

Business and politics in Muslim world

Weekly report on Iran

Report # 103

16th January 2010 to 23 January 2010

Presentation Date: 27th January 2010

M Rashid

Political Front

- **Summary.....6**
- **Iran ‘Fully Supports’ Lebanon Unity.....**
- **Reiss Verdict Due in Tehran.....21**
- **Over Half Karzai New Cabinet Picks Vetoed.....21**
- **MOTTAKI: Iran Suffers From Afghan Instability.....23**
- **Commander Stresses Iran Readiness to Confront Various Threat.....23**
- **RUSSIA: We Are Considering Iran Nuclear Offer.....24**
- **Iran-Bound Plane Slides Off Runway in Sweden.....24**
- **Russia, Iran Strengthen Gas Ties.....24**

- **Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan Sign MoU.....25**
- **MOUSA VI: Enemies Behind Scientist's Assassination.....25**
- **MP Highlights Iranian Jews Religious Freedom.....25**
- **Islamabad Keen to Host Second Iran-Pakistan-Afghanistan26**
- **Chief Justice Warns Against Destructive Measures.....26**
- **National Satellite to Be Unveiled on Revolution Anniver.....27**
- **Lebanon, Iran to Coordinate in UNSC.....27**
- **No Agreement on Iran Sanctions.....28**
- **Ahmadinejad Urges Islamic World's Vigilance Against Enemies25**
- **Moscow Won't Sacrifice Iran for U.S. Ties.....29**
- **Pakistan, Iran to Strengthen Parliamentary Ties.....29**
- **Judiciary Chief Urges Vigilance against Enemies' Plot.....29**
- **Persian Gulf Conference to Kick off Today.....30**
- **Iran-Turkey Ministers Stress Expansion of Ties.....30**
- **FM Spokesman: Failure of 5+1 Meeting Natural.....31**

- **Iran Will Not Host OIC Games.....32**
- **Mottaki: Foreign Powers Seek to Dominate Persian Gulf33**
- **China Urges Flexibility on Iran, Downplays Sanctions..... 34**
- **Larijani: Iran Proud of Supporting Hamas and Hezbollah..... 35**
- **Foreign Powers Have Focused on Persian Gulf.....36**
- **Supreme Leader Calls for Transparency, Cautions Against DoubleStandards.....36**
- **France Using Trial of Iranian for Pressure.....37**
- **Global Development Plan Destructs Environment38**
- **S. African Parliament Speaker to Visit Iran.....38**
- **Mottaki: Israel Responsible for Fate of Iranian Diplomats.....39**
- **Georgia Regrets Delivering Iranian National to US.....39**
- **Spokesman Urges Reconsideration of Ties with London.....40**
- **IPU Should Help Alleviate Sufferings of Muslims.....42**
- **Ahmadinejad Slams NATO for Exploiting on Regional Countries.....43**
- **Commander Dismisses Efficiency of Separation Wall in Gaza.....44**
- **Iran’s Humanitarian Aid Arrives in Haiti.....44**
- **Iran threatens to hit Western warships if attacked.....45**

- **Iran’s view of Green Movement affects its nuclear talks calculus, says scholar.....45**

- **Iran allows Russian jet to continue journey to Bahrain.....47**

- **Sources: Iran ordered attack on Israeli convoy in Jordan.....47**

- **Tehran urges France to free Iranian wanted by US.....48**

- **Iran slams inaction over fate of four kidnapped diplomats.....48**

- **US intel agencies suspect Iran never halted nuclear arms work.....49**

- **Iran police say public tip-offs led to 40 arrests over protests.....50**

- **Israel, Germany warn Iran of new sanctions.....50**

- **China calls for “flexibility” on Iran nuclear standoff.....51**

- **Iran urges “realistic” approach by West on nuclear row.....51**

- **Merkel Supports Israel Against Iran.....52**

- **Team Meets on WWII Reparations.....53**

- **Mashaei Outlines “Survival Strategy”.....54**
- **Iran's Khatami lashes out at Ahmadinejad, defends protesters.....54**
- **Iran warns of artificial islands’ environmental impact on Persian Gulf.....55**
- **Mottaki calls Iran, S. Arabia two key countries in Islamic world.....57**
- **Iran, Iraq border sheriffs meet.....58**
- **Iran to take controversial symphony to Europe despite objections.....58**
- **Why Is Israel Threatening Iran.....59**
- **America Has Stopped Meddling in Iran’s Domestic Affairs.....60**
- **Iran and Turkey Are Not Regional Competitors.....60**
- **Goods and Bads of anti-Iran Sanctions for China.....62**
- **Iran Supports a Powerful Government.....63**
- **Iran Determines Its Own Destiny.....64**

Economic Front

- **Gasoline Rationing May Be Scrapped.....66**
- **Sanctions Unravel.....66**
- **Hand-Woven Carpet Exports Hit \$340m.....66**
- **Iran Exports 400,000 Tons of Diesel to Iraq.....67**
- **Iran to Launch Overseas Trade Center in Oman.....67**
- **Privatization Restricted.....67**
- **Uzbekistan Seeks More Cooperation With Iran.....68**
- **Charter Tickets Refundable.....68**
- **Iran Announces Self-Sufficiency in Naval Industries.....69**

- **Iran, Libya to Set up Economic, Political Committees69**
- **Tehran-Tashkent Trade to Total \$1b.....70**
- **Iran, Tanzania Ink Agreement on Economic Cooperation.....70**
- **Exports to China Up by 40%.....71**
- **Caviar Production Up 12 pc.....71**
- **Iran, U.S. Trade Exchange Down 61%.....72**
- **Free Zone Projects Launched.....72**
- **Some Foreign Fruits Import Banned.....72**
- **Int'l Confab on Strategic Management.....73**

- **Iran Can Export Turkmen Gas To Europe.....74**

- **Goodbye to Subsidies.....74**

- **Preferential Tariffs With Uzbekistan.....76**

- **Investors Eye Renewable Energies.....76**

- **Mineral Exports Exceed \$3b.....77**

- **Iran Holds HOFEX & MEDEX 2010.....78**
- **Italy Ready to Construct Railway.....78**
- **Iran Ready to Finance 40% of Turkey's Van Railway.....78**
- **Iran, Uzbekistan Ink MoU to Boost Ties.....79**
- **Tech for Production of Alpha Alumina Available.....79**
- **Tehran, Tashkent to Establish Commerce Chamber.....79**
- **Tehran, Berlin in 1b Euro Deal.....80**
- **Talks Underway for Gas Exports to Iraq.....80**
- **Oil Workers Unhappy with Pay.....81**
- **Of Azeri Gas & Diversity.....81**

- **Renewable Energy Plants on Agenda.....82**

- **Sanctions Futile.....83**

- **Exports From Bazargan Customs Increase.....83**

Social Front

- **Futurism Seminar Opens Tomorrow.....85**
- **More Battleships Going To Gulf of Aden.....85**
- **Media Key to Fight on "Soft War".....86**
- **AHMADINEJAD: Ethnic Hijab, Source of Honor.....86**
- **Minister Scheduled to Attend Istanbul Festivity.....87**
- **Rioters Equipped.....87**
- **University of Tehran Restoring Ferdowsi Statue.....87**
- **Bushehr Hosts Fajr Festival.....88**
- **Police Seize Large Amounts of Drugs.....89**
- **Iran arrests four suspects in prosecutor's killing.....89**
- **Iran police say public tip-offs led to 40 arrests over protests.....90**
- **Lawmaker slams Iran media control, praises US-funded broadcasters....90**
- **Trial Opens Into Ashura Violence.....92**
- **Drug Traffickers Kill 3 Policemen.....93**
- **Quake Rocks Northwest Iran.....94**

Summary

Political Front

Reiss Verdict Due in Tehran

The lawyer for French academic Clotilde Reiss yesterday expressed confidence she would be acquitted after she appeared in a Tehran court on charges of acting against Iranian national security at anti-government protests in June.

Over Half Karzai New Cabinet Picks Vetoed

The Afghan parliament rejected over half of President Hamid Karzai's second slate of cabinet nominees on Saturday, including two out of three women, dealing him a second major political blow in as many weeks.

Iran Suffers From Afghan Instability

Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki has underscored that Iran has always suffered from insecurity and instability in neighboring countries, especially Afghanistan, while noting that Islamic Republic of Iran welcomes any measure to dispel these instabilities.

Commander Stresses Iran Readiness to Confront Various Threats

A senior commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) underlined that the Iranian nation is fully prepared to confront enemies' plots against the Islamic state.

RUSSIA: We Are Considering Iran Nuclear Offer

Russia says Iran's proposal is under consideration, as time runs out for Moscow, Paris or Washington to accept Tehran's conditions on a nuclear fuel deal.

Iran-Bound Plane Slides Off Runway in Sweden

A Swedish airport official says an Iran Air-owned Airbus carrying 149 passengers has glided off the runway in Stockholm, sliding out into the snow.

Russia, Iran Strengthen Gas Ties

Officials from Gazprom and Iran's Petroleum Ministry have held talks concerning current and potential joint projects for developing the South Pars gas and condensate field in the Persian Gulf.

Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan Sign MoU

Foreign ministers of Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in Islamabad as they wrapped up their meeting on regional issues

Enemies Behind Scientist's Assassination

Former presidential candidate Mir-Hossein Mousavi says Iran's enemies are behind the assassination of Iranian nuclear scientist Masoud Ali-Mohammadi.

MP Highlights Iranian Jews Religious Freedom

Representative of the Jewish minority in the Parliament Siyamak Marre Sedq said Iran is the only country in the world where Jews enjoy full freedom to carry out their social, cultural and ritual activities.

Islamabad Keen to Host Second Iran-Pakistan-Afghanistan Summit

Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi has expressed his country's willingness to host a second tripartite summit of the Iranian, Pakistani and Afghan presidents.

Chief Justice Warns Against Destructive Measures

Judiciary Chief Ayatollah Sadeq Larijani has said that national interests call for avoidance of destructive measures that lead to content of the enemies of the sacred Islamic establishment.

Iran ‘Fully Supports’ Lebanon Unity

Iranian Vice President Mohammad Reza Tajeddini said his government fully supports the “unity and independence” of Lebanon during a visit to Beirut on Saturday, the Lebanese president’s office said.

National Satellite to Be Unveiled on Revolution Anniversary

Iran is poised to launch a new generation of homegrown satellites when the country marks the anniversary of the 1979 Islamic revolution in February, an official charged with coordinating official ceremonies said.

Lebanon, Iran to Coordinate in UNSC

Lebanese President Michel Suleiman on Saturday told visiting Iranian Vice President Mohammed Reza Tajeddini that Lebanon and Iran should coordinate their stances in the UN Security Council, the country's state-run National News Agency reported.

No Agreement on Iran Sanctions

Diplomats from six key powers focused on possible new sanctions against Iran over its nuclear program at a meeting Saturday, but reached no agreement.

Ahmadinejad Urges Islamic World's Vigilance Against Enemies

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad says enemies are trying to create disunity among Muslims in order to dominate the region.

"Moscow Won't Sacrifice Iran for U.S. Ties

Iran's Ambassador to Moscow says it is unlikely for the Kremlin to give up its friendly ties with Tehran in order to establish closer relations with Washington.

Pakistan, Iran to Strengthen Parliamentary Ties

The Pakistani Deputy Chairman Senate, Jan Muhammad Khan Jamali, has said that approval has already been accorded by the Senate for the formation of friendship groups in the Upper House of the Parliament. Pak-Iran Friendship Group in the Upper House of the Parliament will be established soon.

Judiciary Chief Urges Vigilance against Enemies' Plots

Iran's Judiciary Chief Ayatollah Sadeq Larijani has stressed that the Iranian nation's vigilance can defuse the plots hatched by the country's enemies.

Persian Gulf Conference to Kick off Today

The Foreign Ministry is scheduled to hold the 19th international conference on the Persian Gulf here in Tehran today.

Iran-Turkey Ministers Stress Expansion of Ties

Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Seyed Mohammad Hosseini and his Turkey's counterpart Ertugrul Gunay underlined expansion of cultural ties between the two countries on Saturday.

FM Spokesman: Failure of 5+1 Meeting Natural

Spokesman for the Foreign Ministry Ramin Mihman-Parast says the failure of 5+1 meeting which took place in New York was only natural.

Iran Will Not Host OIC Games

In an extraordinary session of the Islamic Solidarity Games Federation (ISSF), Iran lost its right to host the 2nd Islamic Solidarity Games scheduled for April.

Mottaki: Foreign Powers Seek to Dominate Persian Gulf

Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki yesterday accused foreign powers of seeking to take control of the Persian Gulf.

China Urges Flexibility on Iran, Downplays Sanctions

China urged other powers on Tuesday to show more flexibility in dealing with Iran's disputed nuclear program, playing down prospects of sanctions after six countries met to discuss the standoff.

Larijani: Iran Proud of Supporting Hamas and Hezbollah

Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani said yesterday that Iran is proud of standing besides Hamas and Hezbollah and that those who kept silence or helped the Zionist regime must be ashamed.

Foreign Powers Have Focused on Persian Gulf

Minister of Defense General Ahmad Vahidi has said that the Persian Gulf region has always been focused upon due to its sensitive position.

Supreme Leader Calls for Transparency, Cautions Against Double-Standards

Supreme Leader of Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei here yesterday called on the Iranian nation at large and the Islamic Revolution loyalists in particular to clarify stances and avoid double-standards.

France Using Trial of Iranian for Pressure

Paris is seeking to pressure Iran with the trial of an Iranian electrical engineering student, Iran's Foreign Ministry official said yesterday.

Global Development Plan Destructs Environment

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has noted that the current global development plan destructs and ruins the environment.

S. African Parliament Speaker to Visit Iran

South African Parliament Speaker Hon Max Vuyisile Sisulu is due to pay a visit to Iran this week, an advisor to Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani announced yesterday.

Mottaki: Israel Responsible for Fate of Iranian Diplomats

The Islamic Republic takes the Zionist regime of Israel responsible for the fate of the four Iranian diplomats abducted in Lebanon in 1982, Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki said yesterday.

Georgia Regrets Delivering Iranian National to US

Visiting Georgian foreign minister has begged Iran's pardon for delivering an Iranian citizen to United States last year.

Spokesman Urges Reconsideration of Ties with London

Foreign Ministry spokesman Ramin Mihman-Parast says Tehran believes that reconsideration of bilateral ties with London is necessary.

IPU Should Help Alleviate Sufferings of Muslims

Secretary General of Inter-Parliamentary Union of the Islamic States Mahmud Erol Kilic has conferred with Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani on ways to expand parliamentary cooperation among the Islamic nations.

Ahmadinejad Slams NATO for Exploiting on Regional Countries

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said here Monday that NATO tramples upon all regional countries for its own interest.

Commander Dismisses Efficiency of Separation Wall in Gaza

A senior commander said on Monday that Israel's intention for constructing a wall of separation in the bordering areas with Gaza is already a failed plan, and blasted Egypt for picking up a role in the implementation of the plan.

Iran's Humanitarian Aid Arrives in Haiti

A planeload of 30 tons of humanitarian aid, including food stuff, tents and medicines landed in a Haiti airport yesterday morning, an official from Iran's Red Crescent Society told IRNA.

Iran threatens to hit Western warships if attacked

Iran's Defense Minister Ahmad Vahidi said on Tuesday that Tehran could strike Western warships stationed in the Persian Gulf if it were attacked over its nuclear program.

Iran's view of Green Movement affects its nuclear talks calculus, says scholar

The Iranian government's apprehension about the Green Movement, which it regards as a serious opposition force, influences its decision-making in nuclear talks with the West, said Dr. Patrick Clawson, an Iran expert at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, on 14 January in Washington.

Iran allows Russian jet to continue journey to Bahrain

Iran has issued permission for a Russia fighter jet to overfly its territory en route to an international air show in Bahrain, after the plane was barred from entering Iran's air space earlier on Tuesday.

Sources: Iran ordered attack on Israeli convoy in Jordan

An attack last week on an Israeli diplomatic convoy in Jordan was apparently carried out on instructions from Iran, the Jerusalem Post reported on Tuesday, citing sources close to Jordan's General Intelligence Department.

Tehran urges France to free Iranian wanted by US

Iran on Tuesday called on France to release an Iranian engineer facing extradition to the United States for allegedly violating the US trade embargo on Iran.

Iran slams inaction over fate of four kidnapped diplomats

Iran's Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki on Monday criticized international organizations, including the United Nations, for their inaction to determine the fate of four Iranian diplomats who were kidnapped in Lebanon in 1982.

US intel agencies suspect Iran never halted nuclear arms work

US intelligence agencies now suspect that Iran never halted work on its nuclear arms program, as stated in a much disputed 2007 US intelligence assessment, the Washington Times reported on Tuesday.

Iran police say public tip-offs led to 40 arrests over protests

Iranian police say more than 40 people have been arrested on the basis of tip-offs from the public, after police circulated photographs of demonstrators at an anti-government protest last month, the Iran Labor News Agency reported on Tuesday.

Israel, Germany warn Iran of new sanctions

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and German Chancellor Angela Merkel warned Iran on Monday of new sanctions over its nuclear ambitions, following talks in Berlin.

China calls for “flexibility” on Iran nuclear standoff

China on Tuesday called for more “flexibility” in the standoff over Iran’s nuclear program, playing down prospects of new sanctions against Tehran.

Iran urges “realistic” approach by West on nuclear row

Iran on Tuesday urged major powers to adopt a “realistic” approach on the issue of Tehran’s nuclear program, after they failed to decide on new sanctions against Iran.

Merkel Supports Israel Against Iran

German Chancellor Angela Merkel said her country will back tougher sanctions against Iran if it doesn’t change its tune on its nuclear program.

Team Meets on WWII Reparations

A special task force assigned by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad started deliberations on accounting the losses inflicted on Iran during the Second World War.

Mashaei Outlines “Survival Strategy”

The belief in maintaining “unbreakable bonds” between its legitimacy and popularity is the key to the survival of the Islamic Republic, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s top advisor and chief of staff said Sunday.

Iran's Khatami lashes out at Ahmadinejad, defends protesters

Tehran: Reformist ex-President Mohammad Khatami defended opposition protesters and accused Iran's leadership of "lying" to the people, his website reported today.

Iran warns of artificial islands' environmental impact on Persian Gulf

Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki has criticized the construction of artificial islands in the Persian Gulf.

Mottaki calls Iran, S. Arabia two key countries in Islamic world

Border guards from 11 border districts attended the meeting.

The commander of Iran's border sheriffs, brigadier Hossein Zolfaghari, stated that the meeting falls within the previous border agreement signed between the two neighbors.

Iran to take controversial symphony to Europe despite objections

The Tehran Symphony Orchestra (TSO) will perform the Peace and Friendship Symphony in five European countries despite objections by a number of prominent Iranian musicians.

Why Is Israel Threatening Iran

Since the start of the row over Iran's nuclear program in the early years of the new millennium, Israel has kept flexing muscles towards Iran, threatening it with air raids on nuclear facilities. My personal reading says that Israel is possibly following these goals in all its bold intimidations:

America Has Stopped Meddling in Iran's Domestic Affairs

Senior American officials stress that Obama is not following a regime change policy vis-à-vis Iran, but is committed to a dual-track approach, that is continuing negotiations in order to find a solution to the dispute over Iran's nuclear program. Increasing economic pressures are deemed as an alternative if the negotiations fail to end in the desired result.

Goods and Bads of anti-Iran Sanctions for China

China keeps insisting that it is not the right time for further sanctions against Iran and there is still room for diplomacy. Meanwhile, Five plus One's first meeting to discuss Iran's nuclear program has ended in failure, which many attribute to Beijing's stance.

Iran Determines Its Own Destiny

Inside Israel, more than few influential political centers believe that the time has come for West to step up pressure on Iran. Along with the expiration of U.S.-set deadline, and entering 2010 –called the defining year in Iran's nuclear case, Iran's post-election turmoil have given foreign countries an opportunity to take

advantage of the situation. Aware of Iran's volatile situation, Israeli media have heated up their demonization campaign, trying to turn 2010 into a year of tough measures against our country.

Economic Front

Gasoline Rationing May Be Scrapped

Member of the Parliament's Planning and Budget Committee, Mohammad Hussein Farhangi, has said that with implementation of the subsidy reform bill in the year 1389 (March 2010-11), gasoline will not be supplied based on Persian Gulf FOB price, and probably with revocation of gasoline rationing, gasoline will sell at Rls.4,000 per liter, at free-market rate.

Sanctions Unravel

Economic sanctions without full international support against Iran can never pay off, a senior economic official said yesterday.

Hand-Woven Carpet Exports Hit \$340m

Internationally accredited hand-woven Persian carpets have earned the country up to 340 million dollars in the first three quarters of the year to March, the National Carpet Center has reported.

Iran Exports 400,000 Tons of Diesel to Iraq

Iran has exported 400,000 tons of gas oil (diesel) to Iraq since the beginning of the Iranian calendar year on March 21, 2009.

Iran to Launch Overseas Trade Center in Oman

Iran is expected to launch its second trade center in overseas markets by February, says an Iranian economic official.

Privatization Restricted

Head of the Privatization Organization, Gholam-Reza Heydari Kord-e Zanganeh has said given that currently state-run companies' stocks cannot be traded in foreign stock markets, the privatization process is underway in a closed circuit.

Uzbekistan Seeks More Cooperation With Iran

Uzbekistan's deputy prime minister said Saturday his country attaches great importance to upgrading its trade relations with Iran.

Charter Tickets Refundable

Spokesman for Civil Aviation Organization Reza Jafarzadeh said yesterday charter flight tickets could be refunded.

Iran Announces Self-Sufficiency in Naval Industries

A senior commander has praised the country's progress in manufacturing advanced naval tools and equipments, and announced that the Islamic Republic's Navy is no more dependant on foreign states for supplying its military needs.

Iran, Libya to Set up Economic, Political Committees

Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki said on Friday that Iran and Libya were setting up economic and political committees to promote bilateral ties.

Tehran-Tashkent Trade to Total \$1b

Minister of Commerce Mahdi Ghazanfari has said hopefully the volume of transactions between Iran and Uzbekistan will soar from \$600m in 2009 to \$1b in 2010.

Iran, Tanzania Ink Agreement on Economic Cooperation

Iranian and Tanzanian officials endorsed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on economic cooperation in the fields of fishery, cement production and processing industry

Exports to China Up by 40%

The volume of Iran's exports to China has witnessed a 40% increase during the last 9 months, a trade official announced yesterday.

Caviar Production Up 12 pc

Production of caviar in the Gilan province's process centers has increased up to 122 kg in the current Iranian year (started March 21), an official of the center Eshagh Sha'bani said.

Iran, U.S. Trade Exchange Down 61%

Official figures from United States Consensus Office reveal a 61% fall in trade interactions between Iran and the US in November, 2009, to \$46.1

Free Zone Projects Launched

Vice-President, Hamid Baqai, has launched into operation a number of projects in Arvand Free Zone.

Some Foreign Fruits Import Banned

The Iranian agricultural officials put a ban on the import of some fruits in an attempt to support domestic products, Ali Raja'e, the head of Parliament's Agriculture Committee, told Mehr News Agency yesterday in Kerman.

Int'l Confab on Strategic Management

The 4th International Conference on Strategic Management was held on Saturday in Tehran with Iranian and foreign experts in attendance.

Iran Can Export Turkmen Gas To Europe

Iran can export Turkmenistan's natural gas to Europe, said Executive Director of Iran's Narkangan Gas to Liquid International (NGTLIC) and head of the International Institute for Caspian Studies, Narsi Gorban in an interview with Trend Capital.

Goodbye to Subsidies

Everybody acknowledges that Iran's \$50 billion subsidy program cannot continue forever, but many don't believe the time to undo past excesses is now.

This week, the bill to reform the vast subsidy program became law and President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's government is getting ready to take the lead, Mrzine.com reported.

Preferential Tariffs With Uzbekistan

Iran and Uzbekistan plan to extend preferential tariffs to 270 goods in the near future from 27 goods at present.

Investors Eye Renewable Energies

The number of foreign investors interested in Iran's renewable energies has increased in recent years, said managing director of the Renewable Energy Organization.

Mineral Exports Exceed \$3b

Mineral exports exceeded \$3 billion in the first 8 months of the current Iranian year (started March 20, 2009), said Industries and Mines Ministry.

Iran Holds HOFEX & MEDEX 2010

Iran's 19th International Exhibition of Home and Office Furniture, Decoration and Interior Design (HOFEX & MEDEX 2010) will be held from January 31 to February 4 in Tehran's International Fairground.

Italy Ready to Construct Railway

An Italian company has voiced its interest to lay out a 320-km railway linking the central city of Isfahan to the city of Azna in a neighboring province.

Iran Ready to Finance 40% of Turkey's Van Railway

Iran Railways Director General for International Affairs said that the Islamic Republic of Iran is ready to finance 40 percent of Turkey's Van railway.

Iran, Uzbekistan Ink MoU to Boost Ties

Iranian and Uzbek officials inked a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on issues of mutual interests here on late Monday.

Tech for Production of Alpha Alumina Available

Experts of the Iran's Jajarm Aluminum Factory, northeastern Iran gained technology for production of alumina alpha in the country.

Tehran, Tashkent to Establish Commerce Chamber

Iran and Uzbekistan have agreed to establish a joint chamber of commerce in a bid to promote the volume of investments and commercial relations between the two nations

Tehran, Berlin in 1b Euro Deal

Iran and Germany have cut a one-billion-euro deal for exploring natural gas in the Islamic Republic, manager of Gas Engineering and Development Company Ali-Reza Gharibi said yesterday.

Talks Underway for Gas Exports to Iraq

Deputy Head of National Iranian Gas Company, Mostafa Kashkouli, says negotiations are under way with Iraq for export of Iran's natural gas to the neighboring country.

Oil Workers Unhappy with Pay

A deputy oil minister has warned that Iran's oil sector personnel may move out of the country due to their low salary to seek better life abroad.

Of Azeri Gas & Diversity

Iran has finalized an agreement with Azerbaijan to import as much as 17.6 billion cubic feet of natural gas per year.

Reza Kasaeizadeh, managing director of National Iranian Gas Export Company, said the deal for gas imports from Baku has been finalized.

Renewable Energy Plants on Agenda

OPEC member Iran plans to develop new renewable energy power plants over the next five years with capacity totaling 2,000 megawatts (MW) to meet energy demand, said deputy minister for electricity.

Sanctions Futile

Head of Chamber of Commerce, Industries and Mines Mohammad Nahavandian said on Sunday that the illegal sanctions on Iran have had no impact on the performance of the national economy.

Exports From Bazargan Customs Increase

Exports via Bazargan Customs Office with 38 percent growth have reached over 29,000 tons.

Director general of Bazargan Customs Office said the goods worth \$21.639 million have been exported by 1,600 trucks, IRIB wrote.

Social Front

Futurism Seminar Opens Tomorrow

Iran's Futurism Association is holding its three-day Iran Future Seminar in Tehran beginning tomorrow, the association chief said yesterday

Quake Rocks Northwest Iran

A tremor measuring 4.3 on the Richter scale shook the vicinity of the town of Khalkhal in Ardebil province, northwest of Iran early yesterday.

Media Key to Fight on "Soft War"

A senior Culture Ministry official has stressed the need for Iranian media to become acquainted with 'soft war' techniques adopted by the West against Muslim nations

AHMADINEJAD: Ethnic Hijab, Source of Honor

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has said that the hijab observed by ethnic groups has always been a source of honor and pride, while calling on officials to establish dozens of fashion design courses throughout important nationwide universities, and to form a headquarters for revival and promotion of Iranian hijab.

Minister Scheduled to Attend Istanbul Festivity

Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Mohammad Hussein, has arrived in Turkey to take part in the festivity marking selection of Istanbul as the cultural capital of Europe in the year 2010.

Rioters Equipped

Tehran Police Chief General Azizollah Rajabzadeh has claimed the rioters arrested for defiling the Ashura religious observances, were fully equipped with rucksacks, arrows and bows.

University of Tehran Restoring Ferdowsi Statue

After about 70 years, the metal statue of Ferdowsi is undergoing restoration at the University of Tehran. A gift from the Parsee and Zoroastrian communities of India, the statue was erected at Ferdowsi Square on October 1, 1945.

Bushehr Hosts Fajr Festival

Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance has set out the main features of this year's Fajr Festival

Police Seize Large Amounts of Drugs

Police have seized 120.82 kg of illicit drugs in four operations in the country's southern province of Hormozgan, a provincial police commander announced yesterday

Iran arrests four suspects in prosecutor's killing

Iran has arrested four people over the assassination of a prosecutor in the northwestern town of Khoy, in West Azerbaijan Province.

Iran police say public tip-offs led to 40 arrests over protests

Iranian police say more than 40 people have been arrested on the basis of tip-offs from the public, after police circulated photographs of demonstrators at an anti-government protest last month, the Iran Labor News Agency reported on Tuesday.

Lawmaker slams Iran media control, praises US-funded broadcasters

US Congressman Robert Wexler today condemned Iran's suppression of press freedom and stressed the "indispensable" role of US government international broadcasters in soft power outreach.

Trial Opens Into Ashura Violence

One of the suspects arrested during the December 27 unrests in Tehran has confessed to regular and systematic collaboration with the banned Mujahedeen Khalq Organization (MKO).

Drug Traffickers Kill 3 Policemen

Three traffic police officers were killed by drug smugglers on the Zahedan-Khash roadway in southeastern Sistan-Baluchestan province.

More Battleships Going To Gulf of Aden

Commander of the First Naval Zone said the Navy will deploy a fifth fleet of battleships to the Gulf of Aden later this month to help protect Iranian cargo vessels and oil tankers from Somali pirates.

Detailed Report

Political Front

Reiss Verdict Due in Tehran

Lawyer Mohammad Ali Mahdavi Sabet told AFP that the two-hour hearing was the final one in the long-running case which has tested Iran's relations with France and that he now expected the court to announce its verdict within seven days.

Reiss, who has been staying at the French embassy in Tehran since being released on bail in August, was in court for the hearing, the third in her trial, Mahdavi Sabet said.

"She and I made our last defence submissions," he said.

"In my closing statement for the defence, I rejected all the accusations against her and said that she has not committed any crime.

"I asked for her acquittal and I am very confident and optimistic about her acquittal," he said.

"This was her last court session. After that Ms Reiss left for the embassy."

"They will tell me the verdict when it is ready. Under Iranian law, the court has a week to issue its verdict," Mahdavi Sabet added.

The 24-year-old academic was arrested on July 1 shortly before she was due to fly home after a six-month study and teaching visit to the Iranian city of Isfahan.

Over Half Karzai New Cabinet Picks Vetoed

Several key ministers were confirmed, including for Foreign Affairs, Justice and Counter-Narcotics, but 10 out of 17 candidates were voted down, meaning Karzai is still without confirmed leaders for over a third of his ministries.

Parliament unexpectedly threw out the majority of his first picks in a vote two weeks ago, a move hailed as positive for democracy but a setback for Afghan reconstruction after months of uncertainty caused by last year's fraud-marred presidential poll.

The second round of vetoes will prolong the turmoil at a time when the insurgency is worsening and after a year when record numbers of foreign troops and civilians were killed.

In an embarrassing development, it also emerged on Saturday that the nominee for the ministry of rural development was underage, a government official said. The candidate was 31 years old while under the constitution the minimum age is 34.

Karzai has been under intense pressure from his Western backers, and frustrated Afghans, to choose ministers deemed clean and competent. Those who were approved in the first round of voting were mostly liked by foreign diplomats.

The second round of picks are less well-known but there was widespread unhappiness about the choice of Zarar Ahmad Muqbel, a former Interior Minister who international diplomats lobbied hard to have excluded from earlier cabinets.

Karzai's spokesman has said he has a list of backup candidates to replace any rejected in this round of voting, and a source at one ministry had earlier said he was vetting two other prospective nominees.

But he faces a tight schedule to get them in place before traveling to the London conference, a vital international forum on the future of Afghanistan, on Jan 28.

The rejection of two women, out of a record three nominated for the cabinet, was a disappointment to activists and women who had praised Karzai for a bold choice.

"It's probably still too early to expect this much from a parliament that is led by conservative elements," said Orzala Ashraf Nemat, an activist and member of the Afghan women's network, which was co-founded by rejected Women's Affairs Ministry nominee Palwasha Hassan.

"I'm sure the reason they didn't vote for her is that they are too scared of women's empowerment," Nemat added of Hassan. The only woman approved was Amena Afzali as minister for martyrs and disabled.

Parliamentarian Daoud Sultanzoy had warned ahead of the vote that many of the candidates would be rejected because they presented weak programs to parliament or seemed only interested in personal gain.

"One of the things that I think is very disturbing is that some of the people that were introduced were coming with political baggage, with political influence from those circles who are seeking influence in the government," Sultanzoy said, declining to give names.

Karzai has yet to suggest a candidate for the ministry of energy and water after his wish to retain Ismail Khan, a former anti-Taliban guerrilla leader, was rejected by parliament.

Iran Suffers From Afghan Instability

According to Fars news agency correspondent in Islamabad, addressing the trilateral ministerial cooperation meeting of Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, the foreign minister noted: "In the past eight years our principled policy has been to use regional capacities for resolution of regional issues of concern so that on this basis regional solutions would be found."

He underscored: "Recent developments in the region have attracted the attention of international community, and all observers have wised up to the fact that the approaches adopted to date have been practically fruitless, and have even stirred fresh problems and/or have intensified previous topics of concern and shortcomings."

Mottaki noted: "As the result of the faulty policies adopted by major trans-regional governments and their military deployment to the region, irrespective of regional facts, we are unfortunately witness to a sharp growth in formation of radical groups in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Meanwhile, we have emphasized on several occasions that radicalism is a phenomenon that does not know any boundaries."

Mottaki pointed out: "We hope trans-regional governments would learn a lesson from their previous mistakes and blunders, and would take into account the part played by regional countries and their capacities for resolution of regional problems in current equations, throughout their major trans-regional meetings."

He stressed: "Islamic Republic of Iran believes peace, stability, and security in Afghanistan and Pakistan is synonymous to its own peace and security, and pinpoints that the regional countries' peace and stability are tied to each other. Meanwhile, factors such as deep-rooted historical and religious commonalties have bonded the three countries of Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan."

He noted: "Iran has actively participated in international conferences and meetings about Afghanistan and has spared no effort in assisting the establishment of sustainable peace, stability, and development in this country."

Commander Stresses Iran Readiness to Confront Various Threats

"The Iranian nation has acquired an all-out readiness against various threats of the enemies of the Islamic Revolution," Commander of the IRGC Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari said in Shahrekord, the capital city of the southwestern province of Kohkilouyeh and Boyerahmad.

Underlining that the country's enemies have so far failed to achieve their goals, Jafari noted, "The enemies of the Islamic Revolution have come to the conclusion that they cannot achieve their evil goals, yet they continue threats against the Islamic Republic."

The commander blamed the Zionist regime of Israel for hatching various plots and provoking sanctions against Iran, but meantime dismissed Tel Aviv's ability to wage a war against Tehran, saying, "Israel is filled with fear and scared of going into war with Iran."

RUSSIA: We Are Considering Iran Nuclear Offer

"In early January, Tehran presented the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) with additional proposals... We are considering them and are hoping to come to agreement," Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Andrei Nesterenko said Friday.

Nesterenko's comments came as the P5+1, five permanent members of the Security Council plus Germany, prepared to meet in New York to discuss Iran's nuclear program.

Russia hopes that, during the Saturday meeting, nuclear negotiators will be able to agree on the latest proposals Iran has presented regarding a plan to provide the country with further enriched uranium, said the spokesman.

Iran insists its nuclear program is solely for civilian purposes, rejecting Western claims that it intends to pursue a military agenda.

Iran-Bound Plane Slides Off Runway in Sweden

Arlanda airport spokesman Anders Bredfall says the plane is intact and there are no reports of any injuries. He says airport staff are evacuating the passengers.

The Airbus 300-600 was about to take off for Tehran when it glided 130 yards (100 meters) off the runway into the snow. The cause of the accident is not immediately clear.

Saturday's incident in Stockholm prompted officials to close one of the airport's three runways but it was not expected to cause any major delays to other flights.

Russia, Iran Strengthen Gas Ties

The two parties also discussed progress on the development of Iran's gas industry, prospects for cooperation in new regional pipeline projects, and participation in swap deals. Additionally, Gazprom agreed to help draw up a road map of cooperation between Russia and Iran in the energy sector.

According to Gazprom, Iran holds gas reserves of 29.6 tcm, surpassed only by Russia. Currently, Gazprom is developing phases 2 and 3 of South Pars, on stream in 2002, in partnership with Total and Petronas.

Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan Sign MoU

The MoU involves cooperation on discovering problems in the region and dealing with terrorism, extremism, weapon and drug smuggling.

The three sides also reaffirmed that they are responsible for regional security and stability.

The three foreign ministers then highlighted their countries' role in reconstruction of Afghanistan and support for regional consensus for peace, security and stability.

MOUSAVI: Enemies Behind Scientist's Assassination

"The depressing martyrdom of the renowned physicist and Tehran University academic, Massoud Ali-Mohammadi signifies this harsh reality that the enemies of Iran are set to take advantage of today's critical situation to pursue their own interests," said Mousavi.

"This criminal action is definitely a part of a huge plan that obliges all of us, irrespective of our political tendencies, to give it some thought to discover its other aspects," he added.

Iran's former prime minister sent his condolences to the Iranian nation, the academics and the family of the slain scientist.

Massoud Ali-Mohammadi was killed on Tuesday, January 12, after a booby-trapped motorcycle blasted near his home.

The Foreign Ministry has announced that it has found traces of US and Israeli involvement in the assassination of the Iranian nuclear physics scientist.

MP Highlights Iranian Jews Religious Freedom

He made the remarks in a meeting with the Governor of Isfahan Province, Alireza Zaker Esfahani, on Friday.

He said the Jews enjoyed even more privileges in Isfahan due to their long-standing presence in the province which transcends two millennia and also thanks to Jews' contribution in cultural and medical activities as well as in the cultural-religious heritage including synagogues that are built in styles inspired by the Islamic architecture.

Referring to a visit to New York when he was accompanying President Mahmoud Ahmdejad, he said many politicians as well as ordinary people were surprised to hear that Iran's Jews were able to carry out all sorts of their social, sports and cultural activities without being subject to particular and extra security and political considerations inside their worshipping places.

The governor, too, pointed to the active and free presence of Iranian Jews in all activities nationwide and said followers of divine religions should work to stop formation of derivative and forged religions which are rapidly spreading in the West.

Saying that worshipping God is a common point all religions share, he said followers of monotheistic religions could satisfy the need of the contemporary world for spiritual material.

During the meeting the representative of the local Jews, too, said the Jewish community in the city was after building a special complex to be allocated to Jews sports and religious events.

About two thousand Jews are currently living in Isfahan province who enjoy full freedom in carrying out their religion.

Islamabad Keen to Host Second Iran-Pakistan-Afghanistan Summit

Speaking at a meeting with his Iranian counterpart Manouchehr Mottaki in Islamabad yesterday, Qureshi pointed to the joint statement issued in first tripartite summit of the heads of state in Tehran, and said, "Pakistan holds itself committed to the statement and is ready to hold the second summit."

The last tripartite heads-of-state summit was held in Tehran on May 24 attended by Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and his Afghan and Pakistani counterparts Hamid Karzai and Asif Ali Zardari.

Regarding Afghanistan, the Pakistani foreign minister underlined the significance of a regional approach for resolving the ongoing crisis in the war-hit country.

He noted that Iran and Pakistan have suffered from the consequences of the Afghan crisis, including insecurity and refugee-related issues, and assessed Iran's initiative for a meeting on trilateral cooperation among the three neighboring states as "important."

Chief Justice Warns Against Destructive Measures

According to IRNA yesterday, in a meeting of the Minority Faction lawmakers, the Judiciary chief termed the obligations of MPs as highly important and valuable, while underscoring that legislators should always consider national interests in their remarks.

Ayatollah Larijani said: "If the rule of law and impartial study of judicial cases is undermined, chaos and radicalism governs, which is one of the long-lasting ill wishes of the foes of Islamic system, who are against peace and calm in the country."

Judiciary chief further analyzed the post-election incidents and rebuked the lawbreakers that hurt the public sentiments, while adding: "Unfortunately, many of the post-election incidents were due to imprudence and silence of a number of figures and mischief of their

associates and if a wise and prudent stance would have been adopted by them in each case maybe many of these incidents would have not taken place.”

Larijani pointed out: “The claims about irregularities in the election were sheer lies and unfortunately the terms of pursuance of this allegation by the claimants were in fact the main lawbreaker.”

The Judiciary chief further named interaction and expansion of cooperation of the Judiciary with other branches of government, especially the legislative branch as one of the principled policies of the Judiciary.

Iran ‘Fully Supports’ Lebanon Unity

The Iranian official conveyed President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s appreciation for President (Michel) Sleiman’s efforts to strengthen the atmosphere of consensus in Lebanon and emphasized President Ahmadinejad’s full support for the unity, sovereignty and independence of Lebanon and its territory,” a statement released by Sleiman’s office said.

Prime Minister Saad Hariri, son of murdered ex-premier Rafiq Hariri, announced the formation of a new government on November 9.

National Satellite to Be Unveiled on Revolution Anniversary

"Since the 4th decade of Islamic Revolution has been named as the Decade of Progress and Justice by the Supreme Leader of Islamic Revolution, the approach in Ten-Day Dawn will be set on this basis," chairman of the central headquarters of the Ten-Day Dawn Celebrations, Muhammad Hossein Zareh, said.

He noted: “Keeping alive the thoughts of Founder of Islamic Republic of Iran late Imam Khomeini (May his soul rest in peace) and the Supreme Leader of Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei; promoting and institutionalizing the thoughts of late Imam and the Supreme Leader are the main pivotal outlines in the approach adopted by Islamic Revolution Ten-Day Dawn Central Headquarters.”

He added that the plans for Ten-Day Dawn are in line with reinforcement of the spirit of self-belief, and promotion of public trust in the efficiency of the sacred Islamic system and national capacities.

He added that: “The anniversary of victory of Islamic Revolution on February 11 is a national day, and since it is a national day all strata of people participate in it. The participants in February 11 demonstrations enter the scene to bond with the principle of Velayat-e Faqih, (institution of supreme clerical rule) and the sacred Islamic establishment.”

Lebanon, Iran to Coordinate in UNSC

Suleiman described the Lebanese-Iranian relations as "good on all aspects," and asked Tajeddini to convey his regards to the Iranian president and his wishes of prosperity and stability to the Iranian people.

Tajeddini conveyed Iranian President Ahmadinejad's appreciation for Suleiman's efforts to strengthen the atmosphere of consensus in Lebanon and emphasized Ahmadinejad's full support for the unity, sovereignty and independence of Lebanon and its territory, the report said.

Lebanon became a non-permanent member in UN Security Council for a 2-year term from 2010 to 2011.

Tajeddini came to Beirut to attend the Arab and international forum on supporting the resistance which started on Friday. Both Hezbollah and Hamas officials attended the forum.

No Agreement on Iran Sanctions

Robert Cooper, the European Union's political director who chaired the meeting, said the U.S., Russia, China, Britain, France and Germany concluded "that Iran has failed to follow up" on an agreement in principle in October that Tehran exchange uranium for nuclear fuel, "in particular by refusing further meetings to discuss the nuclear issue."

He said the six nations remain committed to a "dual track" approach to Iran to try to defuse global fears over its nuclear program — diplomatic and political engagement on the one hand and possible new sanctions if Tehran refuses to rein in its nuclear ambitions.

"That implies that we will continue to seek a negotiated solution, but consideration of appropriate further measures has also begun," Cooper told reporters after the 2 1/2-hour closed-door meeting.

Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said the six powers "reconfirmed our desire" to meet again with the Iranians to discuss their October proposal.

"We have talked mostly today on the second track, but it doesn't mean that we should abandon the first one," he said. "We do believe there is still time for meaningful political engagement, and efforts to find a solution. That's something that Russia has always advocated."

But a senior diplomat, speaking on condition of anonymity because the talks were private, said the message to Iran from the meeting is that time is running out.

Iran argues that its nuclear program is aimed at creating a peaceful nuclear energy network to serve its growing population. The U.S. and other nations believe Iran's nuclear program has the goal of creating atomic weapons.

Ahmadinejad Urges Islamic World's Vigilance Against Enemies

In a meeting with a group of Muslim Sunnis here on Saturday evening, the president said all people should try to make the Islamic world vigilant and disclose the plots of the enemies of Islam.

President Ahmadinejad rejected dividing Muslims into two groups of Shia and Sunni Muslims and added issues like human rights and fight against terrorism are among the pretexts of the enemies to dominate people and countries.

He stressed that people should be aware of the enemies' plots.

Moscow Won't Sacrifice Iran for U.S. Ties

Russia sees Iran as a regional power. So, it is not likely that Moscow will sacrifice its friendly ties with a trusty neighbor for costly short-term relations with Washington," Mahmoud-Reza Sajjady told Ria Novosti in a Saturday interview.

The envoy added that, from his point of view, the relationship between Moscow and Washington abounds with disagreements and suffers from lack of trust.

"These disagreements are not something that can be overcome in the short term. That is why the two sides can not agree on various issues," he explained.

"It was not long ago that US Republicans described a vast unified Russia as their most dangerous enemy. Although they are not currently in power, they still have enough influence in the US society to be able to impact political decision-making."

"That is why I believe the current US leadership will not be able to create a deep rift in Tehran-Moscow relations," he added.

Sajjady, however, went on to add that in some cases Iran is obliged to show a great deal of sensitivity in matters that concern cooperation between Tehran and Moscow.

He noted that at the moment, the Islamic Republic is looking to see how soon Moscow will deliver the S300 anti-aircraft defense system to Iran and what course it will take under US pressure to pass another resolution against Tehran at the Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Pakistan, Iran to Strengthen Parliamentary Ties

He was talking to Iranian Parliamentarian Flahatisseh, currently visiting Pakistan, who called on him at the Parliament House here on Saturday.

Pakistan and Iran are bound together by centuries old bonds of history, culture and religion and these ties would be strengthened further in the days to come, the Deputy Chairman said.

It is only natural, he said, to expect the Parliamentary relations between the two countries to reflect same closeness and cordiality as witnessed in other fields.

He underscored the need for more frequent exchanges of Parliamentary delegations to study and understand each others system.

Jan Jamali also stressed the need for enhancing the volume of border trade particularly through Iran-Balochistan border to the mutual advantage.

He said that the two countries must also cooperate in facing common challenges like terrorism, and to consolidate their trade and economic relations as considerable scope existed for this purpose. He also expressed his best wishes to the speaker of the Iranian Parliament.

The Iranian MP, reciprocating the gestures said that Iran also attached great importance to its relations with Pakistan which would be flourishing further in the days to come.

He fully endorsed the idea of more frequent parliamentary exchanges to forge still closer Parliamentary relations between the two countries, adding that formation of Pak-Iran friendship group would be a major step forward. He went on to add that Parliamentarians in Iran would look forward to the visit of Pakistan Parliamentary delegation eagerly.

Judiciary Chief Urges Vigilance against Enemies' Plots

Pointing to the recent assassination of an Iranian nuclear physic scientist, Ayatollah Larijani told high-ranking judiciary authorities, "The loss indicates the incentives of the Islamic Republic's enemies for hitting a blow at the country's scientific Jihad (holy struggle)."

"Despite enemy's efforts, the nation's vigilance will certainly make their devilish plots fall flat," Ayatollah Larijani went on to say.

The comments by the judiciary chief came a few days after the Iranian university professor and nuclear scientist, Masoud Ali Mohammadi, was assassinated in a terrorist bomb attack in Tehran.

Persian Gulf Conference to Kick off Today

The two-day conference dubbed as "Persian Gulf: Challenges and Regional Mechanism" will start its work on January 18-19 at the ministry's Political and International Studies Office here in Tehran.

Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki is due to address the inauguration ceremony

Experts from Iran and other countries as well as academics are to take part in the conference.

Director of the ministry's Training and Research Department Mohammad Baqer Khoramshad told reporters that 70 papers will be delivered in the event.

Protection of the environment, Persian Gulf Cooperation Council, Iraq's role in Persian Gulf developments and stability, security of the area as well as global economic crisis and its impact on the Persian Gulf will be discussed in the conference.

Experts from Kuwait, Oman, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Romania, France, Germany, Japan, India, China and Russia will take part in the conference.

Iran-Turkey Ministers Stress Expansion of Ties

Hosseini, who is in Ankara to attend the ceremony to declare Istanbul as the Europe Cultural Capital in the year of 2010, expressed pleasure with this issue and called it as an opportunity for introducing Turkey's traditions and customs to European and world countries.

Referring to the old several thousand years of ties and cultural commonalities, Hosseini said that the two countries have affected each others reciprocally for centuries.

He expressed hope that by considering the abundance of cultural capacities, the two countries can get closer to each other.

Referring to the progress of Iran's cinema industry, he suggested that movies of the two countries be screened in Iran and Turkey.

Hosseini underlined establishment of permanent committee of cultural cooperation between the two countries and added by introducing the members of Turkey's committee, a big step for expansion of ties would be taken.

He also invited Turkish poets to attend a conference for world great poets in next spring in Iran and called it a good opportunity for Iranian literary persons to get acquainted with Turkey's contemporary literature.

Hosseini also asked his Turkish counterpart to agree with changing passing border for Iranian pilgrims who visit Syria to make the road 250 kilometers shorter for the pilgrims.

Ertugrul Gunay said that Iran and Turkey have many commonalities and the two sides have decided to expand these close ties in recent years.

FM Spokesman: Failure of 5+1 Meeting Natural

Talking to IRNA yesterday, he said the only way for the 5+1 members was to officially acknowledge Iran's right to peaceful nuclear technology.

The latest round of talks among 5+1 member states which focused on introducing even more sanctions against Iran closed with no results Saturday night in New York while participants failed to get to any agreement.

Mihman-Parast said the 5+1 programs and talks over Iran's nuclear program are doomed to failure as long as they fail to adopt a realistic approach towards the issue by endorsing Iran's rights to peaceful nuclear technology.

Referring to numerous reports by the International Atomic Energy Agency verifying that Iran had no deviations from international regulations in its nuclear programs, he further stressed that the failure of talks like the one which concluded work last night was because they were carried out with a political motivation.

Answering a question on the reasons for such countries as China to dispatch such a low-level delegation to the talks, the spokesman said some countries including China were of the opinion that such negative measures as well as sanctions are of no use at all and that any politically-motivated move would go nowhere.

As for the Solidarity Games of the Islamic Countries which Iran is to host, he said Iran has already proposed some delay in commencement of the games so that the details of the procedures are well discussed.

He noted that Iran has volunteered to host the games and will focus on all details including the designing of medals

Iran Will Not Host OIC Games

In an extraordinary session of the Islamic Solidarity Games Federation (ISSF), Iran lost its right to host the 2nd Islamic Solidarity Games scheduled for April. In the meeting in Riyadh on Saturday, the ISSF asked Iran to remove the historic name

Persian Gulf from medals and brochures for the major Muslim sporting event. Iran strongly dismissed the call as unwanted and irresponsible. Head of Iran's Olympic Committee Mohammad Aliabadi, his deputy, Bahram Afsharzadeh and secretary of the executive committee of the games Shahrokh Shahnazi rejected the proposition. They insisted on using the name Persian Gulf on all medals, documents and certificates. ISSF officials said that that would not be acceptable. All the medals were embossed with the internationally recognized and historic name of the waterway. The games are a multinational event held every four years and brings together top athletes and sportsmen from the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) nations. The OIC groups 57 members, from the Middle East, Africa, Central Asia, Caucasus, Balkans, Southeast Asia and South Asia. The ISSF praised Iran for providing the facilities and infrastructure for the games, but also expressed "concern" over Swine Flu outbreak in Iran. The second solidarity games had been scheduled for April 9-25. Tehran, Isfahan and Mashhad were among the hosts.

No Regret
In an interview with Mehr News Agency, spokesman of the event, Mohammad Hadi Mansouri said the Islamic Republic had not lost anything. "In the session we presented documents from major international organizations like the UN that use and accept the name of the waterway as the Persian Gulf. We will not negotiate on territorial integrity," he said. The Persian Gulf, in the Southwest Asian region, is an extension of the Indian Ocean located between Iran and the Arabian Peninsula. The 1st Islamic Solidarity Games were held in Mecca in Saudi Arabia from 8-20 April, 2005 with an Olympic-style tournament aimed at showing Muslim sporting prowess. It brought together 6,000 athletes, none of them women. Fifty-five nations participated in the event hosted in Mecca, Medina, Jeddah and Ta'if.

Mottaki: Foreign Powers Seek to Dominate Persian Gulf

He said: "Presence and interference of foreign powers; major arms purchases; support for radical groups; and escalation of tribal and ethnic differences of opinion are the challenges that have led to instability in Persian Gulf region. Today, the Persian Gulf strategic region is sought more than ever by the greedy trans-regional powers which are intent on stirring insecurity, pessimism, and suspicion among regional countries in a futile bid to dominate Persian Gulf's resources."

Addressing the 19th International Persian Gulf Conference on Monday, Mottaki was cited by IRNA as saying: "Our nation has been the first victim of Saddam regime's expansionist policies and the eight-year imposed war."

He added that meanwhile six years after the collapse of Saddam's dictatorship, due to presence of foreign powers in the region numerous problems have been imposed on the regional nations.

Elsewhere, Mottaki referred to consideration of a review in Tehran-London relations, while adding: "These days, especially in the past six months, Iran-Britain relations have been precisely studied in different domains."

Further on, Mottaki said that he doesn't see a dark horizon in the two countries' future mutual cooperation.

Mottaki underlined that Iran and Saudi Arabia have two major capacities in the region, while pointing out: "The two countries, along with other countries, can take major steps, and efforts should be made to make use of these capacities."

Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Syria, Egypt, Lebanon, Sudan, India, China, Japan, Germany and Romania have participated in the International Persian Gulf Conference.

China Urges Flexibility on Iran, Downplays Sanctions

While Western powers have looked to further sanctions against Iran over its rejection of a U.N. plan to rein in Tehran's nuclear ambitions, Russia and now especially China have resisted such steps and called for more negotiations.

Envoys from the United States, Britain, France, Germany, Russia and China met in New York at the weekend to discuss the standoff. The Chinese delegate at those talks reiterated Beijing's position that it does not back further sanctions against Iran for now.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Ma Zhaoxu reinforced that stance on Tuesday, avoiding even using the word "sanctions" in replying to reporters' questions about the meeting.

"Our consistent proposal has been to resolve the Iran nuclear issue appropriately through dialogue and consultation," Ma told a regular news briefing.

"We hope all sides will enhance dialogue and cooperation, and show a more flexible and pragmatic approach," he said.

Some Western diplomats said the New York meeting showed a shared commitment to a "dual track" of dialogue and sanctions in dealing with Iran.

But Ma's comments underscored Beijing's reluctance to contemplate fresh sanctions against Iran, which was China's third biggest source of imported crude oil in the first 11 months of 2009, behind Saudi Arabia and Angola.

China keeps other extensive trade and investment ties with Iran.

As a permanent member of the U.N. Security Council, China can veto any potential resolution to censure Iran or ratchet up sanctions.

"The urgent task now is for all sides to pay attention to the broader picture and step up diplomatic efforts," said Ma.

He said the New York "P5 plus 1" meeting "did not touch on specific next steps" over Iran.

China also dismayed other delegations by sending a mid-ranking diplomat from its U.N. mission to the New York meeting, which had been billed as a gathering of top-level diplomats known as "political directors."

China has said it could not send its Vice Foreign Minister He Yafei because of scheduling conflicts.

But diplomats from other countries read the move as a snub, speculating it might be to show Beijing's resistance to punishing Iran or ire at U.S. arms sales to Taiwan, which China claims sovereignty over since their split in 1949.

Larijani: Iran Proud of Supporting Hamas and Hezbollah

Addressing a conference entitled "Gaza, Symbol of Resistance," he congratulated the anniversary of the Gaza's victory in the 22-day war.

Larijani said Iran's Majlis named a day in the calendar after the Gaza resistance and considers it a special day.

The Speaker urged the parliaments of other Islamic countries to follow the Majlis decision.

"The 22-day war was both sorrowful and prideful," he reiterated.

It was sorrowful because the Zionist regime violated all international laws and used forbidden weapons during the war against innocent people of the Gaza Strip, he said.

Referring to the support of America and some Western countries for the Zionist regime, he said military aids they offered their political, diplomatic and media aid to the occupying regime and prevented the case from being discussed in the Security Council.

Even President Barak Obama who had talked about changing U.S. policies did not pay any attention to the Zionist crimes in Gaza and preferred to expend his time for selecting a dog for her daughter.

"By saying that his ears were familiar with the sound of Azan, the American President claimed that he would restore Palestinian rights, but after one year, Gaza is still under the siege of the Zionists," Larijani said.

He also expressed regret over the silence of some Arab countries over the 22-day war and said unfortunately the regional countries did not understand that defeating the Zionist regime would change the region's fate.

Concerning the prideful side of the Gaza war, Larijani said despite all the supports given to the Zionists by the U.S. and the West, Palestinian resistance could impose a heavy defeat on the occupying regime.

After Lebanon's 33-day and Gaza's 22-day wars the world understood that the Zionist regime could not bear such wars so they tried to draw new plans.

In another part of his remarks, Larijani said, "It was scheduled that the regional countries pay 5 billion dollars to the innocent people of Gaza but during my visit to Egypt I found that they did not offer any help to Gaza by now."

Criticizing the silence of human rights organizations, the Speaker said they have been drowned in modern savageries.

There is no hope in such organizations so that nations' fate depends on their own will, he said

Foreign Powers Have Focused on Persian Gulf

He was cited by Fars news agency as adding: "Meanwhile, this trend has led to formation of a relatively complicated structure, making Persian Gulf a vital region, and creating numerous problems for the regional people."

Addressing the 19th International Persian Gulf Conference on Tuesday morning, the minister of defense noted: "Meanwhile, if the Western states would take action against Iran, their warships in Persian Gulf are the best operational targets for us."

He went on to note: "We are witness to efforts for escalation of militarism in the region. As of the year 2007, a large volume of arms have been imported to Persian Gulf region from overseas, and these efforts are intent on turning the region into a storehouse for weapons."

Supreme Leader Calls for Transparency, Cautions Against Double-Standards

"At the time of conspiracy and when the atmosphere is dusty, all, especially the elite, have the duty to take transparent stances and avoid making double-standard speeches," said Supreme Leader of Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei in an address

to a group of the Islamic Propagation Coordination Council officials and those in charge of holding the '10-Day Dawn' ceremonies.

Lauding the high public turnout and their show of unity in various crucial stages and occasions in the post-Islamic Revolution era, including the July 14 and December 30 rallies, Ayatollah Khamenei said the most important feature of the Islamic Revolution of Iran and of the ceremonies marking the Revolution anniversary over the past 30 years has been unity and mass presence of people.

The annual high turnout of people in the events signifies that the Islamic Revolution and the Islamic Republic establishment rely on people and their faith, said Ayatollah Khamenei, adding that this accounts for the failure of the enemies to destabilize the Islamic system.

Appreciating the Iranian people for their whole-hearted and extensive presence on various occasions related to the Islamic Revolution, especially the 10-Day Dawn celebrations and the 22 Bahman rallies, Ayatollah Khamenei said to underestimate such a solidarity and unity, enemies use all within their power to insinuate that people are no longer united and are in disagreement.

On Quds Day, which is in nature anti-Zionist and pro-Palestine, a few deceived groups and individuals chanted pro-Zionist and anti-Palestine slogans, said the Supreme Leader, adding that on November 4, which marks the day of the Iranian nation's hatred and disavowal of the American imperialism, they moved against this line, the Islamic establishment and Islamic feature of the system.

The Supreme Leader went on to say that the Islamic Republic has been formed based on the will and faith of people and has thus far acted strongly and independently on the same basis.

The Islamic Revolution is a fact stemming from divine traditions and as long as it depends on the faith, love and interest of people, global powers – even if united – will not be able to harm the revolution and people.

Terming Bahman 22 as an 'asset', Ayatollah Khamenei said Bahman 22 belongs to the Iranian nation, the late Imam Khomeini and martyrs. "Enemy tries to destabilize such a huge national wealth (Bahman 22). So, all should be on the scene vigilantly and move prudently and logically."

France Using Trial of Iranian for Pressure

Foreign ministry spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast said yesterday the trial is going ahead "despite the student's innocence" and called the proceedings "illegal."

He says France is mistaken in thinking the case can be used as leverage on Iran. He didn't say where in France the trial is taking place or on what charges.

French media reported the student, Majid Kakavand, was arrested in March at the U.S. request on suspicion he obtained electronic equipment. He was jailed, then moved to house arrest in August.

French academic Clotilde Reiss is on trial in Iran for taking part in anti-government protests following the disputed June presidential elections.

Global Development Plan Destructs Environment

Addressing the Clean Air Day ceremony that was held in Pardisan Park on Tuesday morning, the president was cited by Fars news agency as saying: “The environment is the common legacy and wealth of mankind.”

The president meanwhile added: “If the environment as the common legacy of mankind is not safeguarded, there would be no future. The environment is a location for growth and elevation of mankind. All the components of environment, in precise, linked loops, set the stage for life, growth, and perfection of mankind.”

In reference to different viewpoints toward environment in the recent century, President said: “Some standpoints are for destruction of environment, and in fact they imagine if they destroy the environment, its impacts would be imposed on others.”

President noted that: “The capacity for reconstruction is limited in the environment. There is a more dangerous outlook that has led to formation of an economic system. The basis of this outlook is a never-ending competition and a closed cycle of production and consumption. Obviously, this standpoint is based on accumulation of capital.”

President noted that developed countries have defined a special pattern for their lifestyle and insist that other nations should do the same.

President underscored: “25% of environmental pollutions are emitted by the U.S., while the U.S. population is less than 5% of the global population. These countries have designed a development plan model and want to impose it on other countries.”

S. African Parliament Speaker to Visit Iran

South Africa's parliament speaker will visit Iran on Friday January 22 at the invitation of Ali Larijani," Hassan Zamani told FNA.

The South African top lawmaker is scheduled to meet with his Iranian counterpart, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, and the ministers of energy, oil and economy to discuss the bilateral relations between the two countries and other issues of mutual interest.

Mottaki: Israel Responsible for Fate of Iranian Diplomats

The Qods occupying regime should directly take the responsibility for the health and the lives of our country's four kidnapped diplomats," Mottaki said.

"We urge all international organizations and circles, especially the respectable UN Secretary-General, to fulfill their legal responsibility within the framework of our previous correspondence and consultations and call for an accelerated announcement of the results to eventually relieve their families of increasing anxiety," he added.

The top diplomat also criticized international bodies and related parties, specially the Zionist regime of Israel, for their negligence over the issue.

Referring to various attempts underway, he further stressed the need for speeding up procedures to clarify the situation and destiny of Iran's former charge d'affaires in Beirut.

"All attempts made and measures undertaken so far have unfortunately fallen stern due to the incompetence of international bodies and the parties involved in the issue especially the Zionist regime," Mottaki was quoted by Fars News Agency as saying.

The four Iranian diplomats went missing in Lebanon in 1982 during an Israeli invasion of the country.

The then charge d'affaires of the Iranian Embassy in Beirut Seyed Mohsen Mousavi, military attaché Ahmad Motevaselian, embassy technician Taghi Rastegar Moghadam and journalist of the Islamic republic news agency Kazzem Akhavan were kidnapped by the Lebanese mercenary army - also known as the Falangists - at a gunpoint in northern Lebanon in 1982 and were later handed over to Israeli army.

Israel has released contradictory reports on the issue. The Zionist regime alleged in a statement last year that the diplomats had never been surrendered to Israel. Elsewhere it claimed in response to a request put forward by the Lebanese Hezbollah group that the four are already dead.

Georgia Regrets Delivering Iranian National to US

He was talking in a meeting with Majlis Speaker, Ali Larijani, on Monday.

The Parliament International and Media Affairs Office quoted Ali Larijani as saying in the meeting that the process of the two countries' past friendly relations call for strengthening political, economic and parliamentary relations.

Emphasizing the need for broadening the dimensions of regional cooperation in the framework of securing national interests, Larijani reiterated, "Regional problems and crises must be solved by the regional countries themselves and the presence of alien forces further complicates the situation."

Referring to the situation in Afghanistan and Iraq, he said, “Serious damages due to war and security situations in crisis hit regions inflict both the neighboring and the entire regional countries.”

The Islamic Majlis speaker also referred to the continuation of parliamentary cooperation as an appropriate capacity at the service of expanding comprehensive bilateral relations.

He meanwhile reiterated, “Of course, some of the past moves of the Georgian government, such as delivering an Iranian citizen to the US needs to be settled in advance.”

Larijani at the end invited his Georgian counterpart to pay a visit to Iran.

Visiting Georgian Foreign Minister Grigol Vashadze, too, said during the meeting that Iran is a strong regional country and a good neighbor for Georgia, adding, “A dynamic trend has been clicked aimed at strengthening relations and cooperation with the Islamic Republic of Iran.”

He added, “Georgia attaches great importance to its relations with Iran and we beg the pardon of Tehran for the move made by the then government of Georgia in delivering an Iranian national to US, considering the move as an aftermath of the inappropriate political and internal status in Georgia.”

Regarding regional issues, he referred to the status in Afghanistan, arguing, “There is no military solution to the prevailing problems in Afghanistan, which can be solved resorting to dynamic diplomacy, seeking the assistance of that country’s neighbors, including the Islamic Republic of Iran.”

The Georgian top diplomat asked for ever broader parliamentary relations, extending the Georgian Parliament speaker’s invitation for his Iranian counterpart’s visit of that country.

Iranian citizen Hassan Ardebili was arrested in Georgia in the year 2007 by the pro-US government of the time there and delivered to the United States in the year 2008, where he was put to trial and sentenced to five years imprisonment for involvement in aviation industry business transaction considered illegal by the US.

Spokesman Urges Reconsideration of Ties with London

Talking to reporters during his weekly press briefing, he added that such a move may take place in various economic and political areas.

On the upcoming elections in the neighboring Iraq, he said Tehran is interested in a secure and stable Iraq.

He regretted that certain countries are trying to make use of the existing atmosphere in that war-torn country to their own interest.

As to the anti-Iran stand taken by the Kuwaiti foreign minister, he said such a move indicated that Kuwait was under pressures by big powers.

Mihman-Parast further announced that the Kuwaiti emir is to visit Tehran in the near future, expressing hope that the trip would help boost bilateral relations between the two states.

Commenting on the trend of Iran's ongoing nuclear talks, Mihman-Parast said traces of realism were appearing in the approaches of the countries involved in the talks.

He hoped that such attitudes on the parts of parties involved would lead to favorable outcomes.

The spokesman opined that the deadline set by Iran on supplying the needed fuel for its research reactor was a suitable chance for these countries to get to good results.

Referring to positions adopted by different world countries on Iran's nuclear program, he said most of them approved Iran's right to peaceful nuclear technology and the few Western countries which are opposing it should revise their views and adopt positions based on realities.

Stressing Iran's transparency over its nuclear program, the spokesman described the recent remarks of the German chancellor as well as the Zionist regime's prime minister's on Iran as "just repetitive" and said they were certainly not the best approach to be adopted towards Iran.

He said such remarks could sometimes serve as efforts to satisfy and cheer up participants in international gatherings.

Answering a question on certain attempts to question the glory of Iran's past and plundering the big names in Iran's history, he said it was not proper for countries to attempt to cross out part of the name in "Persian Gulf".

Commenting on a soft warfront being formed against Iran, Mihman-Parast said Iran was facing very strong attempts to form a soft warfront against it by countries which could not stand the advancement and progress of such countries as Iran.

He explained that the media in certain countries were trying to depict a negative image of developing countries in a bid to feed the public opinion in these countries with false and wrong notions.

He said the stronger Iran grows, the media attacks against it become harsher.

The spokesman urged all organizations and bodies in the country to do their best to lighten up the public opinion on the nature and objectives of such media assaults against Iran by certain countries.

On the fate of an Iranian citizen being tried in French courts, Mihman-Parast said Kakavand was innocent and Iran possessed many documents to prove that he is not guilty.

Mihman-Parast condemned the French government's act in trying Kakavand and said Iran believed it was doing so under extreme pressures of the US.

He also said the documents offered to the court against him in France, were all fake and baseless and urged the French government to set him free instantly.

IPU Should Help Alleviate Sufferings of Muslims

Larijani said that the Inter-Parliamentary Union of member states of the Organization of the Islamic Conference should play an active role to deal with the problems of the Muslim World.

Highlighting the significant role of OIC, Larijani said big powers seek to divert the public opinion of the Muslim nations and their regional institutions to minor issues to attain their sinister goals.

"To deal with the phenomenon, the Muslims should make use of their potentials and capabilities to resolve their problems."

The issue of Palestine is the top priority of the Muslim World, he said, adding that it is incumbent upon the Inter-Parliamentary Union of the OIC States to mobilize public opinion of the international community to advocate powerfully the legitimate rights of Palestinians mainly the current humanitarian catastrophes in Gaza.

Other sources of concern for world Muslims are Iraq, Afghanistan and Lebanon and the active cooperation and presence of Inter-Parliamentary Union of the OIC States could create suitable ground for more convergence and cooperation among respective parliaments, Larijani said.

Secretary General of Inter-Parliamentary Union of the OIC States said for his part that Iran plays significant role to establish peace and security in the Middle East and that the Inter-Parliamentary Union of the OIC is encouraging expansion of parliamentary relations and cooperation among Islamic nations.

Iran's active presence at OIC has brought the body progress and high-profile status in regional and international relations, he said.

Ahmadinejad Slams NATO for Exploiting on Regional Countries

"In its eastward move, NATO is ready to invest regional countries' prestige and interests to secure its own objectives," Ahmadinejad said in a meeting with the Georgian Republic's visiting Minister of Foreign Affairs. "They consider no interests for regional countries and are ready for investing even entire countries' prestige to secure their own interests."

The report further quotes President Ahmadinejad as stressing the need for preserving regional security saying in the meeting with Grigol Vashadze, "The regional countries must expand the dimensions of bilateral, multilateral and regional cooperation and to block the path for the intervention of the aliens."

The president said that the relations of the two countries are both sensational and historic, reiterating, "Iran and Georgia are in the same civilizational basin and the two countries have enjoyed friendly relation ever since remote past and we are interested in improving relations with Tbilisi as far as possible today."

The president pointed out that Iran favors expansion of relations with regional countries, arguing, "The two countries can set the foundations for strong cooperation based on constant consultations."

He added, "The entire regional problems and crises can be solved based on regional countries' interactions and cooperation."

Ahmadinejad reiterated, "The regional countries that are after securing their on interests by interference in the region would gain no benefits from such moves and the future belongs to the regional nations."

The Georgian Foreign Minister Grigol Vashadze, too, during the meeting stressed that his country would never act against Iran, no matter in which treaty and organization it is participating.

He also emphasized the need for improvement of comprehensive relations and cooperation between Tehran and Tbilisi.

Georgian Foreign Minister Grigol Vashadze during his one-day working visit also met with his Iranian counterpart Manouchehr Mottaki, Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani and Secretary of Supreme National Security Council Saeed Jalili.

"Talks will be held on bilateral relations and regional issues," the Georgian Foreign Ministry had said in its brief announcement before Vashadze's visit.

Commander Dismisses Efficiency of Separation Wall in Gaza

Although the construction of the steel wall in the Gaza Strip will incarcerate the people of this region in a big jail, this joint plot by the Zionist regime and the treasons committed by the so-called Arab or Muslim governments, similar to the other plots and tricks played in the last 60 years, can never undermine the motivation and resistance of the Gaza people," Iranian Armed Forces Deputy Chief of Staff for Cultural and Defense Publicity Brigadier General Masoud Jazayeri said.

The boycott and siege of the Gaza Strip will one day be broken by the Gazans' strong will, Jazayari added, addressing a number of Armed Forces officials from departments of culture and psychological war.

He also reiterated that several pieces of evidence indicate that the resistance movement has overcome the compromising group in Palestine and the Palestinian people will conquer the occupying Zionist regime soon.

Iran's Humanitarian Aid Arrives in Haiti

Head of IRCS's Public Relations Hadi Behdad said that sugar, tuna fish and detergents were also among Iran's aid sent for the disaster-hit nation.

Iran's humanitarian aid arrived in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, via Venezuela, Behdad added.

Meanwhile, a 30-member team of Iran's doctors and relief workers was also dispatched to the quake-stricken country on Monday.

The Iranian team is going to set up a mobile clinic and distribute medicines among the disaster-hit people of Haiti.

The 7.3-magnitude devastating earthquake that hit Haiti last week has prompted countries across the globe to forward medical teams and relief supplies to the country to assist the survivors of the tragic incident.

Thousands of people were reported killed by the fatal earthquake which occurred on January 12.

Haitian Interior Minister Paul Antoine Bien-Aime said the death toll from the devastating earthquake could reach 200,000.

Iran threatens to hit Western warships if attacked

Iran's Defense Minister Ahmad Vahidi said on Tuesday that Tehran could strike Western warships stationed in the Persian Gulf if it were attacked over its nuclear program.

Vahidi said there were now more than 90 war vessels in the Persian Gulf and that they had created a "military environment" there.

"The question is what is the reason for the presence of this many vessels and what aim are they pursuing," he was quoted as saying by the Fars news agency.

Vahidi, who was speaking at a conference in Tehran on the Persian Gulf, said the vessels included submarines, aircraft carriers and destroyers.

"Of course the Westerners know that the existence of these vessels is the best operational target for Iran if they want to take action against [us]," he added.

Iran has often warned it would retaliate for any attack on its nuclear facilities, which the West suspects form part of an effort to develop a nuclear bomb. Tehran denies the charge.

Neither the United States nor Israel have ruled out military action if diplomacy fails to resolve the long-running nuclear standoff.

Last month, Vahidi said the Islamic Republic would strike back at Israel weapons manufacturing sites and nuclear installations if Israel attacked Iran.

Iran has often said it has missiles able to reach Israel.

Iran's view of Green Movement affects its nuclear talks calculus, says scholar

The Iranian government's apprehension about the Green Movement, which it regards as a serious opposition force, influences its decision-making in nuclear talks with the West, said Dr. Patrick Clawson, an Iran expert at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, on 14 January in Washington.

"Does this government in Iran worry about the Greens? And the answer is yes. As a result, anything that they do on the nuclear program is going to be primarily through the lens of how they think it's going to affect their stance vis-à-vis the opposition," said Clawson, who is deputy director for research at the Washington Institute, where he directs the Iran Security Initiative.

He added that the West should understand that diplomacy, international coalitions, and sanctions are not going to be the principal factors that will move Iran's position on nuclear weapons.

Clawson cited as an example concessions Iran made last summer on its nuclear program that were influenced not by actions by the West, but rather due to domestic political calculations. They included inspections of the reactor in Arak, installation of additional cameras at the Natanz facility, and the building of research reactors in Tehran.

“None of that was because we put in place additional sanctions, or because of the brilliance of our diplomacy over the summer. It’s because they were scared. If they are scared, they do not want, at least some of them, do not want a two front war. And they’d rather concentrate on dealing with the problems at home and get the foreigners off their back,” said Clawson.

He went on to suggest that a possibility exists for the West to exploit Iran’s concern for its domestic opposition to cut a deal.

“If the threat of the Greens is seen as acute, a compromise is distinctly possible,” said Clawson.

But he cautioned that the aftermath of the June 2009 elections has also weakened Iran’s leaders, which hampers their ability to make decisions.

“In that environment of weakened leaders and intensified strife among the different various factions, they have no idea what to do, this is a situation in which the most likely policy is just keep on going. There will be a deadlock for any change,” he said.

The remarks were made during an event in Washington hosted by the Washington Institute announcing the release of a special publication by Clawson entitled: "Much Promise from Modest Steps: The Iranian Opposition, the Nuclear Issue, and the West."

Drawing on several recent off-the-record discussions at the Washington Institute between Iranians, Europeans, and Americans, the study examines the impact that international diplomacy, aimed at Iran's nuclear program, will have on Iranian domestic politics and, in turn, the impact that Iranian political protests since that country's June 2009 elections will have on the issues of most concern to the international community.

A second speaker, Ray Takeyh, senior fellow for Middle Eastern Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations, disagreed with Clawson for linking nuclear negotiations to quelling the domestic opposition.

“I’m not quite sure ... whether a deal with the international community on the nuclear issue resolves your domestic problems. I mean your universities are your universities. Your disaffected elite are your disaffected elite. Your disenfranchised citizenry, is your disenfranchised citizenry. The next day after you ship out the LEU (low enriched uranium) and have some sort of arrangement with 5+1, none of those problems are resolved,” said Takeyh, who was formally a fellow at the Washington Institute and briefly worked for the Obama administration at the Iran desk in the State Department.

Takeyh concluded his comments by addressing critics who say that Iran's government should be treated with respect in order to advance a relationship with that country.

“For a long time many people suggested ... you have to be respectful toward the regime in order to have a relationship with it. I think that may be true if you are trying to transform the relationship between the United States and Iran. I don't think that's where we are at now. I don't think you can transform the relationship. I think you can mitigate some of the hard edges of the Islamic Republic, but I don't see a point in being respectful to a regime that has lost the respect of its constituency. If I was a US government official, I would never use the word Islamic Republic again,” said Takeyh.

Iran allows Russian jet to continue journey to Bahrain

Iran has issued permission for a Russia fighter jet to overfly its territory en route to an international air show in Bahrain, after the plane was barred from entering Iran's air space earlier on Tuesday.

The Russian Foreign Ministry complained earlier that the Su-27 fighter jet was denied passage over Iran as it neared the border, even though its flight plan had been cleared in advance by Iran's Foreign Ministry, reports Reuters.

Citing an Iranian embassy official, Russia's RIA Novosti news agency said that the matter had been resolved.

RIA Novosti noted that some media reports had said that the fighter jet was supposed to be transported by a cargo plane to Bahrain.

The Su-27 is due to participate in an aerobatics display at the Bahrain International Air Show, with Moscow hoping to pick up sales in the Middle East.

Sources: Iran ordered attack on Israeli convoy in Jordan

An attack last week on an Israeli diplomatic convoy in Jordan was apparently carried out on instructions from Iran, the Jerusalem Post reported on Tuesday, citing sources close to Jordan's General Intelligence Department.

The sources told the daily that the Jordanian agency was investigating the possibility that the explosives used in last week's failed attempt were smuggled into Jordan by Iranian diplomats.

The attack itself was apparently perpetrated by local al-Qaida supporters who received money and explosives from Tehran, the sources said.

No one was injured in the incident and the convoy continued on its way.

The sources told the daily that the Jordanian agency believes that the attack came in response to the killing of an Iranian nuclear scientist in Tehran last week.

Iranian officials have accused Israel and the United States of being behind the killing of Massoud Al-Mohammadi. Washington has dismissed the charges as “absurd”.

On Monday, Iranian Interior Minister Mostafa Mohammad-Najjar said Tehran would take revenge on Israel and the United States over the killing, reports Reuters.

Tehran urges France to free Iranian wanted by US

Iran on Tuesday called on France to release an Iranian engineer facing extradition to the United States for allegedly violating the US trade embargo on Iran.

US authorities say Majid Kakavand, 37, sent electrical components and measuring devices purchased in the United States to Iran, via a company in Malaysia, reports AFP.

He was arrested at Charles de Gaulle Airport in Paris in March 2009, while vacationing in France

The appeals court in Paris will rule on Washington’s extradition application on 17 February.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Ramin Mehmanparast, denounced the continued imprisonment of Kakavand.

“Mr Kakavand is innocent and until now they [French authorities] have held him illegally and unlawfully,” Mehmanparast told reporters.

He said “political pressure” from the United States was in part to blame for Kakavand’s trial, and called on Paris to take “serious action” to free him as soon as possible.

Iran possessed “many documents” that prove Kakavand is innocent, Mehmanparast asserted, adding that the documents offered to the court in France against him were “forged”.

The U.S. says since the equipment Kakavand sent had both civilian and military uses, permission was needed to export it to Iran.

Iran slams inaction over fate of four kidnapped diplomats

Iran’s Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki on Monday criticized international organizations, including the United Nations, for their inaction to determine the fate of four Iranian diplomats who were kidnapped in Lebanon in 1982.

The four Iranian diplomats were reportedly kidnapped by Lebanese militiamen in northern Lebanon in July 1982, during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon.

Mottaki said Iran held Israel directly responsible for the safety and security of the four men and called on all international organizations, particularly the United Nations, to take necessary measures to speed up their release.

He said all measures undertaken so far had failed due to the “incompetence” of international bodies and the parties involved in the issue, especially Israel.

The fate of the four men is vague and still unknown, Mottaki noted.

Israel has said it does not know what happened to the diplomats. It is believed that the men were executed by the Lebanese militants a short time after their abduction.

Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah, had earlier said that the diplomats were still alive and being held in Israeli prisons.

US intel agencies suspect Iran never halted nuclear arms work

US intelligence agencies now suspect that Iran never halted work on its nuclear arms program, as stated in a much disputed 2007 US intelligence assessment, the Washington Times reported on Tuesday.

Citing US officials, the newspaper said that differences among analysts now focus on whether Iran’s supreme leader has given or will soon give orders for full-scale production of nuclear arms.

The new consensus is expected to be the highlight of a classified national intelligence estimate nearing completion that will replace the estimate issued in 2007.

The 2007 National Intelligence Estimate, produced by the 16 agencies that make up the US intelligence community, said that there was “moderate confidence” that Iran’s covert work on a nuclear bomb had halted in 2003.

A senior US military officer, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, said last week that Iran’s nuclear program is well-advanced and moving toward the point at which a weapon could be built.

The 2007 finding prompted harsh criticism from US allies and some US lawmakers and the Bush administration.

Intelligence assessments by Britain, France, Germany and Israel all said that Iran’s work on weapons design was continuing on a smaller scale.

US officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, told Newsweek magazine that the revised estimate was prompted by an accumulation of fresh intelligence, not political or diplomatic pressure.

The new estimate, which is under debate as the Obama administration seeks to gain international backing for additional sanctions against Iran, may be released as soon as next month, Newsweek reported on Saturday.

Iran police say public tip-offs led to 40 arrests over protests

Iranian police say more than 40 people have been arrested on the basis of tip-offs from the public, after police circulated photographs of demonstrators at an anti-government protest last month, the Iran Labor News Agency reported on Tuesday.

A special edition of a police publication ran photographs taken on rallies on 27 December, on the Shiite holy day of Ashura, in which more than 500 protesters were arrested.

After the publication of the pictures, “more than 40 people from the elements of sedition were identified and arrested, with the cooperation of the noble and vigilant people of Iran,” ILNA quoted an informed police source as saying.

At least eight people were killed and hundreds wounded during clashes between security forces and demonstrators on Ashura. It was deadliest violence since the massive protests that followed June’s disputed presidential election.

On Monday, five people detained on Ashura went on trial in Tehran, on charges that could be punishable by death.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has accused the United States, Britain and Israel of staging the protests on Ashura.

Israel, Germany warn Iran of new sanctions

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and German Chancellor Angela Merkel warned Iran on Monday of new sanctions over its nuclear ambitions, following talks in Berlin.

Speaking at a joint press conference, Netanyahu again called for “crippling sanctions” against Tehran, which Western powers suspect is seeking to develop a nuclear weapons capability.

“If not now, when? The answer is now,” he said, according to the Financial Times.

Merkel said that Germany had “made it clear” that if Iran’s blocking of a United Nations-brokered nuclear fuel deal did not end, major powers would work on “a comprehensive package of sanctions”.

“Of course we would prefer it if these (sanctions) could be agreed within the framework of the United Nations Security Council,” she said, adding that officials would be working to that end in the coming weeks, reports Reuters.

At a meeting on Saturday of six major powers working on the Iranian nuclear dossier, China made clear it opposed new sanctions against Tehran, at least for now.

Merkel told reporters that Germany would take part in imposing sanctions against Iran, even if there is no UN agreement to act.

As a permanent member of the UN Security Council, China can veto any potential resolution to ratchet up sanctions against Tehran.

In Tehran, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Ramin Mehmanparast, today criticized the comments on sanctions by Netanyahu and Merkel as “repetitive” and “not constructive”, reports the official IRNA news agency.

China calls for “flexibility” on Iran nuclear standoff

China on Tuesday called for more “flexibility” in the standoff over Iran’s nuclear program, playing down prospects of new sanctions against Tehran.

“Our consistent approach has been to resolve the Iran nuclear issue appropriately through dialogue and consultation,” Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Ma Zhaoxu, told reporters, according to Reuters.

“We hope all sides will enhance dialogue and cooperation, and show a more flexible and pragmatic approach,” he added.

On Saturday, representatives from the United States, Britain, France, Germany, Russia and China held talks in New York on the nuclear issue, but failed to reach an agreement on new sanctions against Tehran.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson called for all parties to “step up diplomatic efforts”.

He said that Beijing was aware of the proliferation concerns of the Western countries, but insisted that Tehran had the right to the peaceful use of nuclear energy, reports AFP.

The United States and its European allies suspect Iran is secretly developing a nuclear weapons capability under the guise of a civilian nuclear program. Tehran denies the charge.

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

Iran urges “realistic” approach by West on nuclear row

Iran on Tuesday urged major powers to adopt a “realistic” approach on the issue of Tehran’s nuclear program, after they failed to decide on new sanctions against Iran.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Ramin Mehmanparast, told reporters that Tehran hoped such attitudes by the parties involved in the nuclear negotiations would lead to favorable outcomes, reports the official IRNA news agency.

Stressing that most countries approved of Iran's right to peaceful nuclear technology, Mehmanparast added that some of the Western countries "must take up positive approaches based on reality in their dealings on the Iranian nuclear issue."

"Traces of realism by the parties in the nuclear discussion can be seen," he added.

Mehmanparast told reporters that raising the issue of sanctions against Iran was "repetitive" and "not constructive".

Representatives from the United States, Britain, France, Germany, Russia and China met in New York on Saturday to discuss the nuclear standoff, but failed to reach an agreement about new sanctions against Tehran.

The six powers are concerned by Tehran's rejection of a United Nations-brokered nuclear fuel deal, under which most of Iran's low-enriched uranium would be shipped abroad to be further enriched into fuel for a medical reactor in Tehran.

Iran has instead proposed a staged and simultaneous swap of low-enriched uranium with the nuclear reactor fuel.

Mehmanparast said that the deadline set by Iran on supplying the needed fuel for its medical reactor was a "good opportunity" for the major powers.

Merkel Supports Israel Against Iran

German Chancellor Angela Merkel said her country will back tougher sanctions against Iran if it doesn't change its tune on its nuclear program. Merkel said after meeting Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Berlin on Monday that "if Iran's reactions don't change, we will help work on comprehensive sanctions,"

AP

reported.

She said that Germany hopes to achieve agreement on that in the UN Security Council, but if that isn't possible it also would participate in sanctions along with "countries that are pursuing the same aim."

Germany has long been part of a group of western states seeking to pressure Iran to reverse its nuclear program and stop enriching uranium.

High-Profile

Visit

After a secret meeting with US President Barack Obama's advisor Dennis Ross, Netanyahu is visiting the German capital with a focus on Iran issues. An Israeli delegation comprising Netanyahu, Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman and Defense Minister Ehud Barak have arrived in Germany to attend the second German-

Israeli cabinet meeting in Berlin. The group is also to meet German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle. The meetings were originally scheduled for November last year. Netanyahu last week secretly met with Dennis Ross, a senior advisor to the Obama administration on Iran, who had accompanied US national security advisor, James Jones to Israel. "On the agenda is obviously, among other issues, international pressure on Iran," the prime minister's spokesman, Mark Regev said on Monday, Presstv reported. A spokesman for the Merkel administration had earlier confirmed that Tehran and the so-called Arab-Israeli peace process would be high on the agenda. An Israeli official talking to reporters in a briefing ahead of the Berlin talks said Tel Aviv feels its time "to act to upgrade sanctions" against the Islamic Republic. Both the United States and its close ally Israel have refused to rule out the possibility of a military action should Tehran fail to reverse its nuclear program. Israel views Iran's atomic activities as an existential threat to itself while the West claims Iran is secretly developing nuclear weapons. Iran has denied the charges and said that its nuclear program which is under tight supervision of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is geared to civilian use. Foreign Ministers of Group 5+1 (the US, Britain, France, Russia and China plus Germany) met in New York on Saturday to discuss imposing more sanctions against Iran and its nuclear activities. The meeting failed to achieve its objectives.

Team Meets on WWII Reparations

A special task force assigned by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad started deliberations on accounting the losses inflicted on Iran during the Second World War. The compensation commission, membered by representatives from key ministries and organizations, on Saturday concluded its first session, Presstv reported. Earlier this month Ahmadinejad had said the West must be sued for the damages it inflicted on Iran during the 1939-1945 military conflict. At the outbreak of the conflict, Iran, which had declared its neutrality, was simultaneously invaded by Britain and the former Soviet Union on August 26, 1941. Iran was used as a oil and a transit route for American supplies to the USSR which was involved in a brutal conflict with Adolf Hitler's Nazi Germany.

Persian Corridor
Iran later became known by the Allies as the "victory bridge" or the "Persian Corridor." Britain, the former Soviet Union and the US together managed to move over 5 million tons of munitions and other war materials across Iran to the USSR. The war had dire consequences for the people of Iran. Thousands of Iranian, including workers and drivers to skilled mechanics, were forced to work the "little Detroit's" truck assembly plants in Iran's southern oil-city of Andimeshk. In one year 648,000 vehicles were built in Iran for shipment to the Soviet Union. Galloping inflation imposed further hardships on the lower and middle classes, while fortunes were made by individuals dealing in scarce goods. The masses also suffered from severe food shortages, as the invading forces bought up most of the grains intended for the domestic market.

Mashaei Outlines “Survival Strategy”

The belief in maintaining “unbreakable bonds” between its legitimacy and popularity is the key to the survival of the Islamic Republic, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s top advisor and chief of staff said Sunday. Esfandiar Rahim-Mashaei said governments around the globe consider efficacy as the sole guarantor of their survival. “The Islamic system in Iran, however, has placed its existence on its efficacy as well as legitimacy and popularity”. He noted that the government’s popularity was demonstrated when millions of people re-elected Ahmadinejad for a second term in June. “Marxist regimes and liberal democracies failed because they lacked one or both of these -- legitimacy and popularity,” IRNA quoted him as saying in Tehran.

Shunning

Clichés

The official said the ruling establishment’s vision has allowed Iran to disregard the “obsolete political clichés and rules in the world” and take a different course of action. “This is the precise reason why since the Islamic Revolution in 1979 the powers in the East and West ganged up against the Islamic Republic.” “In the past they [world powers] have hardly missed an opportunity to slow down the progress of the ruling system and will continue on the same path in the future, including in relation to our peaceful nuclear program,” Mashaei said. “Whenever a government is challenged with the ire of arrogant powers and centers of power affiliated to them, it wins the hearts and minds of the peoples across the globe,” Mashaei said, adding that “this notion is all the more apparent in the case of Iran.”

Meddling

in

Elections

The latest anti-Iran move, he stressed, was seen when the hegemony powers interfered in Iran’s internal affairs after the presidential election and tried to create chaos. He was referring to the post-election unrests that erupted in Tehran and other cities following the bitterly disputed polls in mid-June. Iran has accused the West, in particular Britain, the United States and Israel of orchestrating the unrests. Some foreigners and staff of foreign embassies were arrested during the unrests on charges of spying and participating in plots to overthrow the Islamic Republic. Almost all (save for one Frenchwoman) were later released. Mashaei urged the public relations departments of executive organizations to raise awareness about the “government’s activities and services” and also be vigilant about the “sedition” aimed at “slowing down the Islamic state’s forward march”.

Iran's Khatami lashes out at Ahmadinejad, defends protesters

Tehran: Reformist ex-President Mohammad Khatami defended opposition protesters and accused Iran's leadership of "lying" to the people, his website reported today.

Khatami, a key figure in the opposition camp which has infuriated hardliners with its street protests, also slammed those in power who "commit violence with complete immunity" against demonstrators.

"Many lies have been told these days and many promises have been made but people see those in charge of their affairs have not done much," Khatami said.

"So people realise that many of the protesters are not ill-intentioned and their protest is reasonable," he said in comments carried by his Baran Organisation's website.

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's opponents have accused the hardliner of trying to cover up his failures, especially in managing the economy, while the opposition has rejected his June re-election as massively rigged.

Khatami, who was meeting with a group of released post-vote detainees, condemned a new wave of arrests of government critics launched after bloody protests during Shiite mourning rituals of Ashura on December 27.

Iran warns of artificial islands' environmental impact on Persian Gulf

"The construction of artificial islands has environmental impacts on the Persian Gulf region," Mottaki said in an address to the 19th International Conference on the Persian Gulf, which opened in Tehran on Monday.

Experts from Kuwait, Oman, Lebanon, Egypt, Romania, France, Germany, China, India, Russia, and five other foreign countries are participating in the two-day event, which is being sponsored by the Iranian Foreign Ministry.

Mottaki said the Persian Gulf is important because it is an international shipping route and because the region possesses vast energy resources.

Foreign forces trying to create insecurity in Persian Gulf

Mottaki also said that extra-regional powers are greedily eyeing the region and are attempting to create insecurity and to encourage regional countries to distrust each other in order to gain control of the region's resources.

The Iranian foreign minister stated that the instability and problems in the region are caused by a number of factors, namely the presence and interference of foreign forces in the region, the massive arms sales, the support for extremist groups, and the efforts to sow discord between regional ethnic groups.

He pointed to the expansionist policies Israel is pursuing in the Persian Gulf region, saying, "The presence of the Zionist regime has been interconnected with insecurity and

instability in the region, and U.S. officials are pursuing their foreign policy based on the (Zionist) regime's security.”

He also attributed the extremism and terrorism in the Middle East to the discriminatory policies foreign countries are implementing in the region.

Regional cooperation necessary to solve Persian Gulf's problems

The Iranian foreign minister insisted that the problems of the Persian Gulf region must be resolved through regional cooperation.

Iran has presented its proposal for a regional security treaty to regional nations, he said, adding that Tehran believes that there are two approaches for resolving the problems facing the region.

One approach was devised by extra-regional countries that seek to create discord between regional nations, and the other approach envisages regional cooperation, he observed.

Iran is also ready to cooperate with neighboring countries to create a secure environment for economic activities in the region, he added.

Yemen can solve its own problems

Mottaki said the interference of foreign countries in the Yemen conflict has only increased insecurity in the region.

Tehran believes that Sanaa is able to resolve the current crisis through negotiations without the interference of other countries, he added.

The conflict between the Yemeni government and Houthi fighters in northern Yemen began in 2004. It intensified in August 2009 when the Yemeni army launched Operation Scorched Earth in an attempt to crush Shia Houthi fighters in the northern province of Saada.

Regional meeting on dust pollution being organized

Mottaki also announced that a regional meeting will be held in the near future to discuss ways to tackle the region's dust pollution problem.

He called Saudi Arabia the major source of regional dust pollution and said Iraq, Syria, Egypt, and Jordan are other sources of dust pollution.

Tehran to host trilateral meeting on Afghanistan crisis

Mottaki said that Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan plan to hold another trilateral meeting on the crisis in Afghanistan in Tehran in the near future.

Tehran is devising some regional approaches to deal with the crisis in Afghanistan, he stated.

He also asked certain countries, which claim they are helping Afghanistan resolve its problems, to support Tehran's approaches.

Major powers pursuing double-standard policy toward Iran

Elsewhere in his remarks, Mottaki criticized the major powers for adopting double-standard policies toward Iran's nuclear program.

He cited the fact that nothing is done about Israel's hundreds of nuclear warheads and the nuclear cooperation between the U.S. and the Zionist regime, while illegal restrictions on the use of nuclear energy are imposed on Iran, which is a signatory to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Mottaki calls Iran, S. Arabia two key countries in Islamic world

Iran and Saudi Arabia, along with other Islamic nation, can take important steps toward resolving problems facing the Islamic world, he explained.

Talking to reporters on the sidelines of an international meeting on the Persian Gulf in Tehran on Monday, Mottaki said he believed the prospects of relations between Iran, Saudi Arabia and other Muslims states is promising.

The chief diplomat added that Iran considers expanding relations with all the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council members including Saudi Arabia as a foreign policy priority.

The remarks by Mottaki came as Tehran has criticized Riyadh for its military intervention in the Yemen conflict. In a direct reference to Saudi Arabia last week, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said Muslim brothers are not expected to point their guns against each other.

Tehran-London ties

Asked about the Tehran-London future ties, Mottaki said Iran has thoroughly reviewed diplomatic relations with Britain over the past six months.

Tehran has accused Britain of inciting post-election unrest in Iran.

On December 16, the Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee urged the Foreign Ministry to reduce diplomatic relations with the British government.

Mottaki said Iran is reviewing its ties with Britain in 10-12 areas and will make a decision based on its national interests

Iran, Iraq border sheriffs meet

Border guards from 11 border districts attended the meeting.

The commander of Iran's border sheriffs, brigadier Hossein Zolfaghari, stated that the meeting falls within the previous border agreement signed between the two neighbors.

The head of the Iranian team expressed Tehran's readiness to take necessary actions to fulfill the previous border agreements signed between the two countries.

The brigadier hoped the mutual misunderstandings over border demarcation to be cleared up based on the 1975 Algiers agreement.

Iran to take controversial symphony to Europe despite objections

Italy, France, and Germany will be three of the five countries to host the TSO from January 22 to February 4, the Persian service of the Fars News Agency reported on Monday.

The two other countries will be announced in the near future, the agency added with no reference to the source of the report.

No precise venue was mentioned for the TSO's concerts in the three countries.

A number of Iranian musicians including Melal Orchestra conductor Peyman Soltani and TSO Council member Mostafa-Kamal Purtorab are opposed to the composition selected for the concerts.

They have said that the Peace and Friendship Symphony lacks the standards of a symphony to be performed in Europe, which is home of the world's most prominent composers and prestigious symphony orchestras.

They believe that Iranian classical music will be dishonored by performing the symphony.

Composed by Majid Entezami in last year, the symphony was originally entitled the Islamic Revolution Symphony, but it has recently been renamed for the European concerts.

It was first performed at Tehran's Vahdat Hall for five nights during Iran's Fajr celebrations for the 30th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution in February 2009. A number of high-ranking Iranian officials, including President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, attended one of the concerts.

Photo: President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad kisses conductor Majid Entezami after a performances of the Peace and Friendship Symphony by the Tehran Symphony Orchestra at Tehran's Vahdat Hall on February 2, 2009. Former culture minister Mohammad-Hossein Saffar Harandi is also seen.

Why Is Israel Threatening Iran

Since the start of the row over Iran's nuclear program in the early years of the new millennium, Israel has kept flexing muscles towards Iran, threatening it with air raids on nuclear facilities. My personal reading says that Israel is possibly following these goals in all its bold intimidations:

First may be the age-old 'enemy at the gates' trick. The government foregrounds the alleged Iran threat, runs a series of accusations and warnings against this country and manages to derive the support of its citizens. Threats against Iran may also have a corollary target: Arab states of the region. All the air force maneuvers and military muscle-flexing could in fact be a play performed by Israelis to intimidate neighboring Arab states and extract more concessions in the peace process.

However, we should not discard the possibility that Israel's efforts could be real. That is, the country may have come to the analysis that Iran is turning into a new regional nuclear power. This would create a new equilibrium that Israel fears of most, and as long as it has the upper hand, tries to preclude the unfortunate situation by preventing Iran to achieve nuclear know-how. European and American observers may view the threats from a different angle. For some of them, Barack Obama's Middle East policy, particularly with regard to Iran, is flustering the Jewish state. Belligerence and resort to brutish rhetoric are Israel's oft-used weapons just as they sense that an Iran-West thaw is on the way. Butterflies are dancing around in Israelis stomachs as Iran and Five plus One come closer to a compromise.

Now let's change our perspective. Clearly any military step by Israel needs preparations which are as technical as political. The course of events during the recent years shows that Israel needs to double-check the situation before launching a military attack on Iran. Israelis should ask themselves that are all the conditions met? Can Israel disregard Americans' considerations and concerns while they are having hard times fighting terrorism in Iraq, Afghanistan and Yemen? The answer is no. The circumstances are no better for Israel than they were during, say, four years ago. So it's better for them to forget all about military options.

But despite all the unfavorable circumstances, Iranians, on the other hand, should be on high alert given the predisposition of Israelis to mount surprising attacks.

America Has Stopped Meddling in Iran's Domestic Affairs

Senior American officials stress that Obama is not following a regime change policy vis-à-vis Iran, but is committed to a dual-track approach, that is continuing negotiations in order to find a solution to the dispute over Iran's nuclear program. Increasing economic pressures are deemed as an alternative if the negotiations fail to end in the desired result. Meanwhile, some observers believe that new U.S. sanctions will have a new purpose: to influence Iran's domestic developments.

Hosein Salimi, university professor and Iran-US affairs analyst has commented on the issue:

In today's world, and with the emergence of a new international structure, sanctions are no more effective tools to change the behavior of states. The case particularly holds true for Iran that has occasionally experienced periods of isolationist economy and unlike many other countries, is not dependent on global economy. Yes. Sanctions can bring hard times for a country, but they are never able to change its behavior.

Meanwhile, American decision-makers have now understood that they should not use sanctions as a tool to pressurize the Iranian regime to improve its domestic policies. Americans are now aware that any attempt to influence Iran's internal politics will give create a more difficult situation for reform-seeking groups inside Iran.

Although a little late, United States has come to the correct understanding that in the mental framework of the Islamic Republic of Iran, connections with foreign powers and use of external leverage is a stain on reputation. Any movement for social reform thought to be supported by foreign powers will end in nowhere but defeat and will be rejected by the Iranian society.

It is heartwarming to see that a key part of the American decision-making circle has come to this conclusion. Aware of this fact, from now on the United States will discard – at least on the surface- the traditional mentality that justified the use of any tool to carry out change from

Iran and Turkey Are Not Regional Competitors

Recently you have focused your studies on the new Turkey, its diplomacy and the Turkish society. My first question is that what is the quality of the new Turkey's, I mean Erdogan's Turkey, ties with the Arab League and the Arab World? We see that Turkey is trying to exert direct influence on the foreign policy of the Arab World and has entered into free trade agreements with Arabs, especially Persian Gulf states. These are all signs that Turkey has adopted a new approach in its diplomacy. What do you think?

I think we need to further focus on Turkey's foreign relations. I have visited several Arab

countries and studied their behavior closely. Their relations with Turkey are quite interesting. Arab countries believe that closer ties with a Muslim country like Turkey are beneficial and affect their relations with Europe in a positive way. Of course, I think Turkey's diplomatic trait is not something that belongs to this century. There are many reasons for extensive relations between Turkey and Arab countries.

Do you agree with the new diplomatic approach of Turkey represented by Ahmet Davutoglu? Is he really trying to introduce a new approach in Turkey's diplomacy? The one that is sometimes dubbed the neo-Ottoman policy.

I think rather than being a feasible idea, it is more ideological. Revival of the Ottoman influence does not sound realistic. Also, I don't believe that Turkey's diplomacy can move in that way. Many Turkish politicians prefer to change, just as the neighboring countries have changed. But the neo-Ottoman policy belongs to the 19th century and can't be beneficial for this age. It is just an ideological motto and it won't find a place in the Turkish diplomacy.

What do you think of the regional competition between Iran and Turkey? Just as Turkey, Iran is trying to influence the domestic and foreign policies of Arab countries. Many observers believe that there is a competition going on between Iran and Turkey to add more Arab countries to their camp. Do you agree with these observers?

Not that much. I think there are two counter-arguments for such analyses. First of all, Iran is trying to find and integrate exceptions in the Arab World. It is following this policy in Lebanon, has relations with some Iraqi groups with this aim and also tries to exert its influence on Palestinian groups such as Hamas. The Arab World is looking at such efforts with suspicion. Arab countries think that Iran is trying to promote its ideology between Arab countries and revive its ancient influence over Arabs.

So I think that Iran's policy contradicts that of Turkey and this gives Turkey the upper hand. For Turks, ancient past is history and can't be developed anymore. Also, there is more sympathy between some Arab countries and Turkey. Religious factors –I mean the Shiite-Sunni issue- can bring Turkey and Arabs closer. So against Turkey, Iran doesn't have so many opportunities.

On the other hand, Turkey's chances aren't that much better. Although Turkey's position among the Arab countries is better than Iran, we cannot blow it out of proportion. I think that for Turkey, it is more important to attract Arab and Muslim countries and spearhead their ties with the United States and West. This can be an advantage for Turkey. Arabs have oil and Turkey has technology which comes from West, especially the United States. Arab countries need that technology. Through Turkey, they can export their products to the European Union. Strong ties with EU can help Turkey in its interaction with Arab countries.

In my opinion, this is the policy Turkey is following right now. Look at the quality of its relations with Syria, Egypt, Lebanon or even Jordan. So for those reasons, Turkey can

outperform Iran in its ties with Arab countries. Compared with Iran, it can be a better diplomatic leader for Arab countries. Iran's chances are lower. So I don't think talks about regional competition between Iran and Turkey are realistic.

What do you think of Turkey's impact on some regional issues such as Iran's nuclear program, Iraq's policies and the Arab-Israeli relations?

Turkey can play a crucial yet limited role in those cases. On Iraq, I think Turkey prefers Iran to play the key role. Turks have always faced a big challenge in Iraq which is about their borders. Kurdish groups such as PKK have caused great problems for Turkey. So the Turks prefer to leave the case to Iran whose presence in Iraq raises less sensitivity. Iran's presence in Iraq is much stronger and that can be more beneficial for Turkey, since it helps it to tackle the Kurdish problem in its border with Iraq.

But we saw that Turkey had a critical role in resolving the tension between Iraq and Syria after the recent bombings in Baghdad.

I agree with you. But Turkey's policy is based on stability when tensions rise between Iraq and Syria. Turkey tries to keep the balance in its foreign strategy. This is the policy Turkey is following also with many Arab countries. I even want to say that Turkey adopts the same pattern in its relations with Western countries such as France and Germany, since it is this policy that opens new doors to diplomacy and serves its interests.

In its ties with countries such as Syria which has warm relations with Iran and also with some Palestinian groups, Turkey tries to maintain its ties at a certain level and advance its interests through this opening. In its foreign policy, Turkey sometimes decides not to play the key role but complement the efforts of other countries such as Iran.

Goods and Bads of anti-Iran Sanctions for China

China keeps insisting that it is not the right time for further sanctions against Iran and there is still room for diplomacy. Meanwhile, Five plus One's first meeting to discuss Iran's nuclear program has ended in failure, which many attribute to Beijing's stance. Will China turn into a challenge for the United States over Iran's nuclear program?

Mohammad Hossein Malaek, Iran's former ambassador to China and foreign affairs analyst:

China's expansionist policy is in nature a challenge for the United States. However, the difference between China and the United States over Iran and its disputed nuclear program is not a matter of strategic disagreement, but tactical. In other words, Iran is not a big impediment in China-US relations.

New fiscal and economic sanctions the United States is planning to impose will be a huge setback in Iran-China relations, as they shackle trade partnership of Tehran and Beijing. In the recent years, China has purchased an annual estimated value of 9 billion dollars of oil from Iran, the price of which it in pays in cash. The process has however become

increasingly burdensome, creating legal problems for bilateral contracts.

U.S.-supported sanctions could not freeze the trade partnership between Iran and China, but they add to the already existing problems. Tehran can still supply its demands through cash purchase and Beijing won't cut THE economic ties. Things will be the same, only with more courts and legal obstacles.

The Chinese are not interested in any more challenges in the way of their economic ties with Iran. That naturally turns them into critics of tougher sanctions. To keep up their exchanges with American fiscal institutes, Chinese banks have agreed not to issue letters of credit for Iranian traders and organizations and stop dollar-based transactions. Nevertheless, the stronger economic ties between Iran and China, the more difficult it gets for them to carry out financial proceedings. Meanwhile, let's not remember that domestic and international circumstances stop Americans from pressurizing the Chinese.

China's discontent fades away when it comes to the sanctions against Iran's oil and gas projects. Punitive measures targeting Iran's energy industry in recent years have been a blessing for Beijing. They have given it a rare opportunity to invest in Iran's lucrative fields. China has now actually become Iranian Oil Ministry's first option. The result has been a plunge in Iran's energy industry from top global standards to Chinese standards. In negotiations, Beijing tries to persuade Iranians replace Western technology with Chinese technology. There was a time when Chinese commodities were not an item in Iranians' purchase list. Now, they are topping the list and that is the biggest achievement for China.

Iran Supports a Powerful Government

What are the most important recent developments in Afghanistan politics, especially after Karzai's reelection and Obama's new strategy?

Probably announcing a date for London Conference where Afghan officials and the international community will discuss a new reform plan for Afghanistan. There was also the unexpected vote of parliament to Karzai's cabinet. Nearly 70% of his nominees were rejected by the legislature. This has increased considerable pressure on Karzai's administration before on the threshold of the London Conference. Karzai has also called for the *loya jirga* to be convened after the London Conference.

How do you see challenges for democracy after the elections, especially with the parliament's vote to Karzai's cabinet? How are these challenges going to affect the administration in future?

If Karzai fails to gain the support of other bodies of the state, especially the legislature, he can't construct the powerful government image that he wants. How can he talk of forming the *loya jirga* and inviting insurgents to join the government when he has

problems with the parliament? He needs to construct convergence among state forces at first to enter a deal with insurgents from a stronger position. We can't blame the parliament for not voting in favor of Karzai's nominees. The parliament has just used their legal rights. But the need for a harmony between the executive and the legislature is felt more than ever.

How will the recent developments –Karzai's challenges and increase of foreign troops in Afghanistan- affect Tehran-Kabul ties?

Afghanistan can get on the stability and security track if the government assumes the key role in confronting challenges, if it takes over further responsibilities and if foreign countries decrease their presence step by step. History shows us that the foreign troops have never managed to foster the stability and security Afghanistan and its neighbors are looking for. Relying on military power of foreign countries is not the solution. It can't return stability to Afghanistan.

For Iran close relations with Afghanistan are vitally important. Islamic Republic has based its policy on supporting Afghanistan's legitimate government. It wants an Afghan government that develops its potentials and shoulders administrative tasks, so that foreign troops would leave the country

Iran Determines Its Own Destiny

Inside Israel, more than few influential political centers believe that the time has come for West to step up pressure on Iran. Along with the expiration of U.S.-set deadline, and entering 2010 –called the defining year in Iran's nuclear case, Iran's post-election turmoil have given foreign countries an opportunity to take advantage of the situation. Aware of Iran's volatile situation, Israeli media have heated up their demonization campaign, trying to turn 2010 into a year of tough measures against our country.

Inside Iran, the government is deteriorating the situation and undermining Iran's regional position by standing firm on its nuclear stance and rejecting steps taken for reuniting political camps. On the other hand, Israel is hopeful to turn the tide in its own favor and unite the world in taking a unanimous measure against Iran.

Although the incumbent Israeli administration has been radical from the beginning of its term, Iran's domestic developments after the election have provided the best chance for it to gain the consent of the international community against Iran. Recently, a report in Jerusalem Post claimed that no threat in the second decade of 21st century is more serious than a nuclear Iran. The report in the Israeli daily had added that the course of developments with Iran's nuclear program during the recent months have proved that neither sanctions nor diplomacy can stop Iran of what it is pursuing.

The emphasis on inefficiency of sanctions and diplomacy naturally directs attention towards the alternatives: confrontation and war. However, for Tel Aviv and many other states of the region and the world, it is clear that military measures against Iran will not be fruitful and merely complicate the regional situation. Add to this the unwillingness of

present U.S. administration to endorse Israel on a military attack against Iran. Regional and global economic situation also do not allow for a new war.

It seems that Israelis are once again promoting their favorite 'worst case scenario'. To stop the alleged 'Iran threat', they start from 'war as the best option' to guarantee that the international community agrees to exert the maximum pressure on Iran. However, extremist statesmen in Israel need something more powerful, since they believe Iran is approaching its nuclear objectives despite all the pressures and it may already be late for the international community to wake up and see Iran's threat.

This viewpoint, as usual proving the radicalism and belligerence inherent in Israel's diplomacy, is looked upon with doubt by Americans and Europeans, let alone China, India and Russia that benefit from cooperating with Iran. Thus, much striving is needed for Israel to unite the world over military action against Iran. Certain economic and political reasons have so far stopped Five plus One from reaching an agreement on imposition of more stringent sanctions against Iran. But for Israel, what counts is its national interests and Iran's perceived threat towards those interests.

Naturally, Iran's behavior and its domestic developments, besides the depth and extent of Iran's diplomatic ties with other countries, determine the maneuverability of Israel in actualizing its plans. Nevertheless, according to many analysts, never has been the situation as ripe as the past four years for Israel to take advantage of Iran's behavior and its regional and global policies.

Undoubtedly, Israel's propaganda and West's measures are effective only when Iran suffers bewilderment in Iran's in domestic and international domains. Stability, security and citizens' satisfaction with the government besides constructive interaction with the international community will protect Iran from Israel's aggressive policies and age-old animosity. Iran still has the destiny in its own hands. Clever play in both domestic and international fields disarms Israel. But it should be national interests, and not partisan interest or ideology, that determine its moves.

Economical Front

Gasoline Rationing May Be Scrapped

This lawmaker pinpointed based on the subsidy reform bill, which will be declared to government, plans have been set for the government to attain up to Rls.200 trillion in oil products' revenues.

In an interview with Fars news agency, this MP further touched on study of 5th Economic Development Plan, and 1389 (March 2010-11) Budget bills, noting: "A postponement in study of budget bill seems unlikely. But I call for concurrent study of both legislations."

In regard to alternative approaches, this lawmaker pointed out: "The 4th Economic Development Plan can be extended with amendment or without amendment and the 5th Economic Development Plan motion can be postponed to after the year 1390 (March 2011-12)."

Sanctions Unravel

Mohammad Nahavandian, head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, now on a state visit to Austria, said: "The proponents of sanctions can never reach their politically motivated objectives because economic embargoes against a big country like Iran could never muster full international support."

On the contrary, he added, the countries imposing sanctions will lose a big market.

"Under the present economic circumstances, everyone in the world is seeking to stimulate demand and expand markets. Governments are releasing lifelines in order to win markets and they will never seek to restrict their opportunities," said Nahavandian. "Political discrepancies could be settled through political solutions. We should refrain from politicizing the economy and therefore plunge it into turmoil."

Hand-Woven Carpet Exports Hit \$340m

Referring to official figures from Iran's Customs Administration, the center said the exports were up nine percent compared to last year.

Carpets generated 291 million dollars in the first eight months of the year.

Iran Exports 400,000 Tons of Diesel to Iraq

Managing Director of the National Iranian Oil Products Distribution Company (NIOPDC) Farid Ameri said Iran supplies Iraqi power plants with different kinds of fuel.

He added that Iraq had imported 90,000 tons of kerosene and 6,000 tons of jet fuel from Iran over the same period.

Iran has bought about two million barrels of gas oil from Singapore for December delivery to meet its rising winter heating demands.

Ameri went on to say that Iran is in talks with Pakistan and Armenia to supply its neighboring states with liquefied gas fuel.

He added that Iran started to export gasoline and gas oil to Afghanistan to tackle the problem of fuel smuggling into the country.

Iran to Launch Overseas Trade Center in Oman

Hamid Zadboum, an official with the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran, said the center would become operational on January 26, 2010 in Oman.

In November 2009, Iran opened its first overseas-based commercial center in Shanghai.

Zadboum added that some 60 Iranian companies would operate from the proposed center located in the Persian Gulf littoral state of Oman.

The Iranian government has allocated one billion dollars in loans to set up 20 trade centers across the world.

“Tehran aims to promote its economic and commercial capabilities by launching the trade centers,” deputy of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries and Mines Mohammad Davaei said.

He added that President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad had approved funding a one-billion-dollar loan for the project.

Davaei revealed that Iran has started the construction of two centers in Sudan and Azerbaijan.

Privatization Restricted

In an interview with IRNA, the official was cited as adding: “In case the stocks of these companies are dealt at global stock exchanges, they can be sold at prices higher than

domestic ones. Meanwhile, this progress finally leads to promotion of investments in different sectors and attraction of foreign financial sources.”

He said: “Although Tehran Stock Exchange has registered a 40% profit in the past nine months and is among top global stock markets; it is better if the major companies’ shares are also traded in other stock markets.”

He also considered the current national structure as another hurdle to foreign investments, while stating: “Although the stock market act has permitted the takeover of companies, overseas; this measure is not possible due to non-conclusion of a memorandum of understanding with other countries.”

He underscored: “The general policies of Article 44 of the Constitution have laid the ground for domestic and foreign investors, which in turn is key to attraction of important investments.”

He went on to enumerate the two problems obstructing the privatization of power plants as debts to national treasury and debts to banks, while pinpointing 70%-80% of power plants have been financed through grant of loans, and this shortcoming should be dispelled for the power houses’ privatization.

Uzbekistan Seeks More Cooperation With Iran

Elyor Ganiyen, Uzbek Minister of Foreign Economic Relations, Investments and Trade made the remark in an interview with IRNA.

Before leaving Tashkent for Tehran, Ganiyev said Uzbekistan wants full cooperation with the Islamic Republic of Iran, particularly in the cultural, trade and economic fields. The Uzbek official hoped the two countries would reach agreements on further cooperation during his visit to Iran.

The Uzbek minister will be in Tehran to attend the 10th meeting of Iran-Uzbekistan joint economic commission, planned for January 17-18.

Charter Tickets Refundable

"Based on the CAO regulations, charter flight tickets are refundable to passengers cancelling their air travels," Mehr quoted him as saying. He said a number of passengers had complained that air travel agencies had refused to give their money back.

Jafarzadeh also said the travel agencies were not authorized to tell passengers the type of airplane and its operator.

Iran Announces Self-Sufficiency in Naval Industries

"Today, the Islamic Republic of Iran's Navy is proud to have been able to reach self-sufficiency in manufacturing all kinds of advanced naval equipments," Commander of the Iranian Army's Naval Force Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari said.

He further pointed out that production of such missile cruisers and frigates as Paykan, Joshan and Darafsh illustrates Iran's technological mastery in naval industries.

Iran has been pushing an arms development program in recent years in a bid to reach self-sufficiency. It has produced its own jet fighters and armored vehicles as well as radar-avoiding missiles and other high-tech weapons.

The Islamic Republic of Iran is also capable of manufacturing various kinds of naval vessels such as missile cruisers and destroyers.

The Iranian Navy announced in August that it plans to boost production of different types of home-made vessels.

MOTTAKI: Iran, Libya to Set up Economic, Political Committees

He made the remark in Libya on Friday during a joint meeting between Libyan economic experts and the representatives of the Iran's economic sector who are accompanying him to his three-day visit to the country.

He hoped the establishment of the committees would open up a new phase in bilateral relations.

During the meeting, Iranian economic activists outlined Iranian companies' capabilities in generation and transfer of energy, building factories, dams, roads and railways as well as agriculture, water resources management, production of cement, tractors, automobiles, technical and engineering services, refineries, pesticides, export of medicines and hospital equipment, training courses for healthcare and medical staff members, mines and investment within the frameworks of bilateral and multilateral contracts or activities in a third country.

Libyan Prime Minister Baghdadi Mahmudi who was also present in the meeting welcomed all Iranian firms and companies which are keen to make investments in his country and said he will make sure that necessary measures are taken to support all Iranian traders and investors who are willing to establish joint companies in Libya.

Mottaki left Tehran for Tripoli, Libya, Thursday morning on an official visit at the head of a ranking politico-economic delegation.

Tehran-Tashkent Trade to Total \$1b

Addressing the 10th Joint Commercial, Economic, Scientific, and Technical Cooperation Commission meeting of the two countries in Tehran, the minister of commerce was cited by Mehr news agency as saying on Sunday that: “Currently, a significant number of documents have been sealed between the two countries. The strong and resolute presence of the two nations’ private companies in the meetings ushers in a rise in commercial exchanges in line with materialization of the two countries’ presidents’ ideals.”

He underlined: “Uzbekistan is at the heart of Central Asia, en route Silk Road. It is one of the most important historical centers in Asia and across the world, and links Central Asian countries’ transportation and transit networks.”

He expressed hope that with the implementation of agreements reached between the two countries, the ground would be laid for further economic, commercial, and industrial cooperation and the two nations’ relations would be broadened more than ever.

Meanwhile, the Uzbek Minister of Commerce, Foreign Relations, and Investment, Alyar Ghaniov, who has also taken part in these meetings, called for amendment of transportation tariffs between the two countries, while underlining as long as the issue of transportation among the two countries is not solved, many issues of concern will remain unsolved.

The Uzbek minister noted: “Geographical proximity; numerous commonalities in different domains; and long-lasting mutual cooperation are the factors that can set the stage for development of the two countries’ mutual commercial, economic, agricultural, and industrial cooperation.”

He reiterated that Uzbekistan, like Iran, is developing in different economic fields, such that it registered an 8.1% growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and a 33% boost in investments through the year 2009.

Iran, Tanzania Ink Agreement on Economic Cooperation

The MoU was signed on Saturday evening between head of commerce organization of Sistan and Baluchestan province in Iran and deputy minister for fishery and animal husbandry of Tanzania.

During the signing ceremony, the provincial official Iraj Hassanpour said that the MoU is related to dispatching and receiving trade delegations, joint economic cooperation in the field of fishery, cement production, and processing industry, especially in the field of meat production.

Head of Zahedan Chamber of Commerce Abdul Hakim Rigi, who attended the ceremony, said that the presence of Iranian expatriates in Tanzania since many years ago is a privilege for creating more relations with the country.

He added that Tanzania has had a 6% economic growth and one of Iran's foreign economic priorities is interaction with African countries.

The Tanzanian deputy minister presented information about his country, and said that the main factor of his country's economic activities is agriculture.

He added that there are a lot of opportunities in Tanzania for investment

Exports to China Up by 40%

The (total) volume of Iran's exports to China stood at \$2.1 billion in the 9 months of this (Iranian) year (ends March 20). The volume was \$1.5 billion during the similar period last year," Caretaker of Asia and Oceania Trade Office of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization Amir Talebi said.

Reminding that china is Iran's second trade partner after Iraq, the official noted, "The volume of Iran's imports from China has decreased by 17% during the same period."

Dozens of Chinese firms operate in Iran, largely helping with infrastructure projects. Despite the sanctions already in place, two-way trade between China and Iran grew 35 percent last year, to stand at \$27 billion.

China has also signed an estimated \$120 billion worth of oil deals with Iran over the past five years.

Regarding the other South-East Asian countries, Talebi stated that during the first 9 months of the current Iranian year the volume of Iran's exports to Hong Kong has risen by 45%.

"Also during the same period, Iran's exports to Vietnam, the Philippines and New Zealand increased by 56%, 28% and 29%, respectively," Talebi added.

Caviar Production Up 12 pc

From the beginning of the year, 240 Iranian fishermen have fished about 6 tons of caviar fishes which show 12 percent increase in comparison with the figure last year, he said.

"840 kg caviar has been produced in ten process centers in the year 1388 (starting March, 2009)," he added.

He described good weather conditions, preventing illegal fishing and making secure southern parts of the Caspian Sea as the main reasons of caviar production growth in the country.

Iranian fishermen had produced 718 kg caviar from 6 tons of caviar fishes hunted last year.

Iran, U.S. Trade Exchange Down 61%

The same figure for last year was \$119.3, Fars News Agency reported.

Total export of the US to Iran in November 2009 amounted to \$41.5m, showing a severe fall compared to the same period the preceding year, with \$111.1m. The country's imports from Iran also suffered a fall, amounting to \$4.6m, double the amount the preceding year, \$8.2m.

The whole value of commercial transactions between Iran and the United States through the eleven months of 2009 stood at \$329m, of which \$270m constituted the US export to Iran while the remaining \$59m accounted for the country's imports from Iran.

Free Zone Projects Launched

On the sidelines of the inaugural ceremony of these projects, the vice-president noted: "The existing capacities and potentials in this region are numerous and significant and if this free zone takes advantage of all these capacities, it can turn into a major national exporting pole."

He was cited by IRNA as saying that further investments should be made in the domain of product transit network in Arvand Free Zone, and exports in this region to Iraq and Central Asia should be expanded.

Baqai hoped that given the scheduled plans for this region, these projects would be completed within the set deadline, and would be timely prepared for citizens.

Some Foreign Fruits Import Banned

To remove the concerns of farmers in Kerman Province about the import of fruits on the verge of Nowrouz (Iranian New Year), the Commerce Ministry has banned the import of a group of citrus fruits; in case of import, high tariffs would be levied on them," the official stated.

Int'l Confab on Strategic Management

The 4th International Conference on Strategic Management was held on Saturday in Tehran with Iranian and foreign experts in attendance. Mohammad E'rabi, the secretary of the event, said the conference aims at discussing the latest studies and practices in the field of strategic management as well as employment strategy, national strategy, strategic control and competition. In his words, strategic or institutional management is the conduct of drafting, implementing and evaluating cross-functional decisions that will enable an organization to achieve its long-term objectives. It is the process of specifying the organization's mission, vision and objectives, developing policies and plans, often in terms of projects and programs, which are designed to achieve these objectives and then allocating resources to implement the policies and plans, projects and programs. He added, "A balanced scorecard is often used to evaluate the overall performance of the business as well as its competitiveness and progress towards objectives." According to him, strategic management is a level of managerial activity under setting goals and over tactics. Strategic management provides overall direction to the enterprise and is closely related to the field of organization studies. In the field of business administration it is useful to talk about "strategic alignment" between the organization and its environment or "strategic consistency". According to Mehdi Alvani, a board member of Allameh Tabatabaei University, there is strategic consistency when the actions of an organization are consistent with the expectations of management, and these in turn are with the market and the context. He said strategic management is an ongoing process that evaluates and controls the business and the industries in which the company is involved; assesses its competitors and sets goals and strategies to meet all existing and potential competitors; and then reassesses each strategy annually or quarterly to determine how it has been implemented and whether it has succeeded or needs replacement by a new strategy to meet changed circumstances, new technology, new competitors, a new economic environment, or a new social, financial or political environment. Vafa Ghaffarian, the board director of the Telecommunication Company of Iran, also said the Iranian market is not competitive and that hinders the development of strategic management practices. "As long as there is no competition in the work place, strategic management makes no sense at all." He laid emphasis on the importance of privatization, liberation and competition, adding that privatization of the banking sector has paid off, as it has facilitated competition in the financial market to some extent. According to him, in order for a policy to work, there must be a level of consistency from every person in an organization, especially management. This is what needs to occur on both the tactical and strategic levels of management in Iran. The participants of the conference, in the end, agreed that measuring the effectiveness of the organizational strategy is extremely important to conduct a SWOT analysis to figure out the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (both internal and external) of the entity in question. This may require to take certain precautionary measures or even to change the entire strategy. Moreover, in most large companies there are several levels of management. Strategic

management is the highest of these levels. It gives direction to company values, culture, goals and missions. Under this broad company strategy there are typically business-level competitive strategies and functional unit strategies. The sidelines of the event included a specialized workshop on strategic management and a book fair. The two-day International Conference on Strategic Management was organized in collaboration with Tehran University's College of Management as well as the universities of Allameh Tabatabaiee, Amir Kabir, Shahid Beheshti, Science and Industry, Teacher Training, Malek Ashtar, Shahed, Khajeh Nasir Tousi, National Defense, and a number of management associations and organizations.

Iran Can Export Turkmen Gas To Europe

Iran can export Turkmenistan's natural gas to Europe, said Executive Director of Iran's Narkangan Gas to Liquid International (NGTLIC) and head of the International Institute for Caspian Studies, Narsi Gorban in an interview with Trend Capital. Last week, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and his Turkmen counterpart Gurbangulu Berdimuhamedov attended the opening ceremony of Turkmenistan-Iran gas pipeline's second branch from the Dovlatabad field to Hangeran area. Given the current capacities, the new route will allow to bring gas supplies from Turkmenistan to Iran up to 20 billion cubic meters per year. In this respect, Gorban said, "Firstly, we need to take into account that it requires direct fuel transit, for which the country should build a new pipeline from Turkmenistan to the western Iran to export gas to Europe. The consortium should lay new pipeline with a diameter of 56 inches. Iran has this potential. More likely, both Turkmenistan and Iran will carry certain amounts of gas to Europe through this pipeline. In addition, it would enable Iran to send Turkmen gas to the domestic market and export similar amounts of its own gas to Europe. This can be done on the basis of swap contract, or whether Iran might be a gas re-exporter, buying it from Turkmenistan and selling in the same volume to Europe. Iran has enough capacity to implement all these projects. But this requires a consortium of investors. Construction of the pipeline itself is not difficult. This requires a consortium and a financial program. Unfortunately, discussions in this respect have not been held yet."

Goodbye to Subsidies

Everybody acknowledges that Iran's \$50 billion subsidy program cannot continue forever, but many don't believe the time to undo past excesses is now. This week, the bill to reform the vast subsidy program became law and President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's government is getting ready to take the lead, Mrzine.com reported.

A few weeks ago, the New York Times noted that while the outside world is focused on

Iran's nuclear program, policymakers in Iran were busy drafting reforms to end subsidies for energy products and other essential goods. Since then, as the US deadline for reaching a deal with Iran through negotiations came and went, and with it the threats of new illegal sanctions heightened, the government and the parliament hammered out a compromise over how to spend the savings from the gradual removal of subsidies, so this week the "Economic Overhaul Bill" finally became law. The compromise allows the government some discretion in spending the money it saves from not paying subsidies while the parliament maintains oversight.

Differences

The parliament had wanted the money to enter the annual budget and be subject to the same rules and regulations, but President Ahmadinejad put up a hard fight to maintain some control over the money. The compromise is for a special fund that allows him to have that control. He has hailed the bill as historic and the most ambitious policy challenge the Islamic Republic has undertaken since its inception, one that will transform the country. The critics predict dire economic and social consequences. Most economists with a pro-market disposition counsel delay because they believe that the economy is in such a poor shape and so badly managed that it cannot tolerate the price hikes. The resulting economic and political crisis, they argue, will give price reform a bad name and thus prevent future attempts at market reform. They prefer to first see the numerous distortions that plague production go away before the economy is subjected to the shock of higher energy prices. Administratively set low interest rates and overvalued rial are among the chief distortions that they frequently mention.

Others, from a leftist persuasion, offer grander preconditions for improvement, such as legal and cultural reform. Sequencing of reforms is of critical importance for their success but getting the sequencing right is more of an art than a science. It is very hard to know from deductive reasoning alone, especially when you mix in political economy considerations, if it is optimal to wait for other elusive reforms to happen before raising energy prices.

Chicken-and-Egg

Cycle

There is the danger of a chicken-and-egg cycle here with no end. Political economy considerations are the most compelling reasons for supporting the energy price reforms that are on the table now. Now to allay the fears that the sequencing is all wrong, consider the possibility that removing energy subsidies can stimulate the very comprehensive reforms that the reform bill's critics view as preconditions. If higher energy prices further depress industries because they cannot borrow to finance the temporary shock to their costs, it would be one more reason to rethink the interest rate ceilings that at present dissuade banks from lending to producers. If export markets disappear when producers have to pay world market prices for their energy, there is a greater chance that the policies that have led to the highly overvalued rial will come under scrutiny. Perhaps there will be increased pressure to expand public transportation in major cities by

allocating more funds to such critical projects as the Tehran subway. If the cash transfer scheme proves wasteful, as it may well do, perhaps the government will use its savings in more effective ways to help the poor, such as by investing in infrastructure in poorer neighborhoods. Having said all this, once the reform bill goes into effect, the country should brace itself for what the Chinese call “interesting times”. Inflation will come roaring, so caution and gradualism in raising prices is advised. Greater use of smart cards and restraint in massive cash transfers will also help smooth the inevitable shock. Knowing the low tolerance of Iranians for inflation, which is in the long run a good national trait to have, it is extremely important for the government to avoid the temptation to fight it with fixing prices by decree, be it the interest rate, the exchange rate, or the price of melons.

Preferential Tariffs With Uzbekistan

Iran and Uzbekistan plan to extend preferential tariffs to 270 goods in the near future from 27 goods at present. Speaking at the 10th session of Iran-Uzbekistan Economic Commission in Tehran, Commerce Minister Mehdi Ghazanfari said the two countries intend to boost bilateral trade from \$600 million to \$1 billion in the near future, IRNA reported. He said that holding exhibitions in the two countries and boosting relations between the two sides’ private sectors could be regarded as strategic ways to boost bilateral economic ties.

He also called for expansion of bilateral ties in banking, industries, taxation and insurance sectors.

The 10th round of Iran-Uzbekistan Economic Commission was launched on Sunday in Tehran. The one-day meeting was aimed at reviewing challenges and bans on bilateral ties in various economic sectors.

The two sides also signed four memoranda of understanding on trade and economic cooperation. The meeting is held annually in one of the capital cities of the two countries.

Investors Eye Renewable Energies

The number of foreign investors interested in Iran’s renewable energies has increased in recent years, said managing director of the Renewable Energy Organization. “A great number of foreign investors have announced their readiness to build wind power stations in Iran during recent years,” Yousef Armodli said in an interview with Fars News Agency.

Armodli said currently Turkish and Chinese investors have visited Iran to review investment potentials and opportunities in the country’s renewable energies sector. “They intend to establish joint wind power stations with Iranian investors,” he said. Russian gas monopoly Gazprom plans to help Iran develop a way forward to strengthen bilateral ties in the energy sector, officials said in Moscow.

Meanwhile, Gazprom executives welcomed a delegation from Iran led by Hossein Noqrekar-Shirazi, deputy oil minister, to discuss an action plan for gas ties, Russia's ITAR-Tass reported.

"The parties discussed the existing and promising joint projects for the development of the Iranian gas condensate field South Pars, as well as potential cooperation in the implementation of regional pipeline projects and 'exchange' operations," said Alexander Medvedev, the deputy chief executive of Gazprom. Tehran will embark on its fifth five-year plan of economic development beginning in March.

"The country aims to increase its gas production from 21 billion to 35 billion cubic feet of gas per day," he said. Oil production, meanwhile, is expected to increase by 25 percent to 5 million barrels per day under the plan. Gazprom is part of a group of international companies operating in the giant South Pars gas field in the Persian Gulf, the largest gas complex in the world. Tehran, meanwhile, notes Gazprom could emerge as a partner in its long-awaited gas pipeline to Pakistan, which faces mounting scrutiny from Washington. Gazprom established a working relationship with the National Iranian Oil Company in 2008. Iran and Russia should use national currencies in joint oil and gas projects, an Iranian oil official said.

"We want our national currencies to be used in our projects," Deputy Petroleum Minister of Iran Noqrehkar-Shirazi was quoted by RIA Novosti as saying in Moscow.

Mineral Exports Exceed \$3b

Mineral exports exceeded \$3 billion in the first 8 months of the current Iranian year (started March 20, 2009), said Industries and Mines Ministry. According to Moj News Agency, Iran exported \$3.289 billion of mineral products, including cement, gypsum, lime and stones, during this period, the report said. During October 23-November 21, Iran exported \$351,446 of various mineral products. Metal exports also fetched \$1.166 billion during the period. Some 20,400 tons of raisins were also exported to Iraq, Russia, Spain, UAE, Georgia, Belarus, Morocco and Romania. The figure is expected to reach 25,000 tons by March 21.

Iran's non-oil exports to China increased by 40 percent in the same period, valued at \$2.1 billion. After Iraq, China is ranked the second trade partner of Iran in terms of exports. Imports from China also dropped by 17 percent. Propane, iron ore, polyethylene, aluminum, copper, marble stones, chromium stones, cast iron, sulfur and liquorices were among major Iranian products exported to China this year.

Iran also exported \$162 million worth of various products to Hong Kong, including pistachio, carpet, plastics, animal hide, saffron, date and dried fig. Exports to Vietnam, Philippines and New Zealand also increased by 56 percent, 28 percent and 29 percent, respectively. Moreover, exports to the member-states of Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO)

increased by 17 percent. The country exported over 3 million tons of products to the ECO member-states, valued at \$2.138 billion. Economic Cooperation Organization is an intergovernmental organization involving seven Asian and three Eurasian nations. It provides a platform to discuss ways to improve development and promote trade, and investment opportunities. ECO's common objective is to establish a single market for goods and services, much like the European Union. ECO's secretariat and cultural department are located in Tehran, its economic bureau is in Turkey and its scientific bureau is situated in Pakistan. The organization was founded by Turkey, Iran and Pakistan in 1985. In the fall of 1992, ECO expanded to include seven new members, namely Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan

Iran Holds HOFEX & MEDEX 2010

Nearly 422 Iranian companies and 22 foreign ones from 21 countries will attend the 5-day event.

Spain, India, Sweden, the Netherlands, Denmark, Malaysia, Belgium, Indonesia, Romania, China, Pakistan, Syria, Turkey, Switzerland, Germany, Austria, Canada, United Arab Emirates, UK, Italy and Bangladesh are among the major countries to attend Iran HOFEX & MEDEX 2010.

Italy Ready to Construct Railway

Acting manager of State Transportation Infrastructure Construction and Development Company, Aziz Dowlatkhah, said the project is to last two years.

According to IRNA, Dowlatkhah said the Isfahan railway project was a priority, adding: "Iran has managed to get out of global economic turmoil safe and sound and ensure foreign investments."

Iran Ready to Finance 40% of Turkey's Van Railway

Abbas Nazari said Iran is ready to finance 40 percent of Van railway and added that "once the railway is established, Iran could access European markets."

Iran could link European countries' railways and then to Germany's Hamburg Port, he added.

He said that once the 220-kilometer railway comes into operation, Iran could export 3 million tons of cargos to Turkey.

Iran, Uzbekistan Ink MoU to Boost Ties

The MoU was inked by Iran's Minister of Commerce Mehdi Ghazanfari and visiting Uzbek Vice-Prime Minister Elyar Ganiev during the tenth meeting of Iran-Uzbekistan economic, trade, technical and scientific commission.

As per the MoU, the two sides are obliged to boost ties in the fields of commerce, banking, economic relations, energy, investment, technical and engineering services, transportation, transit, agriculture, fisheries, scientific relations, culture and tourism research.

Establishment of a joint trade center was also addressed during the meeting, which will become operational in a near future.

Tech for Production of Alpha Alumina Available

Manager of Iran's Alumina Factory, Shokouhi said that the Iranian experts achieved technology of alpha alumina production and started the preliminary production of the material in Jajarm factory.

Alumina alpha is a powder which is used in the production of ceramic industry and Iran will export the material through the production of the product till the end of the current Iranian year (1388).

He said the price of alumina alpha in Iran's Alumina Plant is twice more than the metalogical alumina in Jajarm Aluminum Factory.

Alumina occurs in two crystalline forms. Alpha alumina is composed of colorless hexagonal crystals with the properties given above; gamma alumina is composed of minute colorless cubic crystals with sp. gr. about 3.6 that are transformed to the alpha form at high temperatures.

Alumina powder is formed by crushing crystalline alumina; it is white when pure. Alumina is widely distributed in nature.

Tehran, Tashkent to Establish Commerce Chamber

According to Mehr news agency, addressing the closing ceremony of Iran-Uzbekistan Joint Commission, Minister of Commerce Mahdi Ghazanfari announced the conclusion of a \$30m contract between the two countries' private sectors. He added that a memorandum of understanding has been inked between the two countries on the domains of commerce, economy and banking affairs, economic relations, energy, transportation and transit, agriculture, scientific and technical relations, tourism, culture, and investments.

The minister of commerce noted: “The agreements that have been signed between Iran and Uzbekistan lay the ground for mutual cooperation more than ever. We hope the private sector would also assist the two governments in enforcement of this MoU so that we would be witness to further economic growth and prosperity of the two countries.”

He underscored: “The Uzbek officials have presented proposals to lower the goods transportation and transit tariff and if this call is materialized the volume of the two countries’ relations will surely double to triple next year, and trade between the two nations will soar to \$1b.”

Throughout this ceremony, Uzbek deputy premier Elyor Ganiev, for his part, considered conclusion of these agreements with Iran as highly important and pinpointed that these agreements can set the stage for removal of numerous problems.

Tehran, Berlin in 1b Euro Deal

According to this contract, the technical know-how for manufacturing turbines and gas turbo-compressors will be transferred to domestic experts.

In an interview with Mehr news agency, he noted: “The German company is duty-bound to enforce the manufacture, installation, and launch of these turbines and turbo-compressors by the end of 5th Economic Development Plan.”

He added: “It is foreseen that with the enforcement of this contract, it would become possible to make gas turbines and turbo-compressors domestically.”

He reminded: “This German company, based on its previous contract, has delivered 45 gas turbines up to now, and the rest of turbines will be delivered by the year-end (March 2010).”

He underscored that currently 200 gas turbo compressors have been launched into operation throughout the national natural gas transference network.

Talks Underway for Gas Exports to Iraq

He added that talks are also underway for transit of natural gas from Turkmenistan to Turkey via Iran.

According to Mehr news agency, this official has referred to communications with other organizations for provision of fuel of industries, power plants, and petrochemical units, while underlining: “Currently, the average capacity for import of natural gas from Azerbaijan Republic and Turkmenistan has increased.”

In reference to CNG stations, he noted: “By March 2008, an overall 392 CNG stations were launched into operation across the country, while currently the related CNG stations have went up to 1,066 in numbers across the nation.”

He further referred to Iran's plans for promotion of its contribution to global natural gas trade.

He added that the balance for production and consumption of natural gas is negative in Iran, while adding currently the average national natural gas consumption rate, without any restriction, amounts to 610m cubic meters a day, which will surge to 700m cubic meters throughout the cold season.

Oil Workers Unhappy with Pay

Seyfollah Jashnsanz, quoted by Mehr, said the oil industry staff were behind a two-fold rise in the country's oil output after a ruinous eight-year war with Iraq ended in 1988. He added Iran was currently producing 4.5 million barrels per day from 800 wells, noting that Iran's oil-dependent economy weighs heavy on the personnel while the salary is very low.

"One of our present challenges in the oil industry stems from the financial problems of our staff," the official said.

Of Azeri Gas & Diversity

Iran has finalized an agreement with Azerbaijan to import as much as 17.6 billion cubic feet of natural gas per year. Reza Kasaeizadeh, managing director of National Iranian Gas Export Company, said the deal for gas imports from Baku has been finalized. Both countries hold some of the richest gas deposits in the world. Iran lacks some of the infrastructure it needs to make full use of its gas, however. The director downplayed any weaknesses on the Iranian side, noting he seriously seeks gas imports from Azerbaijan. A final memorandum of understanding between the two countries was later finalized last week. More than 17.6 billion cubic feet of gas per year are planned to be supplied within the memorandum with an opportunity to increase supplies. The State Oil Company of Azerbaijan Republic and the National Iranian Gas Export Company signed an early agreement for Azeri gas supplies to northern Iran in December. Baku said it also planned to ferry gas supplies to Russia as of this year. Azerbaijan is still a pivotally important energy player in Eurasia and an indispensable producer country for EU natural gas consumers. Uncertainties about Turkmenistan's role in Nabucco project, the gas transit dispute between Azerbaijan and Turkey, and lack of initiative on the part of the EU and its member state governments to push for alternative routes to alternative sources of natural gas in the Caspian, have caused the Nabucco consortium to plan for initial gas to be sourced in northern Iraq, with potentially more gas coming from elsewhere in the Middle East. That decision could mean that Azerbaijan becomes the end of the line for gas to be

supplied to Nabucco, as opposed to both a supplier and a bridge to the resources of Turkmenistan. This is of course not certain, but it could be the case. This decision, combined with the potential for unconventional gas development within the EU, and lower demand at the moment, means that European decision-makers feel that Caspian reserves are not as important as they once were. For Azerbaijan, the question is whether it will remain just an important gas supplier, or will become the key to the riches of the Caspian.

Deciding

Factor

It is tempting to say that the deciding factor in the gas price talks between Azerbaijan and Turkey should be commercial concerns. Ideally, both sides would be able to come to a workable agreement based on a win-win business deal. It is inevitable that strategic realities will enter into the negotiations. In this case geopolitical considerations present a solution. When looking at a bigger picture, it is clear that Caspian gas going to EU markets through Turkey is in the interest of both Baku and Ankara. Recently, Azerbaijan and Iran also have agreed to cooperate in gas sphere. Azerbaijan will most likely export gas not only to Iran, but also to Russia this year. This is a direct result of Western inaction in realizing the Southern Corridor, the central project of which is the planned Nabucco pipeline. It is a testament to the rapid and comprehensive energy development of Azerbaijan that it is exporting to Iran, which holds far greater gas reserves but does not have the necessary infrastructure to supply its own population, and Russia, which only a few years ago used to export gas to Azerbaijan. So far, however, it seems the Azerbaijani gas exports planned for this year will not be at volumes large enough to threaten the planned supply of Nabucco. But, Western policymakers should not take comfort in that fact. Baku can step up its exports to north and south and will do so if action is not forthcoming from Turkey, the EU and the US. Cooperation between Iran and Azerbaijan dates back to the former Soviet Union. After the collapse of Communism, the two sides stepped up efforts in energy cooperation and joint trade ventures. The recent deal to import Azeri gas to Iran is a right move in the right direction. The two neighbors also share commonalities in many other spheres. For instance, Iran has already introduced a visa waiver program for Azeri travelers and traders and the hope is that positive moves as such will further help strengthen and broaden cooperation in all areas, especially trade and energy. In sum, gas from the Caspian region, including Azerbaijan, is a focus of competition between Russian routes and a projected Western-backed pipeline to Europe via Turkey. Azerbaijan already supplies natural gas to its enclave, Nakhichevan, through Iran. Deal with Iran is also expected to boost the volume of natural gas exports from Azerbaijan, consequently diversifying its export routes.

Renewable Energy Plants on Agenda

OPEC member Iran plans to develop new renewable energy power plants over the next five years with capacity totaling 2,000 megawatts (MW) to meet energy demand, said

deputy minister for electricity. Abbas Aliabadi said Iran already has 8,500 MW hydro power plants in operation and has installed 130 MW of wind turbines, Reuters reported. "Iran, though an oil exporting country, is determined to be an important partner in global efforts of human societies to achieve sustainable energy systems," he told a preparatory meeting of the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA). "The government of Iran has paved the way for private sector participation in developing renewable energy systems."

The private sector has already signed contracts to install wind turbines as well as biomass systems with capacity of 600 MW and the Ministry of Energy is implementing 500 MW wind converters, he said without naming any company. OPEC members achieved a 66 percent compliance last year with agreed crude output targets, a senior Iranian oil official was quoted as saying on Sunday, describing it as a success.

The producer group decided at a December 22 meeting in Angola to keep its output policy unchanged, but faces a battle to crack down on those in its ranks who are failing to comply with quotas if it wants to drain fuel stocks. "The level of OPEC members' compliance with the quota restrictions was about 66 percent in 2009, which was a success," ISNA quoted Mohammad Ali Khatibi, Iran's OPEC governor, as saying. He gave no further details.

Sanctions Futile

Head of Chamber of Commerce, Industries and Mines Mohammad Nahavandian said on Sunday that the illegal sanctions on Iran have had no impact on the performance of the national economy. Referring to the failed meeting of the G5+1 held in New York to discuss a fourth round of sanctions on Iran, he said the former three series of sanctions failed to undermine the national economy, IRNA reported. Previous experiences indicate that such policies are ineffective and the country is determined to implement its development plans as usual. He added, "Ill-wishers seek to tighten grip over Iran's economic development, but national resolve has stopped all that."

Exports From Bazargan Customs Increase

Exports via Bazargan Customs Office with 38 percent growth have reached over 29,000 tons.

Director general of Bazargan Customs Office said the goods worth \$21.639 million have been exported by 1,600 trucks, IRIB wrote. Sadeq Namdar said the exported goods increased by 16 and 38 percent in terms of weight and value respectively in comparison with the same period last year. Namdar said most of the goods have been exported to Europe and Central Asia. Fruits, pickles, oil products, different kinds of stone, plastics and construction materials are among the main items.

According to him, during the period, some 135,000 tons of goods valued at \$175 million were also imported

Iran weighing \$20b foreign energy investment

""We are in talks with some foreign companies which had proposed such investments to finance our energy projects in buy-back or direct investment methods, Mirkazemi added, without giving any further detail on the foreign investors.

""Currently, proposals on investment by foreign companies in Iran's oil and gas sector are being examined, whose value upon approval might be up to \$20 billion,"" Mirkazemi was quoted as saying by Mehr news agency.

National budget sees \$65 oil price

Mirkazemi also suggested the government's budget for 2010-11, due to be put forward to parliament soon, may be based on an oil price of \$65.

The average price for Iran's oil since the beginning of the Iranian year which started in March 2009 was about \$63 a barrel.

""We sold our oil at \$35 a barrel at the beginning of the year but the price is now more than \$76 and we are hopeful that the average price of our oil will stand at between \$67-68 by the end of the year,"" he said.

Western firms are increasingly wary of investing in the major oil producer due to an international row over Tehran's nuclear program, but companies from energy-hungry Asian economies are seen as less susceptible to such pressures.

Analysts say Iran, the world's fifth-largest oil exporter, needs capital to help expand and modernize its energy industry. It also sits on the world's second- largest gas reserves.

Oil traded at about \$78 a barrel on international markets on Monday, still down from a mid-2008 peak of around \$147 despite a recovery since early 2009

Social Front

Futurism Seminar Opens Tomorrow

Mohammad Tabatabai said Iranian scientists are submitting articles to the seminar while training workshops and exhibitions on that subject of futurism are organized on the sidelines of the event.

The seminar will focus on energy, financial markets, transportation, natural resources and environment, production and investment, technology and cultural affairs.

"Nations can make up for their shortcomings and find their proper status in the future. Our country should win a good position in terms of science, technology, welfare and development," said Tabatabai.

The seminar is cosponsored by the Expediency Council's Center for Strategic Research, Center for Scientific Policy Research, Sharif University of Technology and several other state-run and private entities.

Quake Rocks Northwest Iran

The quake caused no casualties but destroyed some buildings in the town, which is located 115 kilometers from the provincial capital city of Ardebil, Governor of Khalkhal Mohsen Eydi told IRNA.

The seismological bases affiliated to the Geophysics Institute of Tehran University registered the tremor at 04:57 hours local time (0127 GMT).

The quake was epicentered in an area located in 47.52 degrees in longitude and 37.60 degrees in latitude.

Iran is often hit by quakes of varying magnitudes as it sits on some of the world's most active seismic fault lines.

Media Key to Fight on "Soft War"

Mohammad-Ali Ramin, deputy minister for press affairs, urged Iranian media people to look more closely into the various soft war strategies adopted by the US, British and Israeli media against the Third World countries in a bid to neutralize their conspiracies. Ramin was addressing a press briefing preceding a scheduled conference on "Iranian Media Strategies to Fight Soft War".

"We are not well-informed about such techniques used by the West against other world nations and we need to devise news ways in order to combat the phenomenon," Ramin was quoted by Iranian Students news agency (ISNA) as saying. "Our intellectuals are able to put forth innovative proposals to that end; not only can they immunize Iranian public opinion against such media plots, they can also help other world countries in this regard."

Ramin referred to the destructive ramifications of the West soft war and said, "The phenomenon managed to hinder our scientific progress and political solidarity."

"Westerners use their media propaganda as a prerequisite to and a justification for their military aggressions against other world countries," he added.

The official pointed to the virulent effects such Western media have on the spiritual and ideological foundations of third world, while calling on Iranian media to exercise more awareness in the face of such threats.

Ramin also urged Muslim countries media to enhance their cooperation in the fight against Western media various soft war techniques.

AHMADINEJAD: Ethnic Hijab, Source of Honor

Addressing the ceremonies for national registration of Iranian ethnicities' hijab and chador on Saturday morning, President said: "The spiritual heritage of hijab of Iranian men and women is nationally registered while those who have been intent on destructing this cultural heritage have fled the scene in the face of our nation's crushing wave."

President was cited by Fars news agency as adding: "Hijab has always been a social necessity and need. As the Almighty embedded strive for spiritual growth, inclination to progress, honor, and chastity in mankind, he also embedded inclination to hijab in mankind's inner-self."

President underlined: "God created the universe for mankind and created mankind for himself. In fact, the Almighty placed mankind on earth so that humans would attain perfection."

President noted: "Family forms the foundation of community and the main factor in consolidation of family is the relations between man and woman. A community that is

harmed and traumatized in this regard will never be a location for growth and perfection of mankind. Meanwhile, hijab for men and women aims to manage these attractions within the framework of mankind's perfection."

Minister Scheduled to Attend Istanbul Festivity

In an interview with Mehr news agency, a senior Ministry official, Parviz Karami noted: "The Turkish minister of culture and tourism had invited Dr. Hussein to attend this festivity. Based on this official invitation, the minister arrived in Turkey, heading a high-ranking delegation."

This senior official noted: "The minister of culture and Islamic guidance was on a provincial visit when he was called to pay a two-day visit to Turkey in order to take part in this festivity."

He noted that in this ceremony a number of ministers of culture from other countries, especially from Europe, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Azerbaijan Republic are also presented.

Karami added: "This visit raises an opportunity so that Iran's cultural communications with present countries would be reinforced and fostered within defined frameworks."

Rioters Equipped

"During the incidents on the holy day of Ashura, the rioters hurled stones at policemen and I was wounded," he was quoted by Fars as saying.

He added: "Throughout disturbances in the holy day of Ashura, rioters were comprised of counterrevolutionaries and enemies of the sacred religion of Islam, who desecrated the holy day of Ashura."

He noted: "The rioters were intent on destructing, and setting ablaze public property and the Police Force showed self-restraint throughout the disturbances."

He underlined: "Police has long started its operations for identification of the rioters, desecrating the holy day of Ashura, and these rioters will all be detained in the near future. In fact, new photographs of these rioters will be printed so that they will be identified by people, and will be introduced to Police Force."

University of Tehran Restoring Ferdowsi Statue

In 1959, the statue was replaced with a marble 3m high statue of Ferdowsi which was made by veteran artist Abolhassan Seddiqi.

The metal statue was relocated to the campus of the Faculty of Literature and Humanities of the University of Tehran.

The University of Tehran began the project to refurbish the statue last Wednesday.

In the first stage of the process lasting one week, the crust on the sculpture that has formed over the years will be removed, University of Tehran official Reza Qasemi told MNA.

Bushehr Hosts Fajr Festival

Speaking in a press conference here yesterday, Mohammad Hosseini said this year's festival is hoped to present a better performance, quantitatively and qualitatively, in areas such as poetry, theater, music, etc.

"A total of 18, 469 books have been studied and analyzed by 1056 referees this year of which 33 will be selected as the top books of the year," Hosseini was quoted by IRNA as saying. "The number of jurors in last year's festival was no more than 400; meanwhile, the jurors have been singled out from among the pioneers in different fields of art."

The minister also added that a number of 200 books have been submitted to the secretary of the festival by Iranian expatriates, which indicates greater presence by Iranians abroad, thanks to the efforts by Iranian charge d'affaires in different world countries.

He added that a total of 12,000 poems from 600 poets have also been delivered to the festival, which is scheduled to be inaugurated in southern province of Bushehr on January 23rd.

"The number of art works presented in this year's festival has witnessed an overall 52% growth compared to last year's festival," the minister said.

Hosseini added that 9,457 works of art have been presented to the secretary of the festival from 79 world countries. Latin America will attend the event for the first time during its history.

In theater, 20 plays from Iran and 120 plays from other world countries are present in the event, the minister said, adding that 27 films of a total of 79 films are competing this year, which shows an eye-catching rise compared to last year.

In response to a question, Hosseini said that the Culture Ministry moves in line with Islamic Revolution's highly-valued principles and the laws enshrined in Iranian Constitution.

"We aim to provide grounds for different artists to present their works; this, however, does not mean that the artists can trample upon the rules," the minister added.

He said that the film "Padash" made by Iranian director Kamal Tabrizi was banned due to the very disregard for Iranian cultural values.

Police Seize Large Amounts of Drugs

Mohammad Sadeq Jabbarpour, the commander of the Law Enforcement police of the city of Khamir, told FNA that his forces have seized a motorcycle and three cars during the operations.

Jabbarpour pointed out that major seizures have been made in three of the four operations all at the Serah-e-Ganji checkpoint.

In the first operation, 40.82 kg of opium, skillfully planted in a tanker, was discovered, he said, adding that two more opium cargoes, weighing 49.6 kg and 20.26 kg were discovered and seized in two other operations at the same checkpoint.

Earlier in January, Commander of the anti-drug squad of Iran's Law Enforcement Police announced that his forces had discovered over 340 tons of different types of illicit drugs in nine months of operations across the country.

Iran arrests four suspects in prosecutor's killing

Iran has arrested four people over the assassination of a prosecutor in the northwestern town of Khoy, in West Azerbaijan Province.

Vali Haji-Qolizadeh was shot dead in front of his home in Khoy on Monday night.

Ebrahim Mohammadlu, governor of Khoy, said four suspects were arrested in connection with the "terrorist attack", reports the state-funded Press TV.

Local officials said the Party of Free Life of Kurdistan [PJAK], which seeks autonomy for Kurdish areas in Iran, had claimed responsibility for the killing, the semi-official Mehr news agency reported.

According to Press TV, the prosecutor had been "threatened" by PJAK over the past few days.

Iranian security forces often clash with PJAK members.

PJAK, which Iran considers a "terrorist group", is closely allied with the Turkish Kurdish rebel group, the Kurdistan Workers' Party [PKK].

Reports said that the slain prosecutor had a reputation for fighting moral corruption and anti-revolution groups.

Iran police say public tip-offs led to 40 arrests over protests

Iranian police say more than 40 people have been arrested on the basis of tip-offs from the public, after police circulated photographs of demonstrators at an anti-government protest last month, the Iran Labor News Agency reported on Tuesday.

A special edition of a police publication ran photographs taken on rallies on 27 December, on the Shiite holy day of Ashura, in which more than 500 protesters were arrested.

After the publication of the pictures, “more than 40 people from the elements of sedition were identified and arrested, with the cooperation of the noble and vigilant people of Iran,” ILNA quoted an informed police source as saying.

At least eight people were killed and hundreds wounded during clashes between security forces and demonstrators on Ashura. It was deadliest violence since the massive protests that followed June’s disputed presidential election.

On Monday, five people detained on Ashura went on trial in Tehran, on charges that could be punishable by death.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has accused the United States, Britain and Israel of staging the protests on Ashura.

Lawmaker slams Iran media control, praises US-funded broadcasters

US Congressman Robert Wexler today condemned Iran’s suppression of press freedom and stressed the “indispensable” role of US government international broadcasters in soft power outreach.

“I strongly condemn censorship and intimidation of the press in Iran, Russia, and globally,” said Wexler at a House Committee on Foreign Affairs hearing entitled: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and Voice of America: “Soft Power and the Free Flow of Information”.

“This hearing comes at a critical time as the world’s most repressive regimes, in places such as Iran, crack down, suppress and stifle freedom of the media and expression,” said Wexler, who chairs the Subcommittee on Europe.

He went on to praise the VOA and RFE/RL for fulfilling their mission of promoting “freedom and democracy” by providing listeners worldwide with “accurate, objective, balanced news, [and] information,” and characterized these two outlets as “smart power tools” and “media surrogates”, in places where media freedom is suppressed.

“RFE/RL and VOA are critical smart power tools that are on the front line of international broadcasting, providing unfettered information globally in multiple languages and formats and acting as media surrogates where freedom of the press does not exist,” Wexler said.

He also referred to the impact of technology in the post-election turmoil in Iran and called on the congress to provide additional funding for such international news organizations.

“The twitter revolution in Iran and the Iranian regime’s immediate and violent clampdown on media freedoms is a reminder that media transparency is one of the greatest threats to the rule of autocratic regimes,” Wexler said.

He added: “President Obama has made international broadcasting a top priority for American foreign policy makers, and it is imperative that Congress provide additional funding and resources to give US international broadcaster the tools they need to ensure the free-flow of information.”

In their testimonies before the U.S. House Committee on Foreign Relations’ subcommittee on Europe, both the VOA director Danforth Austin and RFE/RL President Jeffery Gedmin, emphasized that their stations’ commitment to providing their audiences with “accurate, objective and comprehensive” news and information, served to enhance their credibility as news outlets.

Austin said that this credibility allowed audiences to “to cut through the din of shrill propaganda and the fog of misinformation and disinformation that make up so much of the world’s media these days.”

And Gedmin said: “We do not tell people what to think. We do not broadcast propaganda. The simple belief behind RFE/RL has always been that people will always choose truth over falsehood and freedom over tyranny when given a fair chance to decide.”

The two witnesses went on to argue that the objectives of their news organizations and their efforts to project the ideals of democracy and development were critical to U.S. interests.

“What we do supports American interests, it supports enlightened American interests, and I believe if you believe in development and democracy...you have to avail yourself of the full spectrum of policy opportunities and instruments,” said Gedmin.

He quoted the Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who during her recent visit to RFE/RL headquarters in Prague, had called this type of US-sponsored initiative as “smart power”.

“We think it is smart power at its best because it is cost effective and it actually works,” he said.

Austin, for his part, echoed Clinton’s remarks by quoting a recent report by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, which said that soft power was “the ability to attract people to our side without coercion. Legitimacy is central to soft power.”

He continued: “While we at VOA leave the formulation of US foreign policy to the professionals at the State Department, we very much agree that legitimacy in our broadcasts is not only central to soft power, it is critical to the long-range strategic interests of the United States.”

Austin detailed VOA’s reach into Iran according to a January 2009 survey of its Persian News Network [PNN], which was created in 2006. PNN commands a weekly TV audience of about 29.5 percent, or 15 million people, which equals one-in-four adults, weekly.

During the height of the post-election unrest in June, Austin said that Iranians were sending VOA 300 videos a day, along with thousands of still pictures, emails and telephone calls.

And, according to audience feedback, the Iranian government was unable “to completely block VOA’s eight hours of Persian programming,” Austin added.

Gedmin said that RFE/RL’s Persian language program, Radio Farda [Radio Tomorrow], was trusted in Iran and had retained a substantial number of listeners, despite attempts by the Iranian government to block its signals and website.

There were also dangers involved for being “on the cutting edge of the struggle for human rights, democracy and media freedom,” Gedmin said.

The Iranian government had subjected the radio’s employees in Prague to “threats, and blackmail”, so Gedmin said he was considering relocating some of the staff to Washington.

“It is true that the Iranian regime is quite talented and tenacious in finding ways to intimidate people, and they do that to our journalists. And we are in fact moving some of our colleagues to Washington...There are about 40 of them,” Gedmin said.

He concluded by thanking the Congress for helping to shape The RFE/RL’s “story”, adding: “RFE/RL’s story is a tale of human freedom, with crucial chapters still to be written.”

Trial Opens Into Ashura Violence

One of the suspects arrested during the December 27 unrests in Tehran has confessed to regular and systematic collaboration with the banned Mujahedeen Khalq Organization (MKO).

The unnamed university student is accused of trying to undermine the Islamic Republic by cooperating with the MKO and other banned groups, acting against national security and propaganda against the Islamic state. “I had contacts with MKO through e-mail, but I took no action during the [June 12

presidential] election,” he said at the first court hearing of those accused of “harming national interest” during the Ashura unrests, Fars News Agency reported. Anti-government protests were held in Tehran on December 27. Protestors took undue advantage of the religious event that marks the anniversary of the martyrdom in the seventh century of Prophet Muhammad’s (PBUH) grandson Imam Hussein (AS) . Police used tear gas to disperse the protesters who vandalized public property and torched trash bins, provoking clashes with police and security forces. At least seven people died in the violence. A deputy police chief, Ahmad-Reza Radan, said his men had not fired on the crowd and that the police had nothing to do with the deaths.

In response to the Ashura protests, millions of Iranians took to the streets on December 30, demanding the prosecution of the rioters and their leaders. Iran said it was evident for the country that the anti-government riots were led by foreigners.

The riots were in line with a chain of unrests that took place in Tehran and some other cities after the disputed presidential election in mid-June.

Busy With Pictures, Filming
The detainee also admitted that he had attended the post-election unrests from June 15 to 17, September 18, December 4 and December 27, and that the MKO had provided him communication equipment to document the unrests and report it to the terrorist group’s headquarters in Iraq. “I took photos of those injured or killed in the unrests. After developing them I passed it to the anti-government demonstrators and asked them to use them in their rallies. Later I captured the scenes on a video camera and sent them to the MKO,” he added. The MKO admitted that it was involved in the unrests after it informed Amnesty International that security personnel had arrested five its members on December 27. The terrorist group also said the five detainees had come from their camp in Iraq’s northeastern Diyala province where they were based since the early 1980s. Earlier Tehran’s public prosecutor said security forces had arrested five MKO agents in connection with the riots in Tehran. The terrorist group has targeted officials and civilians in Iran and abroad for almost three decades and is on the terror blacklist of many international organizations and countries.

Drug Traffickers Kill 3 Policemen

Three traffic police officers were killed by drug smugglers on the Zahedan-Khash roadway in southeastern Sistan-Baluchestan province. “Three of our officers were martyred by armed smugglers,” a deputy commander of the provincial road and traffic police said on Sunday, Presstv reported. “The incident occurred when road and traffic police officers became suspicious about a vehicle passing by at unusually high speed,” Colonel Mohammad Arab said. “After police ordered the car pull aside its passengers started firing at the policemen. The shooting killed three officers,” he added. It was not clear when the clashes occurred and whether or not the smugglers also had taken casualties.

Khash is located 178 km south of the provincial capital Zahedan, which neighbors Pakistan.

Iran lies on a major drug transit corridor -- where militants, criminal organizations and corrupt officials exploit the notorious drug trade as a major source of income and patronage.

Since the victory of the Islamic Revolution in 1979, Iran has lost over 3,300 security personnel in its non-stop campaign against illegal drugs and death merchants, particularly in the crime-infested southeast border regions

More Battleships Going To Gulf of Aden

Commander of the First Naval Zone said the Navy will deploy a fifth fleet of battleships to the Gulf of Aden later this month to help protect Iranian cargo vessels and oil tankers from Somali pirates.

“The Army’s fifth fleet of warships will be sent to the Gulf of Aden in late January,” Fariborz Qaderpanah told Fars News Agency on Monday.

The fleet is membered by the first and third naval zones based in Bandar Abbas and Chabahar in the southern regions.

The fourth fleet in that region has so far faced no problem in fulfilling its mission and Iranian vessels safely ply the Indian Ocean.

“Our troops sent to the region have been successful in fulfilling their missions,” he said.

The Navy is involved in anti-piracy patrols in the crime-infested gulf since November 2008 when Somali pirates seized an Iranian-chartered cargo ship, MV Delight, off the coast of Yemen.

According to UN Security Council resolutions, countries can send their warships to the troubled region and off the coast of Somalia to fight piracy and protect their economic interests.

The resolution allows warships to enter Somali territorial waters if necessary in pursuit of the pirates but with prior notice.

The Gulf of Aden -- which links the Indian Ocean with the Suez Canal and the Mediterranean Sea -- is an important energy corridor, particularly because Persian Gulf oil in big volume is shipped to the West via the Suez Canal.

For more than two years, the vital waterway has been hit with piracy and lawlessness due largely to the lack of a functioning government in Somalia. Many cargo ships and VLCCs have been hijacked by pirates demanding ransom.

Many countries have sent battleships to the area to protect their ships.