United States and Germany, and several diplomats said China had proposed New York as the venue for the meeting.

Diplomats said they did not know China's motive, speculating it might be to illustrate Beijing's resistance to punishing Iran with more sanctions or dismay at U.S. arms sales to Taiwan, which Beijing views as a renegade province.

However, one diplomat said China often sends a lower-level official to such gatherings.

The other nations are expected to send their foreign ministry political directors to the meeting, which the United States and its Western allies hope will focus on discussing fresh sanctions to impose on Iran over its nuclear activities.

Washington accuses Tehran of trying to develop nuclear weapons under the cover of its civilian atomic program. Iran says its nuclear program is designed to generate electricity so it can export more of its valuable oil and gas.

"We are aware that their representation will be below the level of political director," said State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley. "It will be a useful meeting to have regardless of the Chinese representation."

The United States will continue to work with China and other countries "to convince them that the urgency of the situation requires not only additional engagement, which China does support, but additional pressure, which obviously China is still working through," he told reporters.

Asked if the United States felt snubbed by the Chinese decision, the spokesman paused for several seconds and then answered the question indirectly, saying "in diplomacy you don't wear a chip on your shoulder."

## **PENTAGON: No Evidence Iran Seeks Nukes**

The chief of the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), Lieutenant General Ronald Burgess, says the key findings of the 2007 National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) on Iran's nuclear energy program are still valid.

"The bottom line assessments of the NIE still hold true," he told Voice of America.

The NIE report was a consensus judgment of all US intelligence agencies, which concluded that Iran halted all activities which could have allegedly led to the development of nuclear arms in 2003.



Burgess said the Pentagon had seen no indication that Tehran was planning to resume the program allegedly aimed at developing nuclear weapons.

"We have not seen indication that the government has made the decision to move ahead with the program. But the fact still remains that we don't know what we don't know," he said.

Burgess said the Pentagon would continue to work on verifying that Iran is pursuing peaceful nuclear activities.

The Islamic Republic insists its nuclear program is solely aimed at civilian purposes and rejects the West's allegations that it intends to pursue military objectives.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) reports and US National Intelligence Estimates issued so far have attested to the civilian nature of Iran's nuclear program.

Tehran has repeatedly called for the removal of all weapons of mass destruction from across the globe.

## **Iran-Saudi Arabia Come to Blows Over Yemen**

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad lashed out at Saudi Arabia for its violent military offensive against the civilians in northern Yemen.

"Saudi Arabia was expected to mediate in Yemen's internal conflict as an older brother and restore peace to the Muslim states, rather than launching military strike[s] and pounding bombs on Muslim civilians in the north of Yemen," said Ahmadinejad while addressing the people of Ahwaz on Wednesday.

The Iranian president questioned why Riyadh had not used its military weapons against Zionists to defend Gazans during Israeli 22-day Operation Cast Lead which killed over 1400 people.

The Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal, however, denied any Saudi involvement whatsoever in military attacks against the Yemeni Shia fighters, known as the Houthis.

"I don't know where he (Ahmadinejad) got this accusation ... that the kingdom is waging war on the Houthis," al-Faisal said in Riyadh.

He added that even the Houthis don't say such a thing. "The real accusation is that Iran is the one that meddles in Yemen's internal affairs."

Al-Faisal's remarks, however, quite categorically contradict the news reported nearly on a daily basis by Houthi fighters over the Saudi air offensive against the people of Yemen.

Houthi fighters reported on Wednesday that a man and two of his daughters, civilian all and sundry, were killed by Saudi fighter jets in northern Yemen.

Riyadh joined Yemen's offensive against Houthis after accusing them of killing a Saudi border guard and occupying two border villages on November 3. Houthi fighters have denied the claims.

## **Washington to Keep Door Open for Talks With Tehran**

U.S. Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs William Burns was in Moscow on Thursday to discuss Iran and arms reduction with Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov.

"The United States believes we should keep the door open to negotiations and involve Iran in cooperation," he said in an interview with Gazeta daily published in Russian.

"But we should also make it clear [to Iran] that a non-constructive response to creative proposals put forward by the international community will not have but consequences," he went on.

The UN nuclear regulator, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), had arranged a plan under which Russia would lead a consortium that would enrich uranium for the Tehran Research Center.

Iran rejected that proposal, under which it would have shipped low-enriched uranium abroad in exchange for a more highly enriched version.

The Iran Six, comprising Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia and the United States, have been trying to persuade Tehran to halt uranium enrichment it says it needs for electricity generation for economic and diplomatic incentives. Iran Six envoys last met in Geneva on October 1.

Burns also urged the United States, Russia and other partners to give Tehran a tough signal saying they were seeking a diplomatic way out, but were also quite firm in their intention to make Iran honor its commitments, Gazeta said.

When asked if new sanctions against Iran would harm Russian investments, especially in the Bushehr nuclear power plant, Burns declined to respond, saying that his "Russian colleagues should talk about Russia's position in regard to Iran" and not the United States.

## **Economy Politicized**

"Iran's economy is in a state of transition from being state-owned and the road is treacherous. We have to find a correct knowledge of our domestic and foreign relations in order to make the necessary planning," head of Tehran Chamber of Commerce Yahya Ale Es'haq, was quoted by the Mehr news agency as saying.

He said at presently the private sector held between 10 and 15 percent of Iran's economy, adding the percentage should go much higher.

Deputy Minister of Commerce Mohammad Sadeq Mofateh said the representatives of the private sector in the chamber should be authorized to decide about pricing, tariffs, exports, imports, floating shares and other market affairs.

## **Iran to Get Access to Georgian Ports Through Armenia**

The press service of the Armenian government reported that the government has approved a credit program for 2010-2017. \$ 120 million will be drawn this year.

As Armenian Minister of Transport and Communications Gurgen Sargsyan said during a meeting with Iranian Ambassador to Armenia Seyed Ali Sagayan the Asian Development Bank will provide \$ 500 million credit. Sagayan, in turn, noted that Iranian organizations are interested in construction of this highway and Iranian banks will also participate in financing of the construction.

Preliminary project cost is \$ 962 million. Highway construction concept has been prepared by the German-Austrian company ILF, while feasibility study of the project was done by PADECO. The first tranche will go to support work on security of sections of Yerevan- Ararat and Yerevan-Ashtarak, and the second and third tranches will be used to repair sections of Ashtarak-Gyumri and Goris-Kapan.

Length of the highway from the Armenian capital to Batumi, which currently amounts to 700 km, after the construction of new roads will be reduced to 450 km. Previously, the Government of Armenia has decided to begin construction of transport corridor North-South, which runs from the south of Armenia - Meghri area located on the Armenian-Georgian border to Georgian Black Sea ports.

## **MPs Push for Less UK Ties**

Dozens of lawmakers have demanded cutting of relations with Britain, which Tehran has often accused of interfering in its internal affairs. State radio said Wednesday the initiative was backed by 40 MPs in the 290-seat chamber. ISNA put the number at 35. "The bill, which was on the Parliament agenda in the morning, was referred to the National Security and Foreign Policy Commission," the commission's spokesman Kazem Jalali told newsmen Wednesday, Presstv reported. "We have studied this issue before. The commission believes that we should reduce our ties with Britain," he added. Responding to a question about why the bill was referred to the commission, Jalali said downgrading or boosting relations with other countries is a "sensitive" issue. "Relevant bodies, such as the Foreign Ministry, the Supreme National Security Council

(SNSC)...must be consulted on such matters.” The MP said the commission’s members had met Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki late Tuesday to discuss a range of foreign policy issues. In a speech Tuesday, Mottaki had said the proposal about downgrading ties with London needs to be studied more carefully. Before the bill was referred to the National Security and Foreign Policy Commission, many lawmakers had expressed their support for the move. Mohammad-Ali Abtahi, one of the authors of the bill, blamed British policies for the Tuesday bombing in northern Tehran, which killed a nuclear physicist. He criticized Britain for recognizing the banned Monarchy Organization of Iran (Anjoman-e-Padeshahi-e-Iran) as a legal entity, and said London would go to great lengths to insult the Islamic Republic if Tehran’s fail to take a strong stance. He called for the closure of the British Embassy arguing that should the mission remain open, “the Iranian people would not have a moment’s peace.”

Hasty Move  
Meanwhile the Majlis’ National Security and Foreign Policy Commission Chairman Alaeddin Boroujerdi said the proposal by the MPs had not been coordinated with the commission and called it a hasty move. “We should study this proposal further and it should meet national interests,” ISNA quoted Boroujerdi as saying on Wednesday. Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani said it was the task of the key Foreign Policy and National Security Commission to tackle the issue of relations with the former colonial power. “Considering the sinister actions of the British government towards Iranians, it is the duty of the commission to decide about this country ... and I thank them for working on it,” Larijani said. Last month the British ambassador was summoned to the Foreign Ministry and Mottaki threatened Britain with a “tight slap in the mouth” if it did not stop interfering in Iran’s internal affairs.

### **Khamenei says scientist’s killing show enemies’ ill motives**

Iran’s supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said on Friday that the assassination of an Iranian nuclear scientist earlier this week showed that the country’s enemies were seeking to hamper its scientific progress.

Iranian officials have blamed both Israel and the United States for the killing of Massoud Ali-Mohammadi, a Tehran University professor. Washington has dismissed the charges as “absurd”.

“The hands of the criminal who brought about this loss revealed and exposed the motives of the enemies of the Islamic Republic, which is to strike a blow at the scientific movement of the country,” Khamenei said in a message of condolence on the “martyrdom” of Ali-Mohammadi.

Khamenei expressed confidence that Iranian scientists, professors and researchers would “foil the villainous motives” of the enemies, reports the official IRNA news agency.

Iranian state media have said that Ali-Mohammadi was killed on Tuesday by a remote-controlled bomb strapped to a motorcycle near his home in northern Tehran.

The 50-year-old was a lecturer in nuclear energy. Iran’s Atomic Energy Organization has said that Ali-Mohammadi was not working for the organization.

Although his colleagues described him as non-political, both the Iranian government and the reformists claimed him as a supporter.

### **Amnesty International calls on Iran to free Baha’is on trial**

Amnesty International called on the Iranian authorities on Wednesday to release seven Baha’is who are being tried on charges that include spying for Israel.

The first court session for the five men and two women, who have been held for some 20 months, was held on Tuesday.

“The seven are prisoners of conscience, held solely on account of their beliefs or peaceful activities on behalf of the persecuted Baha’i community, and must be immediately and unconditionally set free,” said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui, deputy director of Amnesty International’s Middle East and North Africa program.

The defendants could face the death penalty if they are convicted of crimes, including “espionage for Israel” and “propaganda against the state”.

The Baha’i International Community has categorically denied the accusations and said that Tuesday’s hearing was marked by “numerous violations” of legal due process.

Amnesty International also noted that at least 13 other Baha’is have been arrested since anti-government protests on the Shiite holy day of Ashura on 27 December.

“The authorities are seeking to make the Baha’i minority scapegoats for the recent unrest, when there is no evidence that they were involved,” said Sahraoui.

The Baha’i faith prohibits its adherents from taking part in conflict and engaging in partisan political activities.

### **Iran launches new website on its nuclear program**

Iran’s Foreign Ministry on Wednesday launched a new website to cover the latest developments about the country’s nuclear program.

Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki officially launched the website in a ceremony held at the Foreign Ministry in Tehran.

The website includes a timeline of Iran's nuclear program, documents related to the program, a map of the country's nuclear facilities, an image gallery and a glossary of nuclear terms.

It also provides documents related to Iran's interactions with the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Speaking at the ceremony, Mottaki said that Iran would continue with its "legal right" to a peaceful nuclear energy program.

Western powers suspect Iran is using the guise of a civilian nuclear program to develop a nuclear weapons capability. Tehran denies the charge.

"If nuclear weapons are merely a means of destruction for humanity, which is so, and today, some of those who claim so were the first to use these weapons, they should be in no one's hands," Mottaki said, according to the semi-official ISNA news agency.

Mottaki stressed that Iran had adopted "a rational and transparent policy" to defend its nuclear rights and would continue to do so, reports the state-funded Press TV network.

## **EU says concerned by trials of Baha'is in Iran**

The Council of the European Union on Tuesday voiced "serious concern" about the trial of seven Baha'is in Iran.

The first court session for the five men and two women, who have been held for some 20 months, was held on Tuesday.

The EU said "the charges against them appear to be motivated by their belonging to a minority faith."

"The EU calls for a just, fair and open trial respecting all international standards and obligations," it said in a statement.

The seven Baha'is are accused of "spying for foreigners", "propaganda against the state" and "cooperating" with Israel, among other charges, according to the semi-official ISNA news agency.

The Baha'i International Community has categorically denied the accusations and said that Tuesday's hearing was marked by "numerous violations" of legal due process.

The 27-nation bloc reiterated its request to Iran to allow independent observation of the judicial proceedings, and called for "a just, fair and open trial".

The EU also noted that Iran is state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which guarantees the rights of freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

Iran denies that the seven defendants are on trial because of their faith.

The EU also expressed concern about the recent detention of 13 other Baha'is for their alleged involvement in anti-government protests.

“The EU calls on Iran to end the persecution of the Baha'i community and to release the detained individuals,” it said.

The Baha'i faith prohibits its adherents from taking part in conflict and engaging in partisan political activities.

### **Turkey PM calls for “just” stance on Iran nuclear dispute**

Turkey's Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Wednesday renewed his criticism of the West's approach towards Iran's nuclear program, saying Tehran was being treated unfairly.

The Turkish premier, who has repeatedly said his government is opposed to a nuclear-armed Iran, said that Israel, which is widely believed to possess nuclear weapons, should also face pressure to eliminate its nuclear arsenal.

“We do not want nuclear weapons in our region. But it would be unfair to ask one country not to obtain nuclear weapons while another country in the region already has them,” Erdogan was quoted as saying by the Turkish news website, Today's Zaman.

Speaking at Moscow State University during an official visit to Russia, Erdogan asserted that major powers must act “in a just manner”.

He also said that nuclear technology for peaceful and civilian purposes is a “sovereign right” for all countries.

“But we have told the Iranian authorities numerous times that we are against nuclear weapons,” he added.

Turkey, which has expanded its political and economic cooperation with Iran in recent years, has sought to help resolve the nuclear standoff.

“We have been telling all parties involved that there is no solution other than a peaceful resolution,” said Erdogan.

On Tuesday, Turkey's Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu called for greater diplomatic efforts to resolve the standoff, noting "an absence of mutual trust" in the current dialogue.

"We don't forget the very bad experience in Iraq. We would advise intensified negotiations through diplomacy," he told the London-based Guardian newspaper.

He also called on major powers to avoid imposing new sanctions against the Islamic Republic.

"Sanctions hurt ordinary people and neighboring countries," said Turkey's top diplomat.

### **Iran speaker accuses Obama of supporting terrorism**

Iran's parliament speaker, Ali Larijani, lashed out at US President Barack Obama on Wednesday over the killing in Tehran of a nuclear scientist, which he said was carried out by the US Central Intelligence Agency and Israel's Mossad.

Washington has rejected Iranian allegations of US involvement in Tuesday's bombing, which killed Tehran University professor Massoud Ali Mohammadi.

Larijani said that a U.S.-based pro-monarchy group had claimed responsibility for the attack, adding that it was controlled by the CIA.

"Maybe America's CIA and the Zionist regime thought that they can mislead us with this silly statement," he told lawmakers, according to the official IRNA news agency.

"We had received clear information a few days before [the bombing] that the intelligence service of the Zionist regime, with the cooperation of the CIA, were seeking to carry out terrorist acts in Tehran," he added.

In Washington on Tuesday, a US intelligence official said the CIA played no role in the bombing.

"Any suggestion that the CIA played a role here is flat wrong," the official told Reuters, on the condition of anonymity.

Larijani said that using such an "unidentified group" as a cover for the attack was a new "disgrace" for Obama, adding that it was a "black stain in the dossier of US crimes against the Iranian nation."

The group he was referring to, Takavaran Tondar, has denied responsibility for the attack and accused Iranian intelligence agents of carrying it out, reports AFP.

Larijani also questioned why the United States was "harboring" terrorists.



“Mr. Obama, one must feel a lot of pity for you, that with all those claims of humanitarianism and a change of policy, all that has remained is the same old war-mongering and past terrorist acts,” said Larijani.

He insisted that the scientist’s killing would have no impact on Iran’s nuclear program, vowing that Iran would protect its nuclear achievements.

Although his colleagues described him as non-political, both the Iranian government and the reformists claimed Mohammadi as a supporter.

Iran’s Atomic Energy Organization has said that Mohammadi was not working for the organization.

### **US envoy says time for new Iran sanctions drawing closer**

The US ambassador to the European Union said on Wednesday that the Obama administration’s offers of engagement toward Iran were not open-ended, warning Tehran that it may face new sanctions.

Speaking at a conference organized by the European Policy Centre think-tank in Brussels, Ambassador William Kennard said: “You’ll hear over the next six months a lot more about our efforts on sanctions” against Iran, according to AFP.

Kennard noted that President Barack Obama had offered “a new era of engagement” with the Islamic Republic.

However, Kennard said, “we also realize that having put some serious offers on the table” in order to have “a pathway to a diplomatic solution, those offers can’t be available for ever.”

“We can’t afford to let the situation fester,” he added.

In October, the United States and five major powers offered Iran a deal to send most of its low-enriched uranium abroad for conversion into fuel for a medical reactor in Tehran.

Iran has rejected the deal, which was brokered by the International Atomic Energy Agency, and has instead proposed revisions to the deal, including a simultaneous fuel swap in Iranian territory.

Representatives from the U.S., Britain, France, Germany, China and Russia will meet later this week to discuss possible new sanctions against Iran.

Tehran is already under three rounds of UN Security Council sanctions for refusing to suspend its uranium enrichment activities.

On Tuesday, Iran said that imposing new sanctions would not be “constructive”, and vowed to continue its nuclear program.

## **France calls on Iran to acquit French academic**

France said on Tuesday that it expects an Iranian court to acquit a French academic who is standing trial on charges related to the protests following June’s disputed presidential election.

Clotilde Reiss, who was arrested on 1 July and charged with “collecting information and encouraging rioters”, is due to attend her next court session on Saturday.

“We expect that her innocence will be recognized by Iranian justice and we want Clotilde Reiss to return to France as soon as possible,” said Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Bernard Valero, according to AFP.

Valero said he was certain that Reiss is innocent.

Reiss’s lawyer, Mohammad Ali Mahdavi-Sabet, said on Monday that he hoped the court hearing on Saturday will be the last.

Reiss was released on bail in August and is staying at the French embassy in Tehran, awaiting the outcome of her case.

The case has raised tensions between Paris and Tehran, already at odds over Iran’s nuclear program.

## **Iran’s Ebadi says seven Baha’is must be acquitted**

In an exclusive telephone interview with WashingtonTV on Tuesday, Shirin Ebadi, one of the lawyers defending the seven detained Baha’i leaders in Iran, whose first trial hearing took place today in Tehran, said that if “justice” were to prevail, the only verdict that could be reached over this case was one of “acquittal”.

“If justice is to be carried out and an impartial judge should investigate the charges leveled against my clients, the only verdict that could be reached is that of acquittal,” said Ebadi, in comments translated from the Persian.

But she went on to express regret about the Judiciary’s behavior. “Unfortunately, for some time now, the Judiciary has distanced itself from justice.”

Ebadi, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, also criticized the manner in which today’s hearing, which was the first session of the trial, was staged behind closed doors.

She said: “On the basis of the information given to me by the families of my clients, the first session of the trial began today and out of the four lawyers which the Centre for the Defense of Human Rights [established by Ebadi and other lawyers in Iran and currently closed by the authorities] had assigned to them – myself, Mr [Abdolfattah] Soltani, Mr [Hadi] Esma’ilzadeh and Ms [Mahnaz]Parakand – [the latter two], Mr Esma’ilzadeh and Ms Parakand took part in the hearing, but in spite of our request, it was announced that the hearing would be held behind closed doors and they even made the relatives leave the room.”

Ebadi explained that her clients have been convicted of “spying for America and Israel, acting against national security and [engaging in] propaganda against the [Islamic Republic’s] system”, adding: “I read the dossier and fortunately or unfortunately, found in it no cause or evidence to sustain the criminal charges upheld by the prosecutor.”

The Baha’i International Community has categorically denied the accusations and said that today’s trial in Tehran was marked by “numerous violations” of legal due process.

The defendants, Mr Behrouz Tavakkoli, Mr Saeed Rezai’i, Mrs Fariba Kamalabadi, Mr Vahid Tizfahm, Mr Jamaloddin Khanjani and Mr Afif Na’imi, were arrested in their homes in Tehran on 14 May 2008 and Mrs Mahvash Sabet was arrested on 5 March 2008 in northeastern city of Mashhad.

On the question of the postponement of the trial of the detainees, Ebadi said: “This case was set up wrongly from the start, that is, my clients should have been released immediately. This delay which has lasted up to now contravenes the laws of the Islamic Republic of Iran.”

Asked about the reasons behind increasing pressure brought to bear in recent months against the Baha’is, including scurrilous accusations against them made by hard-line Iranian media, Ebadi linked these to the protests across Iran following the disputed presidential election.

“The spontaneous popular street protests against the existing situation caused them [officials of the Islamic Republic] to link them to the outside. First, they said that Israel, America and Britain were the perpetrators. Then they said that it was the people who killed Neda [Aqa-soltan]. They then said that the people had themselves inflicted injuries and that the officials are innocent. They offered innumerable reasons – none of which were acceptable to public opinion in Iran and now, it is the turn of the Baha’is to be blamed for the protests and the Green Movement and to create a certain situation. But you know that none of these are correct,” Ebadi said.

She added: “If the people come out onto the streets, they come in order to declare their dissatisfaction with their situation and this is not connected with any faction or group.”

Regarding the difficulties she faced as a defense lawyer for the Baha'is on trial, Ebadi said: "When I and my colleagues accepted to act as their defense lawyers, they [detainees] had not been allowed to see their families for over a year. And for some time too, they were not allowed to meet with us. After a year and a half when the investigation ended, I and the rest of the lawyers were permitted to read the dossier and we met them on one occasion in prison."

In her interview with WashingtonTV, Ebadi also spoke about the situation of the Baha'is in Iran and criticized the fact that their rights as citizens were being denied to them.

"Unfortunately, Baha'is do not enjoy their rights as citizens. This includes the right to work in government offices; the right to obtain a permit to operate a business or the right to set up different educational establishments. Most important of all, from the start of the [Islamic] revolution up to now, they have not had the right to a university education."

## **US voices hope China will support Iran sanctions**

The United States voiced hope on Tuesday that China would back new sanctions against Iran over its nuclear program, after Beijing said the time was not right for such measures.

"At any particular time, a country might say this is a good idea, this is a bad idea. We are going to continue our discussions and we would expect to move forward with this in the coming weeks," US Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs Philip Crowley told reporters.

China's ambassador to the United Nations, Zhang Yesui, told reporters yesterday that it was too early to contemplate new sanctions against Iran, calling for "more time and patience" for diplomatic efforts.

"It's no secret that China and the United States look at the utility of sanctions differently," Crowley said, adding that the Obama administration was talking to countries about additional sanctions.

The United States and its allies have said they will push for new UN sanctions against Iran if it failed to address international concerns about its nuclear program.

China has long been opposed to imposing sanctions against Iran, its second biggest supplier of oil and a close ally.

Crowley said that the U.S. would continue to "make the case that while the door to engagement remains open, to the extent that we see recalcitrance on behalf of the Iranian government, that there will be a cost that Iran will pay."

Iran is already under three rounds of UN Security Council sanctions for refusing to suspend its uranium enrichment activities.

## Economic Front

### **Auto Prototype Unveiled**

According to MOJ news agency, deputy head of Iran's auto giant Saipa, Mohammad Saeed Fallahi, addressing the inaugural ceremony of this exhibition, said: "In our country, industry has been delegated with the responsibility of development, while Iran's auto industry is considered as a pioneering industry."

He underscored that auto industry plays a pivotal part in development and advancement of the country, while adding: "In the current year (March 2009-10) the national automakers have managed to produce 1.1 million vehicles and we have achieved an appropriate global status in this domain."

He considered the automaker's participation in exhibitions to be due to the auto giant's intention to realize the customers' demands so that the new products would also be manufactured and supplied based on the customers' needs.

He reminded that Fars Province has accommodated 6% of the country's population, while 8% of Saipa products are sold in this province. In fact, he said, Fars Province ranks 4th nationwide in relation to sales of this auto giant's products.

### **Moscow Hails Tehran's Stand on GECF**

Sergei Shmatko made the remark in his meeting with visiting Iran's Deputy Oil Minister in the international affairs Hossein Noqrekar-Shirazi.

The Russian minister said his country is willing to review certain joint projects in order to promote bilateral cooperation in the field of energy.

Meanwhile, Noqrekar-Shirazi said Tehran is keen on deepening energy cooperation with Moscow.

He added that international, regional and bilateral cooperation between the two countries in energy field would be fostered by setting a "road map" for it.

Iran's deputy oil minister accompanied by a delegation left for Russia Tuesday on an invitation of the Russian side for a two-day official visit.

## **Non-Exports Satisfactory**

Meanwhile, according to ISNA, in this period imports have settled at over \$32.4b; constituting 72% of the country's overall foreign exchanges in the said period.

Meanwhile, given the announced tallies by the National Customs Office, Iran's foreign trade balance has faced a \$19.7b deficit through March-November 2009.

Furthermore, through the said period, out of Iran's 198 trade partners; the national foreign trade balance has been negative with 111 countries, and positive with 87 countries (without consideration of the oil, natural gas, and service sectors).

Iran's highest positive foreign trade balance through the said period has been with Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Azerbaijan Republic, and Indonesia, respectively totaling \$2.5b, \$599.2m, \$207.2m, \$104.7m, and \$100.6m.

Moreover, Iran's highest negative foreign trade balance in the said duration has been with United Arab Emirates, Germany, South Korea, Switzerland, and England, respectively settling at -\$6.7b; -\$2.9b, -\$1.7b, -\$1.4b, and -\$1.1b.

## **Water and Sewage Co. Glitters in Festival**

Moreover, the head of this company's Public Relations Department, Gholam-Hussein Pourmohammadi, who had taken part in the festival of the superior public relations departments of rural and urban water and sewage companies, was ranked first in the domain of research and opinion polls, and held the second spot in the realm of publications.

## **IKCO to Make 300,000 Economy Engines Per Year**

"Following the strategy of reducing fuel consumption, IKCO will allocate 50 percent of its production capacity to low consumption engines in the next year," said IKCO Deputy Chief Executive (CEO) for Powertrain, Ali Sheikhzadeh.

"Producing this number of low consumption engines can be considered a leap forward in enjoying the EF7 and TU5 engines on IKCO products," he added.

Sheikhzadeh says the launch of an economy engine production line with the capacity of 1,000 units a day will lead IKCO toward the goal of replacing high consumption engines with those with lower consumption rates

## **Iran Inks Investment Agreement With 67 Countries**

Head of Organization for Investment Economic and Technical Assistance of Iran (OIETAI), Dr. Behrouz Alishiri said that enforcement of the agreements is a sample of the governments' guaranty in support of the investors in this regard.

He said the organization is sure that the projects have more benefit for investors, adding, "We should obtain eight percent interests during the Fifth Development Plan and we could gain more benefits through the method."

"The government is limited on the basis of the total policies of the Article 44, and we should produce the economic growth through private sectors," Alishiri reiterated.

He said that the private sector in the country has limited capabilities in this field and the foreign investors could help economy growth in this regard.

### **\$20b Invested in Gas, Oil**

In an interview with IRNA in Moscow, Hossein Noqrekar Shirazi said the investment in the oil and gas sectors is predicted to reach 30 billion dollars when the calendar year ends.

Iranian private sector and foreign entities invested 66 billion dollars in the oil and gas sectors during the first term in office of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad from 2005-2009.

"Presently, 600 million cubic meters of natural gas and four million barrels of oil are produced daily in Iran," the official said, adding Iran is producing 44 million liters of gasoline a day.

### **WTO Endorses Iran Commercial Regime**

"We are waiting the introduction of the negotiating workgroup with Islamic Republic of Iran," he said.

He added: "Following the specification of the workgroup we hold bilateral negotiations with other countries and after attainment of the necessary agreements we can reach a consensus on WTO membership. Meanwhile, this process may take up to almost seven years."

He noted: "We should reach a stage in which our country would not be a location for production of foreign items, and competitive development in production of goods and render of services would take shape."

In an interview with Fars news agency, the minister of commerce further pointed out that: "We intend to lower the volume of imports; and to prevent the import of substandard items. On this basis, the imports in the current year (March 2009-10) have dropped by \$5b."

He underscored: "To prevent the entry of low-quality products, the Standard Institute, Ministries of Industries and Mines; and Health should cooperate with the Ministry of Commerce, and should enlist substandard items and use computer programs that the Ministry of Commerce possesses, to prevent the entry of such items."

He also referred to the economic overhaul plan, underscoring: “This plan, especially the targeted subsidies act will widely assist the clarification of the latent costs in the economy, and will facilitate and ease the management of hidden costs.”

## **Asia, Europe Firms Finance Iran LNG**

Managing-director of Natural Gas Liquefaction Company Ali Kheir-Andish said the rainy day kitty was tapped for 900 million dollars while Iranian banks were joining two Asian and European companies to provide 200 million euros for the project.

He told the Mehr news agency that the project has so far absorbed more than 700 million dollars.

Each phase of Iran LNG project is expected to produce 10.5 million tons of liquefied gas annually. Iran LNG is predicted to ship out its first consignment to world markets by 2012.

## **Guardian Council Approves Subsidy Bill**

The body's spokesman Abbas-Ali Kadkhodaei said the bill complies with Islamic laws and the Iranian constitution.

Iran's Parliament (Majlis) ratified the bill proposed by the government after making some amendments.

The 'Economic Reform Plan' has won an approval from the 243-seat Parliament, with 134 lawmakers allowing the government to establish a reform subsidy organization to enforce the plan.

The legislation will result in the distribution of a portion of the recovered revenue among low-income groups.

The government of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad believes it will save up to 30 percent of the annual budget by lifting subsidies on fuel and some food items.<sup>3</sup>

## **1m Houses Under Construction**

He said his Ministry has provided the required land for construction of houses and municipalities will construct 420,000 residential units for Iranian people.

"The owners of 150,000 out of 200,000 residential units have received financial facilities," Nikzad added.

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<sup>3</sup> /www.irannewsdaily.com



He said, "6,000 contractors are active in the country. We won't have housing problems if every contractor constructs 100 houses."

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development said that the government is seeking to boost housing market because 20 percent of the of job opportunities belongs to the housing part.

## **Sanctions Can't Affect FDI**

Behrouz Alishiri, quoted by IRNA, said the sanctions "represent a government's behavior" and they cannot affect foreign private financiers' decision to invest in another country.

However, he said, sanctions and restrictions can disturb transfer of money and technology.

"If a private entity sees low risk in investment in Iran, it will choose Iran," said Alishiri, also head of the Investment, Technical and Economic Aids Organization.

The official boasted a 200-million-dollar growth in foreign investment in the current calendar year to March compared with last year. He said more than 1.7 billion dollars have been invested in Iran this year.

Alishiri said he expected the foreign investment record would be smashed this year when a foreign investment databank is established and active projects are finalized.

## **Soren Sedan Enters Turkish Market**

IKCO entered the Turkish market in 2007 by first bringing Samand LX passenger cars into the country and then the Samand's EL model. Speaking to the Anatolia news agency yesterday, Yigit Seskir, general director of MYS Automotive, the Turkey distributor for IKCO, said both of the Samand models were well received by Turkish customers and that this high demand led them to also import the Soren.

Both the Soren EL and LX models were introduced in Turkey in the first week of the year, he said. The EL, which is outfitted with an airbag, ABS and air-conditioning, sells for TL 20,990, while the LX model is equipped with double airbags, steel rims, fog lights and parking sensors in addition to the features offered on the EL. It is priced at TL 23,990.

"We entered the Turkish market with the motto 'Good-quality low-priced automobiles' and saw the anticipated demand for Samand. In line with this, we are introducing another car of very high quality at an affordable price," Seskir said.

Another IKCO automobile, the Runna, will also be imported to Turkey, Seskir stated.

## **Target-Oriented Subsidy Plan "Bare Necessity for Development"**

Hosseini who is visiting Khuzestan Province along with President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and the rest of his cabinet members in president's 5th round of provincial tours in 4 years, added, "The plan has got the approval of the Guardians Council and is no longer a bill, but a law, capable of materializing the country's basic needs."

Expressing satisfaction and delight over the final ratification of the bill and its gaining of the Guardian Council's approval seal, he added, "We must take advantage of the facilities and the other resources at our disposal both effectively and while observing justice."

Hosseini added, "How can we yield to the prevailing situation when the development budget of a township like Abadan is below 500 billion rials (over 50mn US dollars), but its health problems here can be solved with a few billion rials, on average?"

The minister emphasized, "The Goal orientation of subsidies law pursues that objective precisely and openly, and is seeking to make use of entire resources."

He reiterated, "The government has acted quite precisely and based on very accurate technical surveys, and now we have at our disposal a law that is also the fruit of close and long interactions between the cabinet and the Majlis."

Hosseini added, "Fine methods have been devised for smooth application of this law."

"In line with the implementation of this law, there is support packages at hand aimed at assisting various sectors, which would be applied in accordance with the affected alterations in the original plan at the parliament."

## **Iran Bans Kinnow Import From Pakistan**

The ban was slapped on last month by the Iranian government when they did not issue import permit of kinnow to local importers, which was described as a major setback by the leading fruit exporters of the country. It may cause irreparable damage to country's fruit export during the current season.

Iran imported around 55,000 tons of kinnow from Pakistan out of a total export of 150,000 tons, which constitutes 33 percent manifesting to a substantial figure.

Describing the emerging situation as catastrophic, fruit exporters demanded of the government to take immediate notice of the expected sharp decline in the kinnow export target, which was set around 200,000 tons for the current year by the exporters in view of the bumper crop of more than 2 million tons.

## **Iran to Invest \$440m in Tyre Factory**

According to a report in the Tehran Times, the goal ultimate goal is for Iran to become self-sufficient in terms of tyre production.

Ezzatollah Zarei Hanzaki, the IDRO deputy for industrial investments, was quoted as saying the project will produce "100,000 tons of tyres for various vehicles" annually. Hanzaki said share in the plant would be split 51:49 between IDRO and Kordestan Tire Company, Moj News Agency reported.

Iran reportedly consumes 300,000 tons a year, while only 200,000 of tyres are produced in the country. With demand projected to reach 480,000 by the end of 2014 the thinking behind the new factory is clear.

According to the reports, the new plant will be built 30 kilometers away from Sanandaj on the road there and Hamedan. The plant is expected to create 850 jobs.

## **Azerbaijan to Supply Gas to Iran Until April**

The contract signed by Azerbaijan's State Oil Company and its Iranian counterpart "stipulates supplies until April 1, 2010," Rovnag Abdullayev said, adding that another, long-term contract currently being prepared.

"Until then, Azerbaijan will reconstruct its gas compressing station in Astara (on Iranian border) and the Gadjibul-Astara pipeline. After that we will be able to supply Iran with three to five million cubic meters of gas daily," Abdullayev told reporters.

By 2011, Azerbaijan may be producing up to 1.5 billion cubic meters of gas, which would provide all its neighbours' needs, Abdullayev said. Rich in oil and gas and strategically located between Russia and Iran, Azerbaijan has been courted by both Moscow and the West since independence following the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union.

"Azerbaijan's existing Iran-bound gas pipelines and compressor station in Astara do not allow transporting more gas to Iran now. This year we plan to invest \$125 million to reconstruct and upgrade Hajigabul-Astara line and compressor station in Astara", said Abdullayev. He noted that after reconstruction of Azerbaijan's existing infrastructure by the autumn of this year the country will be able transport 3 to 5 million cubic meters of gas per day to Iran.

Backed by Western governments, companies such as Britain's BP have invested heavily in its energy sector, building a corridor of oil and gas pipelines from Azerbaijan through Georgia and Turkey to Europe.

### **Iran, Implantology Society Hold 1st Conference**

Secretary of Iran's Implantology Society Rohollah Nowrouzi said that the meeting was organized as a formal inauguration of the Society and to determine the board of directors.

"More than 1,000 implantologists and dentists are active in Iran," Nowrouzi added.

He said that the main duty of the Society is to evaluate the performance of Iranian implantologists.

The International Team for Implantology (ITI) has approved the Implantology Society of Iran and the society will offer necessary standards and modern technologies in this field

### **Iran, Middle East's top producer of wide steel plates**

The Moj News Agency reported that the company, which is the largest manufacturer of wide steel plates in the region and one of the ten holding this technology in the world, set a new record by manufacturing this product.

The wide plates made in this factory are unique in quality are used in making huge pipes, ships and steel tanks.

Khuzestan Oxin Steel Company uses state-of-the-art mechanical and automatic machinery for its production.

The main duty of the company is to produce various kinds of steel plates with different thicknesses and high strengths.

Operations in the factory include direct reduction, melting and wide slab casting and producing wide plates.

Among the 20 largest steel producers of the world only Iran, China and India have not been affected by the global economic crisis and Iran ranks first in terms of growth.

The Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting reported that according to statistics released by the World Steel Association the meltdown has caused steel production in 17 countries to be reduced.

Crude steel production in the nine month period ending December 21 reached 7.8 million tons, showing a 4 percent growth compared to the same period the year before.

The report added that the total exports of crude steel and steel products in this period hit 825,583 tons worth \$358 million, which is 71 percent more in terms of weight compared to the year before.

### **Oman FM Discusses...**

Alawi and Manouchehr Mottaki met on Tuesday and the latter called for greater momentum in completing joint economic ventures between the two Persian Gulf neighbors.

Mottaki said Iran's potential in expanding road and railways and ports could help foster economic cooperation.

The Omani official said the sultanate is keen on boosting trade with Iran, particularly in the industrial, construction and gas sectors.

He described Iran as a "strategic bridge" that connects the Persian Gulf to Central Asia, and said that Muscat was eager to use its relations with the Islamic Republic to open effective trade collaboration ties with regional states.

The two men also discussed developments in Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq and Afghanistan.

### **Yemen**

### **Crisis**

At a press conference Wednesday, Mottaki and Alawi said that Yemen should return to talks to end the bloody conflict with Shiite fighters that has complicated efforts to combat Al-Qaeda in the troubled Arab country.

Yemen, the Arab world's poorest nation, came to the foreground of US-led efforts to battle militancy after a Yemen-based wing of Al-Qaeda said it was behind a failed Dec. 25 plot to bomb a US-bound airliner.

The government of President Ali Abdullah Saleh is also embroiled in a war with rebels of the Shiite Zaidi sect in northern provinces and faces a separatist movement in the south.

"We emphasized the necessity of adopting a solution to end the crisis. If it continues, it will bring not only instability for Yemen but (negatively) affect the whole region,"

Mottaki told reporters.

### **Negotiated**

### **Settlement**

"We insist on finding a solution to the crisis in Yemen, a solution that is based on negotiations," he said.

Placed strategically on the peninsula's southern rim, Yemen has shrinking oil reserves and faces a water crisis. Its population of 23 million is expected to double in the next 20 years.

Oman, a neighbor of Yemen, maintains close ties with Iran.

"We are prepared to support the Yemeni government in any way possible to find a solution to resolve security concerns there," Alawi said in the comments carried on Presstv.

## **Taiwan places firm on watch list following sales to Iran**

Taiwan has placed a local firm on a watch list after it sold specialized equipment to Iran, an official in Taiwan said on Wednesday, according to AFP.

“The company is on an observation list, which means it must obtain prior export permits, after it imported 108 pressure sensors from Europe and sold them to Iran in March 2008,” said an official at the Bureau of Foreign Trade.

The official, who declined to identify the company, stressed that the equipment was neither high-tech nor restricted, rejecting media reports that it could be used in the production of weapons-grade uranium.

Pressure sensors can measure altitudes and are therefore used in aircraft and rockets, according to AFP.

The Bureau of Foreign Trade launched an investigation last month due in part to a report in Britain’s Daily Telegraph newspaper, which said Iran had sought to acquire parts for its nuclear program from Taiwan.

Citing unnamed Western intelligence officials, the daily reported last month that Iran has been trying to acquire the equipment for more than a year, but has come across resistance by European and even Chinese companies.

UN officials are investigating whether the European companies are undertaking proper checks of end-user certificates for their equipment, said the daily.

## **Living Index Upbeat**

The Islamic Republic of Iran is the Middle East’s 7th best country to live, according to the 2010 Quality of Life Index, published by travel magazine International Living. Among the world’s 194 and Middle East’s 11 countries, Iran has been ranked 150th and 7th best country to live in 2010, according to the report. France topped the poll for the fifth consecutive year, followed by Australia, Switzerland, and Germany. The US lost four positions to end at seventh. Sweden has been dubbed as the costliest country in the world to live by the index. Jordan, Kuwait, Syria, Qatar, Egypt, UAE, Iran, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Yemen are Middle East’s top ten countries in terms of living index. The index, published for the 30th year, ranks 194 nations in nine categories: cost of

living, culture and leisure, economy, environment, freedom, health, infrastructure, safety and risk, and climate.

## **Azeri Gas on the Map**

Along with the traditional markets of gas sale such as Georgia and Turkey, this year Azerbaijan starts supplying gas to new markets--Russia and Iran. Next week Azerbaijan and Iran are expected to sign a long-term five-year contract, with a possibility to prolong the supply of Azerbaijani gas to the country. However, the representatives of the Iranian side say Tehran is ready to acquire up to five billion cubic meters of Azerbaijani gas per year, reported Trend News Agency.

### **Production**

According to data provided by British Petroleum, in 2008 the gas production in Iran made up 116.3 billion cubic meters of gas, while consumption comprised 117 billion cubic meters. Azerbaijani gas will be delivered to the northern regions of the country that are far from major gas fields. In 2010, Azerbaijan will transport about 1.1 billion cubic meters of gas to Russia. This volume more than twice exceeds the earlier figure which was predicted at 500 million cubic meters. This gas will be delivered to supply the southern regions of Russia. Increasing the supply of Azerbaijani gas to Russia and starting gas supplies to Iran firstly should strengthen the processes in Turkey and the EU, which see Azerbaijan as one of the major countries for energy security. For a long time, Azerbaijan and Turkey have been continuing negotiations to conclude a transit agreement, which is necessary for the gas export to the EU. However, despite that over 10 rounds of negotiations have been held, no practical results have been achieved. Availability of free gas volumes allows Azerbaijan to enter new markets such as Russia and Iran. And the absence of a transit agreement with Turkey makes it difficult to transport Azerbaijani gas to the European countries. Because of the lack of concrete results in the negotiations with Turkey, Azerbaijan more often raises the issue of alternative routes of gas supplies to Europe. For example, it is considered to establish gas compress terminal on the Black Sea Kulevi terminal (owned by SOCAR) and its further transportation by ship to Romania or Bulgaria and onward to the European pipeline system.

**China** Factor  
In addition, a question was raised about the possible export of Azerbaijani gas to one of the largest developing markets in the world--China. Implementation of this project is possible by getting connected to the Kazakhstan-China pipeline. The gas demand in China began to increase sharply from mid 1990 of the last century. In 1995, gas consumption was only 17.7 billion cubic meters. According to BP, in the beginning of 2009, the gas demand in the country reached 80.7 billion cubic meters, which is 15.8 percent higher than consumed in 2007.

The share of gas demand in China in 2008 made up 2.7 percent of the total global demand.

Thus, the delay in making a decision on a transit agreement for the transportation of Azerbaijani gas via Turkey not only increases the attractiveness of alternative routes for the transportation of gas to Europe, but also other directions of export. Important role in this regard is also played by the processes around the South Corridor pipeline routes, which are supposed to deliver Caspian gas to Europe. The absence of concrete decisions and actions to implement projects to deliver gas from the Caspian region leads to the fact that suppliers are looking for new markets, which today are ready to purchase fuel. As for Azerbaijan, if formerly the focus on the beginning of the export of Azerbaijani gas was made on the second stage of the development of Shah Deniz field, which will be commissioned after 2014, today Azerbaijan already has free export gas volumes. The unresolved issues with the transit of gas through Turkey and the lack of concrete actions of investors to create new export pipeline routes can lead to the fact that if not the entire volume of Caspian gas intended for export to Europe, its small part will be redirected to other markets which are willing to accept and pay for gas right now. Azerbaijan and Iran are connected via the Gazi-Magomed-Astara-Bind-Biand gas pipeline length 1,474.5 kilometers, including 296.5 kilometers in the territory of Azerbaijan.

Its design capacity was 10 billion cubic meters a year, now it is lower. This route is a branch of the Gazakh-Astara-Iran pipeline commissioned in 1971. Three compressor stations, including in Gazi-Magomed, Aghdash and Gazakh, were built on its route. The transmission system is designed to pressure 55 atmospheres. The pipe's diameter is 1200 mm. Modernization of the infrastructure will allow the delivery of about 5 millions of Azerbaijani gas to Iran. Now the infrastructure allows the delivery of about 500 million cubic meters of gas per year.

## **IOC Paying in Euro for Imports**

State-run Indian Oil Corp (IOC) has introduced a clause in its latest crude buy tender, shifting away from US dollar in favor of the euro in paying for imports through Iranian vessels, oil sources said.

“In the event of IOC using an Iranian vessel, then payment for the cargo will be made in euros by telegraphic transfer without recourse to letter of credit, as per normal trade credit period of 30 days after bill of lading date,” a trade source, who has received the tender document, told Reuters.

IOC meets one to two percent of its vessel requirements through Iranian ships, another source said.

The source, who did not wish to be identified as he was not authorized to speak to the media, said IOC usually made payments in dollars for crude cargoes shipped in Iranian vessels and details of the vessels revealed to US bankers.

“Somehow IOC was managing it so far but a risk is always there that payments in dollars might get blocked if crude is imported in Iranian flag carrier,” he said, adding that was



why the new clause to pay in the euro was being introduced. In its latest tender IOC ought sweet barrels for March lifting. The tender closes on Tuesday and bids remain valid until Wednesday. IOC makes spot purchases of crude on free on board basis.

## **2009 Economic Projects at \$313b**

The value of Iran's economic projects has increased remarkably in 2009. Iran's planned and operational economic projects in 2009 stood at \$313 billion, as against \$27 billion in 2008, the Middle East Business Intelligence (MEED) reported. While the global crisis greatly overshadowed the Persian Gulf's Arab states in 2009, Iranian projects witnessed a 9.5-percent growth. According to the report, the value of projects stood at \$286 billion early 2009, but the figure increased to \$313 billion by the end of the year. Among the six Arab states in the southern part of Persian Gulf, only Bahrain and Qatar have registered growth in their projects and the rest witnessed declines in the value of their economic projects. The value of planned and operational projects in UAE in 2009 witnessed a 21-percent fall at \$967 billion. In Saudi Arabia, the projects reached \$616 billion, showing a 0.3-percent fall.

In Kuwait and Oman, projects declined by 11 and 2 percent and stood at \$268 billion and \$104 billion, respectively. The value of economic projects in Bahrain and Qatar increased by 5 and 3 percent in 2009 with a net worth of \$67 billion and \$229 billion, respectively. Total value of projects in the six countries decreased from \$2,548 billion in early 2009 to \$2,257 billion in late 2009, which shows an 11-percent fall.

## Social Front

### **Sixteen to Be Tied Over Recent Unrests**

The Tehran Prosecutor's office said in a statement that one of the defendants could be charged with being "mohareb" (enemy of God)- a crime punishable by execution.

The fifteen suspects were charged with "conspiring against national security and carrying out acts against the establishment," the statement added, press tv reported.

The office said that the indictments had been based on police reports, investigations, and the explicit testimonies of the suspects.

Meantime, the statement did not identify the suspects or specify the dates of their trials.

On December 27, anti-government protesters in Tehran took advantage of the Ashoura mourning ceremonies to chant slogans against high-ranking Iranian officials.

### **Iran cancels performances of British troupe at Fajr festival**

Iran has cancelled the performances of a British play on Friday.

“Grand Inquisitor” was to be staged by veteran British stage director Peter Brook at the 28th Fajr International Theater Festival, which will take place in Tehran from January 22 to 31.

“Inviting Peter Brook to stage ‘Grand Inquisitor’ produced extremely divergent reactions. Some have declared they won’t tolerate performances of his troupe in Iran,” the Public Relations of the festival announced in a press release.

Last week, the Iranian Majlis asked its National Security and Foreign Policy Committee to consider a proposal to reduce the level of relations with Britain.

The Iranian government has accused Britain of involvement in Iran’s post-election unrest.

In addition, Vice President Hamdi Baqaii, who is also the director of Iran's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization, threatened to cut cultural ties with Britain if the British Museum does not fulfill its obligation to loan the Cyrus Cylinder to Iran for an exhibit.

## 26 Movies at Fajr Fest

Twenty-six films will compete in the Iranian Films Section of the 28th Fajr International Film Festival.

Bahram Bahramian's 'Aal', Azizollah Hamidnejad's 'Anahita', Ebrahim Hatamikia's 'In the Color of Purple', Mohammad-Ali Basheh-Ahangar's 'The Wakefulness of Dreams', Bahram Tavakkoli's 'Walking in Fog', Ali Shah-Hatami's 'The Ducks Flying' and Rambod Javan's 'Adam's Son, Eve's Daughter' are among the films, Mehr News Agency wrote.

Masoud Keramati's 'My Little Song', Tahmineh Milani's 'Reckoning', Alireza Raisian's 'Age Forty', Poursan Derakhshandeh's 'The Continuous Dreams', and Ebrahim Foruzesh's 'The First Stone', Shahram Asadi's 'The Fateful Night' and Parviz Sheikh-Tadi's 'The Hunter of Saturday' will be screened in the section. Additional films slated to be shown are Hamed Kolahdari's 'Hot Chocolate', Masoud Atyabi's 'The Morning of the Seventh Day', Bijan Mirbaqeri's 'Third Floor', Homayoun As'adian's 'Gold and Copper', Dariush Mehrjouei and Mehdi Karampour's 'Tehran, Tehran' and Mojtaba Raei's 'The Evening of the Tenth Day'. The lineup also includes Hassan Fathi's 'Punishment', Abbas Rafei's 'The Earth and the Philosophers' Stone', Shahriar Bahrani's 'The Kingdom of Solomon', Ahmad Kaveri's 'Infiltrator', Alireza Amini's 'Seven Minutes to Autumn' and Dariush Farhang's 'A True Report'.

The festival will be held from January 25 to February 4.

## Qanoun Maestro Passes Away

Veteran Iranian musician and Qanoun maestro Simin Aqarazi passed away at the age of 71 in Tehran.

Aqarazi was one of the first female Qanoun players in the country who had a great role in promoting the traditional instrument.

Qanoun is a string instrument similar to Zither, which is mostly used in traditional Eastern music.

According to Presstv, Aqarazi collaborated with many acclaimed musicians including the late musician and composer Rouhollah Khaleqi and celebrated film score composer Majid Entezami.

## **Houston to Let in Light of Sufis**

The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston plans to open an exhibit on mystical Sufi and Islamic arts to explore some of its facets through the lenses of artists. 'Light of the Sufis: The Mystical Arts of Islam' is the first exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston to be devoted to Sufism, whose followers seek a mystical union with God, Presstv reported. Light of the Sufis focuses on some of the most important Sufi ideas and practices that found expression through the arts of the Islamic world, beginning with light, which symbolizes both God and enlightenment. "We are pleased to further the Museum's efforts to explore and interpret art created in the Islamic world, and Light of the Sufis will introduce the general public to Sufism and to the beautiful works of art inspired by its ideas," said Dr. Peter C. Marzio, MFAH director.

The expanded Houston presentation will include some fifty works which are drawn from public and private collections, and will incorporate additional contemporary pieces. Light of the Sufis: The Mystical Arts of Islam is scheduled to open at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas, on May 16, 2010. The exhibit was previously on display at the Brooklyn Museum, where it was organized by the Hagop Kevorkian Curator of Islamic Art, Ladan Akbarnia, in the summer of 2009.

## **Persian Art Sparkles at Istanbul Palace**

If you've always been interested in Persian history a visit to Istanbul might be a good backup choice. Through Feb. 5, the museum at the city's Topkapi Palace--former home of the Ottoman sultans--is hosting 'Ten Thousand Years of Iran's Civilization and Two Thousand Years of Joint Heritage', an exhibition featuring some 150 objects from the National Museum of Iran, as well as pieces from Turkish museums, New York Times reported.

Although once imperial rivals, Turkey and Iran have been at peace for hundreds of years and, more recently, have been rapidly improving their political and trade relations. The two countries share both a long border and a long history, something which the exhibition--which, helpfully, has English descriptions--tries to highlight. Many of the items exhibited come from the collection of the Topkapi Palace Museum itself, including several intricate Persian rugs and wall hangings and beautiful illuminated Qur'ans. But the more interesting items in the compact exhibition come from the National Museum of Iran's collection of prehistoric artifacts. Many of these objects, most of them dating back to the beginning of the first millennium B.C., display an almost breathtaking level of elegance and artistic sophistication, from a small bronze sculpture of a bull that is set on wheels to delicate human-shaped clay vessels and gold chalices that have intricate animal motifs engraved on them. The show is housed in the palace's former stables, which, despite the sound of it, are actually quite refined. The sultans' horses lived grandly, it would appear, and their former home makes a fine exhibition hall.

## **Norway Caricature Condemned**

Foreign Ministry spokesman, Ramin Mehmanparast condemned the publishing of a defamatory caricature of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in a Norwegian newspaper. “Such illogical moves are against religious values, divine religions, the international code of conduct, human rights declaration and freedom of speech,” IRNA quoted him as saying in Tehran on Wednesday. “Hurting the feelings of 1.5 billion Muslims under the pretext of freedom of speech is neither logical nor justifiable,” he said. “Such blasphemous measures which aroused Muslim fury in the past will not help promote understanding among nations,” the spokesman added. The Norwegian government is responsible for promoting such provocative acts, he complained.

The cartoons published on January 8 in the Oslo newspaper Aftenposten, were a replay of the insulting caricatures of the Prophet of Islam published in September 2005 in the Danish daily Jyllands-Posten. The cartoons led to angry protests by Muslims over the world and boycott of Danish products in many Muslim countries.

## **Iran to try 16 over protests on Ashura**

Iran will soon put on trial 16 people arrested in connection with anti-government protests on the Shiite holy day of Ashura last month, the semi-official ISNA news agency reported on Friday.

The report, which did not identify the detainees who are to be put on trial, said one would face the charge of “moharebeh”, or waging war against God, which carries the death sentence.

The others were accused of “assembling and colluding against security” and “propaganda activities against the state”, ISNA said, citing a statement from the Tehran public and revolution court.

All of the accused are currently in prison and the trial will begin soon at the Tehran Revolution Court,” the statement read.

At least eight people were killed and hundreds wounded during clashes between security forces and demonstrators on Ashura on 27 December.

Iranian law enforcement forces arrested more than 500 people during the protests, some 300 of whom are still being held.

It was the most serious violence since the massive protests that followed June’s disputed presidential election.

## **Iran court upholds death by stoning verdict for two Azeris**

A court in Iran's West Azarbaijan Province has upheld the sentence of death by stoning for two Azeri Iranians, the Human Rights Activists News Agency reported on Friday.

The two defendants, identified as Sarimeh Ebadi, 30, and Booali Janfeshani, 32, were convicted of adultery, the report said.

Both are said to be currently behind bars in the northwestern city of Orumieyh.

According to the report, an appeals court upheld the sentence on 6 January.

Under Iran's Islamic law, adultery is punishable by stoning, despite a 2002 directive by then-Judiciary chief, Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi-Shahrudi, imposing a moratorium on the punishment.

But since then, at least five people in Iran have been stoned to death, as the directive has no legal weight and judges are free to ignore it, according to Amnesty International.

Under Iranian law, men sentenced to death by stoning are buried up to their waists and women up to their chests. The public then throws stones – not big enough to kill the person immediately – at the convicted.

The United Nations and international rights groups have called on Tehran to abolish the sentence, saying it violates Iran's obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which forbids cruel and inhumane punishment.

## **Iranian director to show film about protests at Venice festival**

Iranian film director Hana Makhmalbaf will preview her film about the protests that followed Iran's disputed presidential election, at the Venice Film Festival, organizers said on Monday.

The film, entitled "Green Days", will screen outside of the competition at the film festival, which runs from 2 to 12 September.

"The footage is already in Italy and the young director is finishing the editing and post-production at a secret location," thereby avoiding strict Iranian censorship, a festival spokesperson told AFP.

In the film, the "camera works like a mirror to show you Iranian society undergoing a revolution with all its hopes and doubts," the director said in a statement, according to the entertainment trade magazine, Variety.

According to AFP, the film uses a mix of raw footage from the protests and fictional sequences about the position of women in Iran.

Hana Makhmalbaf is the 21-year-old daughter of renowned Iranian film director Mohsen Makhmalbaf.

Her first feature-length film, a documentary titled “Joy of Madness”, was screened at the 2003 Venice Film Festival when she was 15 years old.

In 2008, she won the Crystal Bear award at the Berlin Film Festival for her film “Buddha Collapsed out of Shame.”

Sources: Agence France-Presse, Variety magazine website, Makhmalbaf Film House website

### **Iran police chief says SMS, e-mails under control**

Iran’s police chief warned protesters on Friday not to use text messages and e-mails to organize anti-government rallies, saying those who do so will be punished.

Esmail Ahmadi-Moqaddam, commander of the Law Enforcement Force, said that those who called on the population to participate in “illegal” demonstrations would not get any concessions by the security forces.

Iran’s tech-savvy and mostly young pro-reform supporters have used the Internet and SMS text messaging to organize demonstrations since the disputed presidential election in June.

“These people must also know where they are sending the SMS from or where the e-mails are being sent from, as these systems are completely under [our] control,” Ahmadi-Moqaddam was quoted as saying by the semi-official ISNA news agency.

“They should not assume that using anti-proxies ... will prevent their identification. That is wishful thinking,” he added.

Speaking on the sidelines of a meeting in Tehran of counter-narcotics police officers, the police chief said that those who continue to use cell phones and e-mails in service of the pro-reform movement would be punished.

“Those involved in organizing or issuing calls have committed a worse crime than those who come to the streets and break the law,” Ahmadi-Moqaddam said.

Following violent clashes between security forces and protesters on the Shiite holy day of Ashura on 27 December, the police chief warned demonstrators to stay off the streets or face harsh consequences.

Despite such warnings, street protests have continued sporadically in the six months following the disputed presidential election.

## **Iran's Mousavi sacked from post at arts academy**

Iranian opposition leader Mir Hossein Mousavi has been stripped of his post as president of Iran's Academy of Arts, local media reported on Tuesday.

The semi-official ISNA and Fars news agencies said that the government's Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution voted to remove Mousavi, who came second in June's disputed presidential election, from the post.

Mousavi had headed the academy ever since its establishment in 1999.

In November, the council, which is chaired by Iran's president, voted to change its law to allow the government to appoint the academy's president.

The council appointed Ali Moallem Damghani as the new president of the Academy of Arts, ISNA said.

Mousavi has come under increasing pressure from government officials, including supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, over his continued protests against the government.

Mousavi and fellow opposition leader, Mehdi Karroubi, allege that the 12 June vote was rigged.

Despite scores of arrests and security crackdowns, opposition protests have repeatedly flared up since the vote.

## **Iran election named top Twitter topic in 2009**

Iran's disputed presidential election was the most popular topic of 2009 on the micro-blogging service, Twitter, it said on Tuesday.

"Twitter users found the Iranian elections the most engaging topic of the year," Twitter said in a blog post, according to AFP.

The service, which lets users broadcast news in short text messages using computers or mobile telephones, was a primary communications tool by protesters following the 12 June election.

As the Iranian government imposed greater restrictions on the media following the election, Twitter and other social networking sites, such as Facebook, became popular tools for Iranians to spread messages, photos and videos of the post-election protests.

Highlighting the importance of the service, the US State Department in June asked Twitter to delay scheduled maintenance that would have cut its service in Iran.



Twitter “helped us understand what was happening around the world, showing us that people everywhere can be united in concern,” Twitter’s chief scientist, Abdur Chowdhury, said on Wednesday, according to the Toronto Star.

### **Car of Iran pro-reform leader hit by gunfire – website**

The armored car of one of Iran’s pro-reform leaders, Mehdi Karroubi, was hit by gunfire in the northwestern city of Qazvin, the official website of his Etemad-e Melli party said on Friday.

Karroubi, who was in the city to attend a mourning ceremony for slain protesters, was in the car at the time, but was not hurt.

The Sahamnews website said that some 500 members of the Basij militia and residents of nearby villages surrounded the building where Karroubi was and attacked it with stones, breaking windows.

The attackers chanted slogans in support of the government and the supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the report added.

They also chanted, “Death to Karroubi”, “Come out, hypocrite”, and other insults, and demanded he leave the city.

After four hours, security forces intervened to get Karroubi out of the building, which was the home of a former reformist lawmaker.

As his car was leaving, it was attacked and hit by gunfire, the website said, adding that only the windows were damaged.

There was no immediate word from the authorities on the incident.

Last week, a car carrying Karroubi also was attacked, as he was leaving a mosque in eastern Tehran.

Karroubi, a reformist cleric, ran in June’s presidential election, which reformists say was rigged.

Karroubi, who came fourth in the June poll, angered the government when he alleged that a number of prisoners arrested after the election were mistreated or sexually assaulted.

### **Rights group slams arrests of women’s rights activists in Iran**

The International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran on Tuesday condemned the widespread arrests of women’s rights activists and female journalists in Iran, and called for their immediate release.

“It is evident that the authorities are singling out women’s rights activists and arbitrarily arresting them, as well as female journalists, in the context of recent public demonstrations,” said Aaron Rhodes, a spokesperson for the New York-based Campaign.

The human rights group noted that other women have been jailed, some apparently based on their links with political and civil society activists.

It pointed to the arrest on 28 December of Nooshin Ebadi, the sister of Nobel Peace Prize laureate and human rights lawyer, Shirin Ebadi.

The Campaign said that the arrest was aimed at intimidating and silencing Shirin Ebadi, who has been critical of the Iranian government’s crackdown on protests since June’s disputed presidential election.

“The arrest of Shirin Ebadi’s sister is an act of hostage-taking by the state and should be strongly condemned by the international community,” said Rhodes.

The Campaign said that some activists have been threatened with execution, while others have disappeared, with no official record of their arrest or whereabouts.

On Wednesday, the pro-reform website, Rahesabz, said that Iran has arrested more than 180 people in recent days, following anti-government protests on 27 December.

The website named 92 people detained, including 17 journalists and members of the Baha’i faith. Another 94 unnamed students have also been arrested, mostly in the city of Mashhad, it said.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, whose disputed re-election has triggered numerous protests since the 12 June vote, has accused the United States, Britain and Israel of staging the latest anti-government demonstrations.

### **Transfer of capital will help ease Tehran’s problems: Larijani**

Transferring the political center from Tehran is aimed at easing the problems facing the city, Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani said during a television program aired Wednesday night.

The remarks by Larijani came as the oversight Guardian Council has opposed a parliamentary approval to allocate money from the Foreign Exchange Fund to finance metro projects in Tehran and other metropolises in the country.

The bill has been handed over to the Expediency Council which overrules the Guardian Council to resolve the issue.

Larijani said a huge expansion of Tehran over the past 30 years due to the growth of urban sprawls is a serious issue that should be stopped, Larijani said.

He called for the development of public transportation system as he said Tehran citizens spend many hours in traffic jams.

He went on to say the proposal to transfer the capital from Tehran to another city was discussed and approved by the Expediency Council.

However, he said the project would take a long time as transferring a political center is not an easy job

### **Iran threatens to cut cultural ties with Britain over Cyrus Cylinder loan**

Iran's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization (CHTHO) director, who is also a vice president, said on Thursday that Iran would cut cultural ties with Britain if they cannot come to an agreement with the British Museum concerning the Cyrus Cylinder loan.

“We are currently talking to them about the issue and if the discussions produce the outcome that Britain doesn't want to fulfill the previous agreement, undoubtedly, we will cut cultural ties with Britain due to our previous ultimatum,” Hamid Baqaii told the Persian service of IRNA.

Iran has been waiting to receive the Cyrus Cylinder on loan from the British Museum since 2005 after the National Museum of Iran loaned the British Museum a number of artifacts for the “Forgotten Empire: The World of Ancient Persia” show in London.

The cylinder was to put on display in an exhibition at the National Museum of Iran on January 16, but officials at the British Museum said last week that would be a delay in sending the artifact.

They said that the decision to postpone sending the artifact to Iran was made due to a recent discovery of two cuneiform tablets in BM's collection of Babylonian art, which contain passages with remarkable similarities to those found on the cylinder.

But Iranian government sees political reasons for the delay as it occurs in the wake of turmoil following Iran's disputed presidential election.

“If we catch the Britain killing time in sending the Cyrus Cylinder, we will inform the

world that Britain is forcing cultural issues into the political arena,” Baqaii noted.

“At present, the cultural and academic centers of Britain and CHTHO are collaborating, but on this matter, they need to cooperate with us,” he said.

Considered the world’s first declaration of human rights, the Cyrus Cylinder is a document issued by the Persian emperor Cyrus the Great in the form of a clay cylinder inscribed in Akkadian cuneiform script.

The cylinder was created following the Persian conquest of Babylon in 539 BC, when Cyrus overthrew the Babylonian king Nabonidus and replaced him as ruler, ending the Neo-Babylonian Empire.

The text of the cylinder denounces Nabonidus as impious and portrays the victorious Cyrus as pleasing to the chief Babylonian god Marduk.

It goes on to describe how Cyrus had improved the lives of the citizens of Babylonia, repatriated displaced peoples and restored temples and cult sanctuaries.

The cylinder was discovered in 1879 by the Assyro-British archaeologist Hormuz Rassam in the foundations of the Esagila, the main temple of Babylon. Today, it is kept in the British Museum in London.