

Business and politics in Muslim world

Weekly report on Iran

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Summary

Political Front

Dialogue on Stalled Iran Nuclear Deal Goes On

The U.N. nuclear agency chief said on Friday dialogue was continuing on a draft deal on enriched uranium between Iran and world powers despite Tehran's rejection of terms meant to prevent the material being used for atomic bombs.

China Still Leery on U.S. Sanctions Push for Iran

China called on Thursday for efforts to resume dialogue with Iran over its nuclear program, stalling U.S. Secretary Hillary Clinton's efforts to win public commitment for a new round of U.N. sanctions.

Clinton: No Choice Except Increasing Pressure on Iran

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said that Iran's attitude regarding its nuclear program leaves the world community "no choice but to increase pressure on Iran."

Iran Invited to 46th Munich Security Conference

Iran has been invited to join the 46th Munich Security Conference which is viewed as the top annual gathering of political movers and shakers on global strategic issues, the chairman of the confab, Wolfgang Ischinger announced in Berlin on Thursday.

Russia Free to Sell Weaponry to Iran

Moscow is free to sell weaponry to Tehran, the head of Russia's state arms exporter said on Thursday.

Spokesman Denounces Iran Gas Sanctions Approval by U.S. Senate

Foreign Ministry spokesman Ramin Mihman-Parast has condemned the U.S. Senate for approving Iran gasoline import sanctions, saying it is in line with the wrong policies of former US administrations.

Mottaki: Fuel Swap, Chance for West to Build Trust

Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki, exchanged views with his Brazilian counterpart in Davos, Switzerland yesterday.

Ahmadinejad: Iranians to Respond World Arrogance on Revolution Anniversary

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said Thursday that Iranians would respond to the world arrogance during this year's national ceremonies to mark the Islamic Revolution victory anniversary in Iran (February 11).

Iran, Belarus Study Expansion of Ties

Esfandiar Rahim-Mashaei, Head of Presidential Office has met with Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko in Minsk, capital of Belarus.

"Iran, Brazil among Developed Countries"

Iran and Brazil are no longer among the developing states but among the developed group of states, said Secretary of the Supreme Cultural Revolution Council (SCRC).

Mottaki Meets with Sarkozy Adviser in Davos

Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki met with French President Nicolas Sarkozy's adviser at the World Economic Forum in Davos on Thursday.

Qashqavi Meets 2 Syrian Ministers

Foreign Minister's Parliamentary Consular and Iranian

Larijani Meets with Ugandan Parliament Speaker

Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani met and conferred on Thursday with his Ugandan counterpart Edward Ssekandi.

"Reform Needed in West's Approach towards Women

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad here Wednesday considered West's approach towards women "instrumental", arguing, "Nothing is left of women's prestige in Europe and some other countries

Jannati to Judiciary: Rule on Rioters' Case More Speedily

Substitute Friday prayers leader of Tehran Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati has called on the Judiciary to make swift decisions on the post-vote rioters, especially "the Ashura vilifiers."

Foreign Envoys Laud Iran's Engineering Ability

Ambassadors of foreign countries in Tehran on Thursday visited the Tohid Tunnel and lauded the capabilities of Iranian engineers for designing and construction of the tunnel in Tehran.

Iran, Iraq, Syria Agree to Tackle Dust Crisis

The Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq and Syria reached an agreement on Thursday to tackle the dust crisis in the region.

U.S.: Iran Draft Deal on Table Without Change

The United States claims a UN-backed deal to provide fuel for Tehran's reactor is 'still on the table' but will see no change as demanded by the Iranian side.

Blair Attacked Over Iran Stance

Tony Blair was strongly criticized after he warned that the international community must be prepared to take a "very hard, tough line" with Iran over its banned nuclear program.

Sarkozy, Clinton Discuss Iran Sanctions

French President Nicolas Sarkozy and U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton met Friday in Paris for talks on a number of issues, including the possibility of imposing sanctions on Iran regarding its nuclear program.

Israel Spied on Iran, Syria From Secret Turkish Base

Israeli spy agencies have reportedly made spying on Iran's nuclear program "a top priority

Obama Aide: Iran May Lash Out at Israel

President Barack Obama's national security adviser is citing a heightened risk that Iran will respond to growing pressure over its nuclear program by stoking violence against Israel.

Iran: U.S. Sanctions Not to Halt Gasoline Supplies

U.S. legislation to impose gasoline sanctions on Iran over its disputed nuclear program won't succeed in halting fuel supplies, an Oil Ministry official said.

Raul Castro Likely to Visit Iran

Cuban Ambassador to Tehran William Carbo Ricardo announced that Cuban President Raul Castro is likely to pay a visit to Iran this year.

Larijani calls for establishment of Islamic parliament

Iranian Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani has called for the establishment of an Islamic parliament.

Top aide says Iran is worried about Obama

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's top aide said Friday Tehran is concerned about the direction of the U.S. administration after President Barack Obama delivered his first State of the Union address.

Trial of 16 Ashura riot detainees begins in Iran

The trial of 16 individuals involved in last month's unrest in Iran has started with the prosecutor laying out the charges brought out against the defendants.

Economic Front

Pakistan-Iran Agree to Expedite Work

To meet power shortfall on priority bases, Pakistan and Iran on Thursday agreed to expedite the process of importing 1,000 MW power by Pakistan from Iran on fast track basis for its early completion.

Tehran, Copenhagen Target Boosting Business Ties

Danish and Iranian trade delegations held talks in Copenhagen aimed at expanding business relations, the Iranian embassy announced in the Danish capital on Thursday

FTZs Absorb \$2b of Foreign Investment

The Head of Iran's Free Trade Zones' Center told reporters that the zones have absorbed 2 billion dollars of foreign investment.

Malaysian Private Sector Urged to Take Part in Iran Expo

The Colombo Plan is encouraging the Malaysian private sector to participate in the Iran Renewable Energy Expo and Conference (RenExpo and Conference) and International Halal Conference 2010 in Tehran from March 2 to 5.

Iran Exports \$5b of Minerals This Year

Deputy Minister of Industries and Mines, Mohammad-Masoud Samiei-Nejad, says the volume of exported mineral materials will rise to more than 6billion dollars till the end of the current Iranian year (ending March 2010).

Agri-Products Exports to Reach \$3.5b

Minister of the Agriculture Jihad, Sadeq Khalilian, has said the value of exporting agricultural products from the Islamic Republic of Iran would reach 3.5 billion dollars till the end of the current Iranian year in March 2010.

Tehran, Ankara Urge More Economic Ties

Majlis Speaker, Ali Larijani in a meeting with his Turkish counterpart, Mohammad-Ali Shahin on Friday reiterated that Tehran-Ankara relations would affect regional and international arenas and urged for expansion of the two countries' economic ties.

Tehran to Host Int'l Furniture Exhibition

The 19th International Home and Office Exhibition (Hofex 2010) will begin here today.

Furniture Exports Over \$3m

Iran has exported \$3.6 million of furniture during the first half of the current Iranian fiscal year (started March 20, 2009), head of Home and Office Furniture Exporters Association of Iran said.

Iranians at Kuwait INFOCONNECT 2010

Kuwait's International Information Technology, Office Systems & Communications Exhibition (Infoconnect 2010) will be launched today at Kuwait International Fairground.

Tajikistan Calls for Further Economic Ties With Iran

Tajikistan's Minister of Economic Development and Trade, Farrukh Hamrah Aliov has asked for expansion of economic commercial ties with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Drug trafficking inflicts \$8.5bn of damage on Iran's economy annually

Drug trafficking inflicts about \$8.5 billion of damage on the country's economy every year, according to the lieutenant commander of Iran's Anti-Drug Police Squad.

Social Front

Astan-e Qods Museum furnished with new lighting system

Astan-e Qods Razavi Museum's Stamp and Banknote Section in the holy city of Mashhad has recently been equipped with LED (Light-Emitting Diode) rope lighting to avoid any further damage to its collections of historical artifacts.

Saeedlou: Iran, Cuba Cooperation Helps Promote Sports

Head of Physical Education Organization Ali Saeedlou said on Wednesday that developing Iran-Cuba sports ties will help promote the level of athletics in both countries.

Iranian Academic Refutes Racism Charges Against him

Director of the Institute for Studies in Theoretical Physics and Mathematics, Mohammad-Javad Larijani, on Wednesday denied the racist charges leveled against him

Ashura Rioters on Trial

The trial of 16 individuals involved in last month's unrest in Iran has started with the prosecutor laying out the charges brought out against the defendants.

Supreme Leader Pays Homage to Late Imam Khomeini

Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei attended the mausoleum of the Founder of the Islamic Republic, the late Imam Khomeini in southern Tehran, yesterday

Rafsanjani calls for displaying grandeur of revolution on Bahman 22

Expediency Council Chairman Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani called on the people to attend the nationwide rallies on Bahman 22 to show national unity and the grandeur of the Islamic Revolution.

Cleric warns Saudis about insults to Shia pilgrims

Grand Ayatollah Nasser Makarem Shirazi has warned Saudi Arabian officials that Iran will reconsider its decision to send its nationals to umra (lesser pilgrimage) if they do not stop the Wahhabis from insulting Shia pilgrims.

“Theater for All” still unfulfilled

“Theater for All”, the Fajr International Theater Festival's motto was repeated for the fifth year in the recent edition and still remains as a statement adorning posters of the event

Anahita Temple avoids destruction

The construction project that caused damages to the Anahita Temple in Kangavar in Kermanshah Province was halted last week.

leader Receives Royan Institute Officials

Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei on Thursday received a group of Royan Institute officials and researchers

Detailed News

Political News

Dialogue on Stalled Iran Nuclear Deal Goes On

Western diplomats have said Iran has effectively turned down the IAEA-brokered proposal and the United States and major European allies are pursuing broader U.N. sanctions against the Islamic Republic over its disputed nuclear activity.

"The proposal is on the table. Dialogue is continuing," said Yukiya Amano, director-general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, in his first public remarks on the standoff since he succeeded Mohamed ElBaradei two months ago.

Amano, who was attending the World Economic Forum, gave no further details to reporters.

Diplomats told Reuters last week Iran's envoy to the IAEA had notified Amano that it could not accept the deal's central provision for Tehran to ship most of its enriched uranium abroad in one go in exchange for fuel for nuclear medicine.

China Still Leery on U.S. Sanctions Push for Iran

"Iran's nuclear issue should be resolved through diplomatic efforts and negotiations," China's Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi told reporters in London, where he took part in an international conference on Afghanistan.

"We believe we should focus on resuming dialogue and restarting negotiations," he said, asked if there had been any discussion on the sidelines of the meeting on further sanctions against Iran."

Yang spoke after a meeting with Clinton, who has been working hard alongside the Afghanistan conference to build support for new sanctions on Iran among members of the U.N. Security Council.

Clinton, speaking to reporters, said that in her talks with all of her counterparts she had stressed that Iran had made no efforts to reach a compromise with the international community over its nuclear program, which Western countries fear is aimed at producing nuclear weapons.

Iran's weekly report

Tehran, which turned down an offer from the International Atomic Energy Agency last year to reprocess uranium the West fears could eventually be used to build bombs, says the program is purely for peaceful purposes.

Clinton: No Choice Except Increasing Pressure on Iran

During a press conference following the convention on Afghanistan in London, Clinton said that pressure would be used in the hope that Iran would reconsider its position regarding its diplomatic contacts.

Iran Invited to 46th Munich Security Conference

Talking to Berlin-based foreign media, Ischinger confirmed that an invitation had been sent out to an Iranian representative.

However, I don't know whether or not the invitation has been accepted by Iran, the former German diplomat added.

This year's keynote speaker at the Munich meeting, slated to take place from February 5-7, will be Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi.

Germany will be represented by Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle and his fiercest inner-cabinet rival Defense Minister Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg.

This year's guest list includes Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, Afghan President Hamid Karzai, NATO chief Anders Fogh Rasmussen, U.S. national security advisor James L. Jones, Azeri President Ilham Aliyev, the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency Yukiya Amano, the chairman of the U.S. Senate foreign affairs committee John Kerry and former Republican presidential contender Senator John McCain.

The security meeting is to focus on possible concrete steps for the nuclear disarmament of world powers and looking at ways of "strengthening the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)," according to Ischinger.

Other major political issues include Afghanistan, energy security, Middle East stability, European security architecture and NATO's future, the conference organizer said.

Russia Free to Sell Weaponry to Iran

Nothing prevents the continuation of military cooperation in those directions of interest to Russia and Iran," Anatoly Isaikin, director-general of Rosoboronexport, said at a press conference.

Iran's weekly report

"No special rules are applied to Iran in arms selling...Iran has never violated a single commitment it has undertaken with regard to military contracts," he was quoted by the RIA Novosti news agency and the Interfax news agency as saying.

Russia agreed to sell S-300PMU1 missile systems to Iran under a deal reached several years ago, but hasn't made the delivery yet.

The deal is worth some 800 million U.S. dollars, according to unofficial sources.

The S-300PMU1 multi-channel mobile air defense system is designed to intercept modern and projected aircraft, strategic cruise missiles, and other targets flying at up to 2,800 meters per second.

Israel has urged Russia not to deliver such systems to Iran, alleging Iran wants to develop a military nuclear program and such a deal will not serve the interests of peace in the Middle East.

U.S. Senate Approves Stronger Penalties Against Iran

The sanctions would include the denial of loans and other assistance from American financial institutions to companies that export gasoline to Iran or help expand its oil-refining capacity.

The penalties would extend to companies that build oil and gas pipelines in Iran and provide tankers to move Iran's petroleum. The measure prohibits the United States government from buying goods from foreign companies that do business in Iran's energy sector.

The House has passed similar legislation, and the houses will work out the differences between the bills

Spokesman Denounces Iran Gas Sanctions Approval by U.S. Senate

We have repeatedly announced that the sanctions, the US has imposed against our people over the past 31 years after the victory of the Islamic Revolution, have had no result but solidified the resolve of our nation to seek independence and self-sufficiency and attain highest levels of sophisticated technology," said Mihman-Parast in an exclusive interview with IRNA on the sidelines of the 40th Annual Meeting of the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, Switzerland.

Mehmanparast added that if the U.S. government implements any approval of the US Senate to tighten squeeze on Iranian people, they will by no means be ready to relinquish their essential rights.

The Iranian people, he added, will not consider such methods effective for confidence building between the two countries, taking it in line with wrong policies of former US administrations.

Commenting on the proposal of Brigadier General, Mir-Feisal Bagherzadeh, Head of the Foundation for Preservation and Publication of Sacred Defense Works and Values, Mihman-Parast said, "We have always announced that the war-mongering and military build-up policies of the unilateralist countries under the pretext of solving regional crisis are wrong as their failure has repeatedly been emphasized."

Brigadier General Baqerzadeh has in a package of proposal to the UN called for shifting application of the war navies of the big powers in favor of the peacekeeping and humanitarian missions.

The spokesman said Iranian officials suggest the countries, possessing Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs), to seriously adhere to their NPT commitments of disarmament, hence contributing to the fulfillment of the idea of the WMDs free world and using their military facilities in favor of the humanitarian rather than destructive goals and helping the world people in various crises.

He recommended the countries to take lessons from global economic crises and not to spend their people's wealth on devastation, trying to narrow down the gap between the north and the south.

He also advised the states to reconsider global economic frames, taking humanitarian and justice aspects of the issue into consideration and distance themselves from discrimination and double-standards.

Mottaki: Fuel Swap, Chance for West to Build Trust

Mottaki told the IRIBNews correspondent that supply of nuclear fuel for Tehran research reactor was the main issue discussed.

Mottaki also had talks with the former secretary general of the UN, Kofi Annan, and discussed issues concerning security problems in Afghanistan.

Mottaki emphasized on regional solutions to the problems. He also invited Annan to attend the Iran-African Union Cooperation.

The Foreign Minister in an interview with the CNN spoke of Iran's proposal of fuel swap as an opportunity for the West to build up trust.

Mottaki is expected to deliver a speech on Iran's solutions to financial crises in World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2010, this evening in Davos.

Ahmadinejad: Iranians to Respond World Arrogance on Revolution Anniversary

Iran's weekly report

Iranians would bury the Capitalism in this year's February 11 rallies, said the president, addressing a meeting of officials in charge of organizing the 'Dahe-ye Fajr' (the Ten-Day Dawn) ceremonies.

The Ten Day Dawn ceremonies mark the victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979. Iranians commemorate the day by staging massive rallies to demonstrate their support for the Islamic Revolution.

“By a massive turnout in this year's rallies on February 11, Iranians will prove the world community once more that they were wrong about the people of Iran,” President Ahmadinejad said.

He added that the world arrogant powers were no longer powerful as they have failed in dealing with world's major political, economic and cultural issues.

Referring to the current international developments, the president said, “arrogant powers are after the precious resources of the Middle East region and that is why they interfere in this region's affairs.

“With the help of God and that of the freedom-seeking nations, we will never let them (world arrogant powers) achieve their goal,” stressed the president.

Referring to the arrogant powers meddling in Iran's post-election developments, President Ahmadinejad said, “The main objective of their interference and conspiracies was to dominate the Middle East region as it is the center of the world's energy.”

“Middle East is the cradle of the world's major civilizations and the crossroads of the world's political relations. It is also the rich source of world's energy and that is why the arrogant powers are to dominate it.

“However, the reason that they have problem with us is the fact that we are the obstacle on their way to reach their goal,” stressed the president.

He reiterated that Iranians are a justice-seeking nation.

Iran, Belarus Study Expansion of Ties

In the meeting, the two sides studied the regional and international developments as well as expansion of bilateral cooperation, IRIB reported.

Lukashenko said that the Islamic Republic of Iran and Belarus have many capacities for expansion of ties and the two countries should boost their efforts in this regard.

He expressed hope that the officials of the two countries would remove the existed obstacles in the fields of economy and trade and provide the conditions for expansion of mutual cooperation.

Iran's weekly report

Lukashenko said the Islamic Republic of Iran has a vital role in the regional and international arenas, adding, "The developments related to Iran are important for me."

Rahim Mashaei for his part referred to the friendly ties between Iran and Belarus and said, "Tehran and Minsk try to boost their bilateral relations."

"The two countries are trying to reach self-sufficiency. Today Iran and Belarus are countries which campaign for independence and freedom," Mashaei noted.

"Iran, Brazil among Developed Countries"

Mohammad-Reza Mokhber-Dezfouli made the remark in the meeting of the SCRC managers and an academic delegation from Brazil, headed by the country's Ambassador to Iran Antoniolis Spinola.

Mokhber-Dezfuli called for exchange of experiences between the two countries.

Brazil is a significant country in Latin America and Iran is among the most advanced and distinguished states in the Middle East, he noted.

Based on the statistics, released recently by the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI) website, Iran has a share of more than one percent in the world science generation and this is due to the incessant efforts of Iranian scientists.

Spinola, for his part, said that Iran and Brazil have reached high levels in science and technology and they are rich in oil and natural resources.

Mottaki Meets with Sarkozy Adviser in Davos

Whilst there, the minister is also expected to hold talks with former United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan and Brazilian Foreign Minister Celso Amorim.

Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ramin Mehman-Parast had said on Wednesday that Mottaki will state the country's initiatives for solving the global economic crisis during the Annual Meeting of the World Economic Forum that will run from January 27 through January 31.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran will state its viewpoints to help find the roots of the crisis and the ways to solve it," Mehman-Parast had said.

Qashqavi Meets 2 Syrian Ministers

Expatriates Affairs Deputy Hassan Qashqavi here Wednesday met and conferred with Syrian Foreign Minister and Syria's Immigrants Minister separately.

Iran's weekly report

Qashqavi, in his meeting with the Syrian Minister of Foreign Affairs Valid al-Muallem, exchanged viewpoints on regional and international developments.

Al-Muallem said during the meeting, "Keeping in mind the next month's Arab League Summit in Libya, we would focus our entire efforts aimed at strengthening the resistance front in Palestine.

The deputy FM, too, said that Tehran-Damascus relations are satisfactory in all possible fields, adding, "The shared Tehran-Damascus stands on support for the resistance forces is a perfect model for supporting the oppressed nations, and this policy is unchangeable."

In the meeting between Qashqavi and the Syrian Immigrants Minister Joseph Swaid, too, issues of mutual interest regarding the two countries' citizens were surveyed.

Swaid said that 17 million Syrians are living abroad, adding, "Syria is ready for cooperation with Iran on both countries' citizens' affairs in various countries."

Welcoming the idea, Qashqavi presented a report on the status of the Iranians abroad.

He added, "The Iranians living in countries around the globe with various specialties have always been a pride for their motherland."

Larijani Meets with Ugandan Parliament Speaker

At the sidelines of the annual meeting of the Islamic Inter-Parliamentary Union (IIPU) underway in Uganda, Larijani reiterated on the importance of promoting IRI-Uganda bilateral ties.

Uganda has witnessed a good progress in the recent years, the Speaker said announcing the Islamic Republic of Iran's readiness to transfer its technical and engineering experiments to Uganda as well as other African countries.

Speaker of the Uganda Parliament Edward Ssekandi, for his part, said Iran has an important status in the region and plays a great role in the international equations.

He expressed hope that the two countries relations would be expanded in all fields.

During his stay in Uganda, IRI Speaker also met with his Egyptian counterpart Ahmed Fathi and conferred with him about the important issues of the Muslim world which should be discussed in the IIPU meeting.

Iran-Egypt parliament speakers discussed ways of strengthening unity of IIPU member states.

The annual meeting of the Islamic Inter-Parliamentary Union (IIPU) chaired by Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani kicked off in Uganda's capital, Kampala, Thursday morning.

"Reform Needed in West's Approach towards Women

Addressing an International Conference of Islamic World Female Scientists, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad added, "Under such conditions, the female scientists of the Islamic world can both harbingers reforms and elevate the real status of women in the world today."

President Ahmadinejad further elaborated on his viewpoints on women's status in the West, arguing, "They take advantage of women there to advertise for their goods, and this shows how worthless they consider the value of women there."

The head of the Supreme Cultural Revolution Council addressing the western societies, reiterated, "The atmosphere you have created for the women in your countries has deprived them of the opportunity for growth and perfection, while we believe in a way women and men are equals, but this equality is regarding their basic rights."

The president added, "The difference between us and them in this respect is that we believe women and men do differ functionally, because respecting the women's prestige is confirming their difference with men."

Ahmadinejad emphasized that the women's role in a society is a lot more effective and practical than men's, arguing, "Men are nurtured by women, so why do you intend to deprive the women of such an exalted status?"

He added, "Of course, this does not mean that the women are not mistreated in other societies, since the unprecedented injustice observed against women has a 200 year history."

The president referring to one of his interviews with a European news network, said, "The reporter said there that the Europeans are concerned about the women's status and the violation of their human rights in Iran, but I asked her in reply whether there is anything left of the women's personality in Europe that she was talking about such issues?"

Iran's weekly report

He added, "In many European countries women are busy performing very laborious jobs with very low wages, which is because they wish to exploit the entire nations, and both sexes, at the service of (the survival of) the capitalism."

Elsewhere in his address President Ahmadinejad referred to the presence of a number of competent women at his cabinet, arguing, "My scientific and judiciary affairs deputies are both expert women and our health minister, too, is a qualified academic figure, and when I surveyed the quality of their work I noticed they were better and more competent than the others."

The president at the end stressed the Iranian people and government's support for the Islamic world female scientists, encouraging them to plan for the liberation of the world women from the inappropriate status they are entangled with in many countries.

Jannati to Judiciary: Rule on Rioters' Case More Speedily

Showing weakness under present circumstances will be tantamount to times worse future," said Ayatollah Jannati in his Friday prayers congregation address in Tehran University campus, asking the Judiciary Chief, Ayatollah Sadeq Larijani, to speedily implement the judicial rulings issued in the case of the post-election rioters.

He said the Judiciary shoulders heavy duty of dealing with the case of the post-election rioters.

Further addressing himself to the Judiciary Chief, Ayatollah Larijani, Ayatollah Jannati in his second sermon reiterated harsh punishment of "Moharebs" (Those waging war against God).

Lauding Judiciary for execution of two of the post-vote rioters on Thursday, Ayatollah Jannati said on July 9, 1999, too several people were executed so that we would no longer witness such event as that of Ashura.

Elsewhere in his sermon, Ayatollah Jannati referred to the U.S. military build-up in the quake-torn country of Haiti, saying the U.S. indifference towards killing of tens of thousand people in the country is an instance of its ill nature.

"Instead of sending medicine and humanitarian assistance to Haiti, the U.S. raises and stabilizes its military presence there," said the Ayatollah.

The reason for Iran's opposition to the US is Americans' "war-mongering and hegemonic" nature, concluded Ayatollah Jannati.

Foreign Envoys Laud Iran's Engineering Ability

Ambassadors from Asian, European and Latin American countries visited different parts of the tunnel.

Iran's weekly report

They called on Iranian engineers to help them implementing joint construction projects in their countries.

Tajik charge d'affairs in Tehran acknowledged Iranian experts and engineers for construction of the Tohid Tunnel and said that he had traveled to different countries, but he has not seen such a big tunnel in other countries.

He called on Iranian engineers to help their Tajik counterpart in the construction of such projects in Tajikistan.

Croatian Ambassador to Tehran said that Tohid Tunnel has a nice and special designing, adding, "The tunnel has both technical and beautiful view. Construction of the tunnel is wonderful to me."

Russian charge d'affairs in Tehran also said that Tohid Tunnel was a big project that constructed on the basis of modern technologies.

Director managing of Tehran Engineering and Construction Department said that the ambassadors of foreign countries asked Iranian engineers to participate in the construction of such projects in their countries.

Iran, Iraq, Syria Agree to Tackle Dust Crisis

Vice-President for Environmental Protection and Head of the Department of the Environment (DoE), Mohammad Javad Mohamadizadeh, said Wednesday night that 95 percent of the dust comes from Iraq and Syria and the three countries agreed to decline dust through mulching.

He said an Iranian delegation authorized in this regard will travel to Iraq to investigate the dust fields and tackle the problem within three years.

Mohamadizadeh said that just five percent of the dust comes from deserts inside the country.

He said that the Organization of Environmental Protection decided to mulch around the Shadegan Lagoon

U.S.: Iran Draft Deal on Table Without Change

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Philip Crowley asserted in a press briefing on Friday that the draft deal, first floated by the US, was a "fair opportunity" for Iran to build confidence regarding the country's nuclear work.

"We still think that is a fair opportunity for Iran. We think it's good for Iran and it would help begin to address some of our concerns about certain elements of its nuclear program. And as far as I know, the offer is still on the table for Iran to say yes," he told reporters.

Iran's weekly report

Crowley, however, reaffirmed that the proposal would see no change as demanded by the Iranian government.

"As Secretary [of State Hillary] Clinton and others have said, we have no plans to amend it," he said, reflecting the American inflexibility on the issue.

Blair Attacked Over Iran Stance

In his evidence to the Iraq Inquiry, the former prime minister said that many of the arguments which led him to confront Saddam Hussein now applied to the regime in Tehran.

He attacked the Iranians for fomenting the insurgency which followed the invasion of Iraq by British and U.S. forces, and he said that they must not now be allowed to develop nuclear weapons.

He said that if action had not been taken in 2003 to topple Saddam, Iraq could now be locked in a nuclear arms race with Iran with potential devastating consequences for the region and the wider world.

However his claim that the Iranians almost caused the failure of the coalition mission in Iraq through their support for the insurgency was dismissed as a "piece of spin" by a former British ambassador to Tehran, Sir Richard Dalton.

"To say that Iran was the principal reason seemed to me to be part of a broader argument which he was trying to make, namely that it makes what he did in Iraq look better if he extends it to the future and says the policies then might have to be applied. But Iran is a completely different situation," he told the BBC Radio 4 Today program.

Sir Richard said that it was now essential that all the political parties made clear in the run up to the general election that there would be no repeat of Mr Blair's actions in respect of Iran.

"One result of Tony Blair's intervention on Iran - he mentioned Iran 58 times - is to put the question of confronting Iran into play in the election," he said.

"We need to be much clearer, as voters, with our politicians and with our candidates that we expect a different behavior and a greater integrity in our democracy next time."

Sarkozy, Clinton Discuss Iran Sanctions

Iran's weekly report

Sarkozy has often called for increased sanctions to force Tehran to either give up its uranium enrichment program or let it be placed under international controls.

Among other issues Clinton was set to discuss with Sarkozy and, later Friday, Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner was the Haiti donors conference, to be held on March 22 and 23 in New York.

After her meeting with Sarkozy, Clinton delivered a speech on security issues at the Institute for Strategic Research at the Military Academy (IRSEM).

Responding to a question, she defended the use of American soldiers in Haiti, saying that relief following the earthquake 'could not have been carried out only by civilians.'

The consequences of the disaster were so severe, Clinton said, that essential problems such as food delivery could only have been resolved by the military.

The presence of large numbers of U.S. troops in Haiti led to complaints from a number of parties involved in relief work there.

For example, Benoit Leduc of Doctors Without Borders said that his organization was concerned about the 'militarization of aid' and 'the extreme confusion of distributing food with a gun.'

Israel Spied on Iran, Syria From Secret Turkish Base

Revelations of a secret Israeli spy base, which was allegedly set up in Ankara to gather classified information on Iran and Syria, has dragged Tel Aviv into a new spy scandal.

Sources in Turkey's ruling party told Russia's Mignews that Israeli spy agents ran an advanced electronic monitoring station from the Ankara military headquarters to keep tabs on communication networks in Iran and Syria.

According to the sources who were speaking on condition of anonymity, the Signals Intelligence station was solely managed by Israeli intelligence personnel and had become off-limits for members of the Turkish government.

Israeli military sources have refused to comment on the revelations, which are likely to spark an outcry in Turkey, now that they have been leaked to newspapers and media outlets.

This is not the first time Israel finds itself at the centre of a major spy scandal.

For years Israeli politicians have masterminded a wave of undercover operations and terror plots in numerous countries, including Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Iran, Switzerland, and the U.S.

However, much of Israel's espionage operations are focused on the Tehran government, largely because of Iran's uranium enrichment activities, which is seen by Israel as a mortal threat.

Obama Aide: Iran May Lash Out at Israel

The adviser, retired Marine Gen. James Jones, said history shows that when regimes are feeling pressure they can lash out through surrogates.

He said that in Iran's case that would mean facilitating attacks on Israel through Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza. Iran helps arm Hezbollah and Hamas.

Jones also alluded to the prospect of additional international sanctions being applied to Iran as one factor in making Iran feel greater pressure.

Iran: U.S. Sanctions Not to Halt Gasoline Supplies

If for any reason any refinery or trader would stop working with us, we can refer to other refineries and traders and receive the amount of gasoline needed," said Hojatollah Ghanimifard, vice president for investment affairs at the National Iranian Oil Co. "These kinds of unilateral sanctions are not new to us. For the past 30 years such sanctions have been imposed by the U.S. and everyone knows they could not be workable," he said by phone today from Tehran.

The U.S. Senate yesterday unanimously passed legislation to expand sanctions on foreign companies that invest in Iran's energy sector. The measure requires sanctions against foreign companies that sell refined petroleum to Iran or help develop its refining capacity. The bill needs to be reconciled with similar legislation passed by the U.S. House in December.

"These type of unilateral sanctions don't really have much of an impact because there will be enough middlemen for Iran to carry on as normal," Olivier Jakob, managing director of oil consultant Petromatrix GmbH in Zug, Switzerland, said in a telephone interview.

Refineries around the world are running below capacity and have to pay fixed and some variable costs regardless of how much of their capacity is being used, Ghanimifard said. "If we approached these refineries and asked them to receive crude oil in exchange for gasoline, for sure their response would be positive," he said.

Iran's weekly report

Iran "has piled more gasoline in its stocks" since it sought to control fuel consumption, Ghanimifard said. Gasoline reserves were the highest in 15 years, Farid Ameri, managing director of the National Iranian Oil Products Distribution Co., said in October.

Ghanimifard said that a halt in exports to Iran will force some refineries or traders to sell in other markets and push prices down. "The excess of supply in those markets will spill over to markets that need to receive gasoline, including Iran."

Royal Dutch Shell Plc, Switzerland's Vitol Group, BP Plc, Reliance Industries Ltd. are among companies that do business with Iran, Republican Jon Kyl, who has co-sponsored the legislation, said in April.

Shell Chief Executive Officer Peter Voser said in an interview in Davos, Switzerland, that the company will comply with current and future laws in its relationship with Iran.

"Some trading companies have been selling oil to Iran and it may limit what they can do," Petromatrix's Jakob said. "The only way for sanctions to have success is for them to be backed by the United Nations."

Raul Castro Likely to Visit Iran

The visit is likely to take place this year (2010)," Ricardo said yesterday, refusing to announce the exact date of the visit.

He further reminded reciprocal invitations by the Iranian and Cuban presidents for official visits to each others' countries, but said that the exact dates for the visits are yet to be decided.

Responding to a question on the details of the last week's visit to Tehran by the Cuban Deputy Foreign Minister, Marcos Rodriguez Costa, the envoy said that during the trip, the two sides discussed ways to expand the two sides' political and economic relations and exchanged views about issues related to the two countries' embassies.

Ricardo added that during the visit, the two sides made a comprehensive and full review of the existing impediments to the expansion of bilateral ties and talked about other Latin American states.

"The recent developments in the region, including the upcoming elections in Argentina and Iraq, were also discussed in the meetings between the Cuban deputy foreign minister and Iranian officials," the envoy added.

Larijani calls for establishment of Islamic parliament

The establishment of the Islamic Inter-Parliamentary Union is the first step by Muslim nations that paves the way for the establishment of an Islamic parliament, Larijani told delegates at the sixth summit of the Parliamentary Union of the Organization of the

Iran's weekly report

Islamic Conference in Kampala, Uganda on Saturday.

Over fifty years ago, European countries established the European Parliament and the predecessor of the European Union, which was a major step for the development of Europe after long wars, he stated.

In comparison with European countries at that time, Muslim countries have greater potential to increase their unity, the Iranian parliament speaker noted

Top aide says Iran is worried about Obama

"We have concerns Obama will not be successful in bring change to U.S. policies," Esfandiar Rahim-Mashaie, the senior aide to President Ahmadinejad and his chief of staff, said.

If he cannot fulfill his promise to resolve issues between Tehran and Washington, he said, we cannot hold our breath that he would resolve other issues facing the U.S., the Iranian Students News Agency reported.

After a year in office, the once-popular President Obama is having difficulties in saving the economy, ending the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and fulfilling his campaign promises, including the health care reform.

In his State of the Union address to Congress on Wednesday, Obama explained about his effort in the past year to develop a new approach toward nuclear programs of Iran and North Korea.

The focus on nuclear arms control "is why North Korea now faces increased isolation and stronger sanctions -- sanctions that are being vigorously enforced," Obama said.

"That is why the international community is more united, and the Islamic Republic of Iran is more isolated," he said. "And as Iran's leaders continue to ignore their obligations, there should be no doubt: they too, will face growing consequences."

Mashaie rejected the remarks and said Iranians are "the flag-bearers of peace."

"The Iranian nation never seeks war because beautiful people do not look for a quarrel," he said. "However, we would defend our country and religion with our blood if any danger looms over our land."

Mashaie said it was time for Washington to realize it needed Tehran's help if it wanted to "get out of the quagmire it has made in Iraq and Afghanistan."

Iran and the U.S. have had no diplomatic ties for nearly three decades. The animosity has reached a new level after the Bush administration put Tehran on the "axis of evil," and accused the country of seeking nuclear weaponry.

Trial of 16 Ashura riot detainees begins in Iran

The hearing, presided by Judge Abul Qasim Salavati, began with a general indictment against 14 men and two women on Saturday morning at Tehran's Revolution Court.

The prosecutor explained that five of the defendants were facing charges of Moharebeh (enmity towards God), while the others were being tried for taking part in "illegal protests, threatening national security, and spreading propaganda against the establishment."

The indictment said that the latter individuals had targeted the country's security "by encouraging others to rebel."

According to the prosecutor, all the suspects were working in line with the interests of the U.S. and other foreign states that "were seeking regime change in the Islamic Republic of Iran."

The anti-government protests on December 27 coincided with Ashura mourning ceremonies, when protesters damaged public property, set fire to trashcans, and clashed with security forces.

The defendants could face long prison terms or the death penalty for the more serious charges such as Moharebeh.

Nine rioters have already been handed the death penalty over their involvement in plots against the Islamic Republic following the June presidential election.

In a recent hearing, they were found guilty of being a Mohareb (enemy of God), attempting to topple the Islamic establishment, and membership in the Mujahedeen Khalq Organization. The nine will be executed if the Court of Appeal upholds their sentence.

The MKO, listed as a terrorist group in Iran, Iraq, Canada, and the U.S., has carried out many attacks against Iranian officials and civilians over the past 30 years.

Meanwhile, official statements indicate that legal proceedings on the cases of 37 other Ashura detainees have also begun at the Tehran Revolution Court, as the prosecutors' office has finished compiling their files.

Tehran's Public Prosecutor's Office has released a statement vowing to bring charges against all Ashura detainees with determination, scrutiny and rapid action.

Economic News

Pakistan-Iran Agree to Expedite Work

This was expressed during a meeting between the Ambassador of Iran to Pakistan, Masha' Allah Shakeri and Federal Minister for Water and Power, Raja Pervez Ashraf. The discussed matters of mutual interest as well as bilateral relations to further boost economic ties between the two countries.

The current status of transmission line for import of 100 MW power for Gwadar from Iran was also discussed. The Minister informed a Pakistani delegation was leaving for Iran tonight to discuss matters relating to import of power from Iran within the shortest possible time frame. Both the minister and the ambassador also discussed the current status of the gas pipeline project, the construction of transmission line for import of 100 MW for Gwadar and 1000 MW for national grid and appreciated each other's cooperation in this regard.

Earlier, the minister while welcoming the Iranian envoy said Pakistan had close brotherly relations with Iran. Pakistan values the help and support of Iran and both the countries want to establish bilateral relations in all sectors.

Tehran, Copenhagen Target Boosting Business Ties

The head of Iran's Chamber of Commerce Mohammad Nahavandian termed Danish-Iranian economic ties strategic.

He pointed to the very important role of Danish companies in Iran's growing market.

Nahavandian cautioned that Danish hesitancy to enter the Iranian market could mean a losing business opportunity as other foreign competitors could boost trade with Iran.

The Iranian official urged the need for a long-term Danish cooperation with Iran's private and state sector.

He called for the creation of a joint Danish-Iranian trade council to speed up expansion of business ties.

Meanwhile, the chairman of the Danish Chamber of Commerce welcomed Nahavandian's proposal, while labeling Iran the gateway to a 300-million people regional market.

He said Danish firms would cooperate with Iran in the area of petrochemical products and food industries.

FTZs Absorb \$2b of Foreign Investment

Hamid Baghae asserted that in the wake of the economic crisis in the world, foreign investors are more inclined to bring their money to Iranian trade zones.

Baghae added that Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Turkey have declared readiness to open banks in Iranian free zones.

Baghae also added that it has been predicted in the fifth development plan to hand over government responsibilities and rights to the heads of free zones.

Malaysian Private Sector Urged to Take Part in Iran Expo

The RenExpo and Conference is a global forum for companies to showcase their abilities to both the public sector and private companies while the International Halal Conference will provide an opportunity to governments to realize the potential of investing in halal products.

The Colombo Plan, in collaboration with the Iran Chambers of Commerce, Industries and Mines, will sponsor 15 participants from Colombo Plan developing member countries, including Malaysia, at the conferences.

Iran Exports \$5b of Minerals This Year

Samiei-Nejad said that cement is the most important export item, adding, "More than 4 million tons of cement would be exported till January 20."

He said that production of mineral materials during the ninth cabinet has raised by 87 percent, adding, "The number of mines across the country has increased from 3,200 to 5,280 during the period."

Agri-Products Exports to Reach \$3.5b

He said the figure is 50 percent higher than that was predicted in the fourth development plan.

Referring to producing of 400 different kinds of agricultural products in the country, Khalilian said a project of making different kinds of insurances for agricultural products have been planned to encourage farmers to further use of the insurances and compensate possible damage to them.

The Minister went on to say that in a workshop which was held Friday in Gorgan, northern Iran participants studied the conditions of producing cotton, olive and silk in northern provinces of the country and they agreed to support increase production of citrus fruits, cotton and expand olive gardens within the next five years.

He said hundreds of projects in the agricultural sector are due to be inaugurated during the Ten Day Dawn (1-11 February, 2010).

Tehran, Ankara Urge More Economic Ties

Following recent visit by Turkish Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan to Tehran, it is expected that expansion of economic relations between the two countries would be accelerated," Larijani said on the sideline of IPE meeting in Uganda,

Mohammad-Ali Shahin for his part said that the Turkish parliament seeks consolidation and expansion of the two countries' relations.

Pointing to his upcoming visit to Iran, he said that mutual parliamentary relationship would facilitate economic ties between the two countries. He renders his support to such an approach towards Iran.

Tehran to Host Int'l Furniture Exhibition

Spain, Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, Belgium, Indonesia, Romania, China, Pakistan, Syria, Turkey, India, Switzerland, Germany, Austria, Canada, United Arab Emirates, UK, Russia, Saudi Arabia and Italy are among the countries attending Iran Hofex 2010.

The five-day event will be start today till February 3.

Furniture Exports Over \$3m

Iran's total furniture exports in the last year were around \$9 million, while the figure for the first half of the current year reached \$3.6 million, Reza Joshaghani said.

"The exports show 67 percent growth over the same period last year," he added.

Armenia, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Russia, Georgia, Pakistan, Syria, Iraq Belarus, Afghanistan, UAE, Algeria, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are Iran's major target markets for furniture exports, he said.

Iran also imports furniture and furniture raw materials from Turkey, Russia, UAE and China, he concluded.

Iranians at Kuwait INFOCONNECT 2010

Nearly 350 companies from various countries including the Islamic Republic of Iran have attended INFOCONNECT 2010 which is to run to February 4.

The exhibitors' profile include Hardware vendors, suppliers and manufacturers, Accessories and Peripherals vendors & manufacturers, Application Developers, B2C Solutions, Content Management, Data Warehousing, E-Learning, IT Consultancy, Outsourcing Services, Security Management, Software Developers & Vendors, System Integration, IP Technology, ISPs and dealers, Portal Software, Web Services.

Tajikistan Calls for Further Economic Ties With Iran

Addressing a news conference on Saturday, Aliov referred to the remarkable expansion of economic cooperation between Tajikistan and Iran during the last few years adding that "the ties could be even expanded further due to existing potentials."

After Russia and China, Iran has been ranked Tajikistan's third biggest trade partner, he said.

According to him, bilateral trade between the two countries accounted for 4 percent of Tajikistan's foreign trade.

Tajik government looks for further participation of Iranian private sectors in its various projects, he concluded.

Drug trafficking inflicts \$8.5bn of damage on Iran's economy annually

Contrary to popular belief, drug addiction is not limited to a certain social class, although the poor addicts are the ones in the public eye, for the most part, Taha Taheri told the Mehr News Agency on Saturday.

Taheri rejected a UN report which said Iran ranks first in the consumption of drugs, saying the UN report has many flaws.

The report exaggerated the drug consumption situation in the country and has many other problems as well, he stated.

"For instance, while we believe there are 1.2 million addicts in the country, they put the number at 900,000, which is 300,000 less than the official statistics," he added.

Taheri said that during a recent meeting with UN Office on Drugs and Crime Executive Director Antonio Maria Costa, he complained about the report, and it has thus been decided that UNODC experts will travel to Iran to study the situation more closely.

Iran's weekly report

Taheri stated that Iran, as the current chairman of the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs, is making efforts to make the UN statistics on drugs more precise so that the statistics cannot be used for political purposes.

However, UNODC has kept more precise statistics over the past three years, he added.

The Commission on Narcotic Drugs is the central drug policy-making body within the United Nations system.

Social News

Leader Receives Royan Institute Officials

The Supreme Leader said that correct application of science, knowledge and efforts with reliance upon faith play vital role in success of Royan Institute.

Head of Royan Institute Dr. Gourabi briefed the Supreme Leader on the latest achievements of the institute in the field of stem cells and cloning.

Royan Institute is a public non-governmental non-profitable organization established in 1991 as an infertility clinic.

In 1998, the institute was approved by Ministry of Health as Stem Cell based Research Center. The institute currently acts as leader of Stem Cell research and also one of the best clinics for infertility treatment.

Bonyana, Iran's first cloned calf was successfully born on July 11, 2009 in the Nasr Animal Husbandry affiliated with Royan Institute's Isfahan Campus.

This was the most important part of Royan Institute's research in the field of cloning and transgenic animals, which can lead to the production of farm animals and recombinant drugs.

Saeedlou: Iran, Cuba Cooperation Helps Promote Sports

In a meeting with the Cuban Deputy Foreign Minister Marcos Rodriguez, he referred to both countries' capacities for further developing political, economic and sports ties and added that Cuba's sports enjoy high capacities.

Saeedlou said that a sports agreement has been drafted and Iran-Cuba sports ties will soon expand.

Rodriguez said for his part that given the two countries' capacities, bilateral sports ties will further develop.

He extended an invitation letter from the head of Cuban National Olympic Committee to Saeedlou to visit Hanava.

Cuba is fully ready to expand sports relations with Iran and exchange experiences with Iran.

Iranian Academic Refutes Racism Charges Against him

Larijani told IRNA that western societies, especially the US, have had a long history of racism and Islam has always advocated equality among different races.

He pointed to certain allegations raised by a number of media outlets, and said, "Such media controversies are part of an organized attack by the US and the anti-revolutionary circles against the Islamic establishment (of Iran)."

He added that such moves have been aimed to harm Iran from a human rights standpoint.

He said those raising such charges aim to overshadow the Human Rights Council Seventh Universal Periodic Review, which will be held in Geneva on 8 - 19 February 2010.

Larijani said Muslims and the Iranian nation have always honored black Africans who accompanied the Great Prophet of Islam, Hazrat Mohammad (Peace be upon him and his progeny) or the first Imam of the prophet's infallible household, Hazrat Ali (AS), and were among the freed black slaves but were appointed to top positions assigned by the Prophet and Hazrat Ali (AS).

Larijani went on to point to the wide-scale racism in the US and said although Barack Obama was elected the US president, racism and discrimination against blacks and other colors still prevail in the United States.

Ashura Rioters on Trial

The hearing, presided by Judge Abul Qasim Salavati, began with a general indictment against 14 men and two women yesterday morning at Tehran's Revolution Court.

The prosecutor explained that five of the defendants were facing charges of Moharebeh (enmity towards God), while the others were being tried for taking part in "illegal protests, threatening national security, and spreading propaganda against the establishment."

The indictment said that the latter individuals had targeted the country's security "by encouraging others to rebel."

Iran's weekly report

According to the prosecutor, all the suspects were working in line with the interests of the U.S. and other foreign states that "were seeking regime change in the Islamic Republic of Iran."

The protests on December 27 coincided with Ashura mourning ceremonies, when protesters damaged public property, set fire to trashcans, and clashed with security forces.

The defendants could face long prison terms or the death penalty for the more serious charges such as Moharebeh.

Nine rioters have already been handed the death penalty over their involvement in plots against the Islamic Republic following the June presidential election.

Supreme Leader Pays Homage to Late Imam Khomeini

The event took place on the occasion of the 'Ten-Day Dawn' celebrations marking the victory of the 1978 Islamic Revolution in Iran.

Ayatollah Khamenei also visited the tombs of the nation's martyrs, who made the ultimate sacrifice in the 1980-88 Iraqi-imposed war.

Rafsanjani calls for displaying grandeur of revolution on Bahman 22

Bahman 22, which falls on February 11 this year, marks the victory of the Islamic Revolution in 1979.

"Despite the existence of diverse views (on political issues facing the country), all people should turn the Bahman 22 into a maneuver of national unity and support for the Islamic Republic by their massive participation (in rallies)," Rafsanjani told the Expediency Council session on Saturday.

Underscoring the importance of this year's marches, he said the global arrogance, led by the United States, has been seeking to intensify political pressure on Tehran and has taken steps to impose new sanctions against Iran.

Some countries which didn't used to take hostile stance against Iran have recently aligned themselves with the hegemonic powers, he added.

Considering such a critical juncture, it is vitally essential that people avoid divisive actions in order to neutralize the foreigners' pressure and to safeguard the sacred Islamic system, he said.

"All considerate people who love the system should try to hold rallies on the "national Eid of Bahman 22" peacefully and magnificently, because any clash or violent act will be

in line with the enemies' plans.”

Rafsanjani went on to say that the Bahman 22 is the symbol of people's loyalty to the Islamic system and this day is an important episode to preserve and strengthen national unity

Cleric warns Saudis about insults to Shia pilgrims

If the Wahhabis are allowed to continue their insults against Shia pilgrims with impunity, Iran will reconsider the umra trips, Grand Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi said in Qom on Saturday at a meeting with Iranian Hajj and Pilgrimage Organization Director Hojjatoleslam Seyyed Ali Ghazi-Asgar, the Mehr News Agency reported.

The grand ayatollah called on the Saudi Arabian authorities to take a tough stance toward the insulters.

This behavior is at odds with the basic tenets of Islam and moral principles, he stated.

He went on to say that religious duties should be performed in tranquility and with dignity and political differences should not affect these ceremonies.

“We want these religious duties to be performed in the utmost tranquility and with great dignity,” he said.

He added that the hajj and umra have a great potential for unifying the Muslim world, countering anti-Islamic propaganda, and fighting against the cultural invasion launched by the enemies of Islam.

He called for the establishment of an Islamic think tank of clerics and non-clerics with sufficient experience in hajj ceremonies to deal with the current issues.

Grand Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi also said that the Iranian clergymen in charge of hajj should become more educated so that they can clarify the ambiguities

“Theater for All” still unfulfilled

Theater, almost obsolete as a cultural institution in Iran, seems a long way off from attracting people with different tastes and habits.

Even those Iranian theatergoers who were attracted faced problems attending performances during the festival, which was held in the five halls of Tehran's City Theater Complex, the main host, and at 11 other venues in Tehran.

The colorful banners of the 28th Fajr International Theater Festival in front of the City Theater Complex attracted people coming and going at the crowded Vali-e Asr - Enqelab Intersection.

Iran's weekly report

Enthusiasts crowded in front of theaters disregarding the cold weather. Some did not succeed in buying tickets to their favorite plays but they hoped to obtain tickets for other performances.

Tickets sold online before the beginning of the festival and at the City Theater's ticket offices sold out a portion of tickets on the first day of the festival in the opening hours.

However, the media reported about a black market for the festival's tickets. Some sold their tickets at double the cost to others and guest tickets without seat numbers were sold to attendees.

Some celebrated performances by renowned artists were staged at theaters with capacities of about 100 people. This accommodated VIPs and their guests, but disappointed enthusiasts wanting to attend their favorite performances.

Tehran's City Theater Complex, Iran's most prestigious theater venue, consists of five halls out of which four have limited capacities.

Theatergoers missed performances due to distances between venues, the compact schedule of programs at the festival as well as delays occurring at some performances.

The festival played host to renowned plays by veteran stage artists but the program also contained some unfamiliar names without providing further details.

About three months before the beginning of the festival, some veteran stage artists including Mohammad Charmshir, Mohammad Rahmanian and Bahram Beizaii withdrew their submissions from the festival's secretary for various reasons.

As the secretary of festival Hossein Parsaii mentioned in a press conference previously, this edition of festival was "an opportunity for fledgeling artists to introduce their plays."

Despite this opportunity, people were drawn to well known and familiar plays since the unfamiliar ones lacked sufficient details in the program to attract large audiences.

Foreign participants fared better since people seemed to be curious enough to go to their performances without requiring detailed information.

20 foreign plays from different countries went on stage during the festival. "Grand Inquisitor" by Peter Brook was among the participants whose staging was cancelled due to "extremely divergent reactions" produced by his invitation, as the Public Relations of the festival announced in a press release.

The Iranian Theater Market was established this year on the sideline of the festival to introduce Iran's Theater to the world and to give foreign participants an opportunity to learn more about dramatic arts in Iran.

Iran's weekly report

The project has received positive feedback from foreign participants however many of them said that it was a first experience and had deficiencies.

Plays participating in the Street Theater Section that were performed in the open area of City Theater faced problems due to the cold weather. The troupes were forced to take shelter in the rain and perform their plays in limited indoor space.

The audiences at street theater performances could not enjoy them fully due to the cold weather and limited space beneath the roof of the City Theater.

Limited capacity of theaters, lack of information on performances and disorganized ticket sales are factors leading to a theater festival that is not for all and did not satisfy enthusiasts.

Fajr theater festival is a chance for stage artists to introduce their works, for officials to observe deficiencies and find solutions to existing problems in Iran's Theater and also for people to simply enjoy the wide selection of performances.

However, it is a huge task for this annual event, which takes place only in Tehran, to establish a desire for theater in the hearts and minds of all the people

Anahita Temple avoids destruction

The decision to halt the project was made following publication of a report on the mess at the Parthian era site by the Persian service of the Mehr News Agency.

The Kangavar Endowments and Charity Affairs Office (KECAO) began construction of concrete foundations to develop the shrine of Imamzadeh Ebrahim (AS) located on the perimeter of the Anahita Temple in December.

Construction of a hotel at the location is a part of the development plan.

“The construction project near the Anahita Temple was illegal so it was barred by a court order,” Kermanshah Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Department (KCHTHD) Director Asadollah Beiranvand told Mehr on Friday.

He said that the office had begun the project without receiving approval from the KCHTHD.

Meanwhile, KECAO Director Mohammad Qorbani denied Beiranvand's remarks and said that construction was carried out based on mutual agreement between the KCHTHD

and

KECAO.

According to Qorbani, the development plan was approved by the Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization in 1994, but implementation of the plan was postponed for unspecified reasons.

The development plan received approval of the Kermanshah Governor's General Office in 2009 and the final version of it was signed during a session attended by officials from the KCHTHD, the KECAO and the Kermanshah governor general on December 19, 2009.

Several column bases and ruins of a wall remain from the magnificent Greek-style Anahita Temple, which is believed to have been built circa 200 BC.

The temple was used during the Parthian era (248 BC-224) as well as the Sassanid era (224-651).

The monument was also damaged as it was used for various purposes by the Seljuk, Ilkhanid, Safavid, and Qajar dynasties, which ruled in Iran over the past centuries.

In addition, the Anahita Temple was seriously damaged by an earthquake in 1957. Afterwards, people invaded the perimeter of the site, using stones from the temple to rebuild their homes at that location.

Photo: The concrete footings created for the construction project are seen near the ruins of columns of the Anahita Temple in an undated photo. (Photo by Mehr)

Astan-e Qods Museum furnished with new lighting system

Providing the appropriate lightning for the preserved treasures has long been a great concern of officials, said deputy director of the museum Mohsen Amirinia.

LEDs are small light bulbs that have no filament, unlike ordinary incandescent light bulbs. Because they have no filament, less energy is required, less heat is produced and bulb life is thousands of times longer.

“LEDs are much brighter than incandescent bulbs. And especially in the windows where banknotes are displayed, more visitors are attracted,” Amirinia said.

Other sections will soon be equipped with LED lighting, he added.