

Business and politics in Muslim world

Weekly report on Iran

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M Rashid

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Summary

Political front

U.S. wants peaceful solution to Iran nuclear dispute

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said on Sunday that Washington wants peaceful solution to a nuclear dispute with Iran, but does not want to engage with Tehran "while they are building their bomb".

Tehran begins enriching uranium to 20%, state media say

Iran announced on Tuesday it has begun work to enrich uranium to 20 percent, dismissing warnings of new sanctions from world powers who suspect the sensitive

nuclear project is aimed at making a bomb.

Iran knows the location of U.S. missile defense shields in region: general

Iran is fully aware of the locations of the U.S. missile defense shields in the region, Brigadier General Ahmad Miqani said on Tuesday.

US says Iranian-backed insurgents killed in Iraq

The US military said on Friday that five suspected members of an “Iranian-backed terrorist organization” were killed in a shootout during an Iraqi-led anti-smuggling operation southeast of Baghdad.

International broadcasters slam Iran interference

Three major international broadcasters on Friday condemned Iran for blocking broadcasts from abroad, as Tehran sought to suppress protests on yesterday’s anniversary of the 1979 Islamic revolution.

Clinton says no US plan for military action against Iran

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said in an interview broadcast on Wednesday that Washington has no plans for military action against Iran over its nuclear program.

Rights group raps Iran over rejecting UN recommendations

Amnesty International on Wednesday criticized Iran for rejecting recommendations by the United Nations to improve human rights in the country.

Iran rules out halting work at Tehran research reactor

Iran said on Wednesday that it would not suspend work at its Tehran research reactor in return for medical radioisotopes, as proposed by three world powers.

Majority of Americans see Iran as a threat – poll

A Gallup poll released on Tuesday found 61 percent of Americans saw Iran’s military power as a critical threat to US interests.

Iran speaker to visit Japan on 23 February

Iran’s parliament speaker, Ali Larijani, will visit Japan on 23 February, deputy parliament speaker, Hassan Zamani, told the Iran Labor News Agency on Tuesday.

Ahmadinejad calls for greater Iran-Turkey ties

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad on Tuesday called for the promotion of ties between his country and Turkey, saying greater mutual ties were in the benefit of regional peace and stability.

Clinton rejects Iran’s claim of peaceful nuclear aims

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on Tuesday questioned Iran's claims that its nuclear ambitions are peaceful, as she defended Washington's push for sanctions against Tehran.

Islamic Countries Praise Human Rights in Iran

Islamic countries envoys have praised strengthening of human rights foundations in Iran.

Kuwaiti Envoy: Iran No Threat to Region

Iran is no threat to the regional countries, including the Persian Gulf littoral states, and this has been proved to everyone, Kuwaiti Ambassador to Tehran Majdi Ahmad Ebrahim Al-Zafiri stressed here yesterday.

More Fuel Swap Proposals for Iran

Iran is studying proposals from the United States, Russia and France on a nuclear fuel swap, after it said last week that it was stepping up its own uranium enrichment.

Mullen: Attack on Iran's Nuclear Facilities "Worries"

The chairman of the U.S. military's Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mike Mullen, said on Sunday he was concerned about the consequences of any attack on Iran's nuclear facilities.

Russia Commits to Deliver S-300 System

The Kremlin's powerful Security Council says Moscow sees no reason to delay the sale of its S-300 anti-aircraft systems to Tehran.

Obama Aide: Regime Change Possible in Iran

A top Obama Administration official has said that tougher sanctions against Iran over its defiance on its nuclear program could trigger regime change in Tehran

U.S. Slaps New Sanctions on IRGC

The Obama administration on Wednesday slapped new sanctions on several affiliates of Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps amid stepped-up efforts to get U.N. penalties against Tehran because of its nuclear and missile programs.

President: Iran Favors Establishment of a Nuclear-Free World

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said in his Friday interview with Russia's NTV network, "Iranian nation's regional and international status is incomparable with its position 31 years ago.

Saudi Arabia seeks "immediate resolution" over Iran

Saudi Arabia on Monday called for an "immediate resolution" to the standoff over Iran's nuclear program rather than sanctions.

Turkey offers to host Iran nuclear fuel swap

Turkey's Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Sunday that his country is willing to serve as the venue for an exchange of Iran's low-enriched uranium for nuclear fuel rods from the West, in a bid to salvage a United Nations-brokered deal.

AEOI Studying New Fuel Swap Offer

Chief of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) on Monday said that following the decision to refine uranium to 20 percent inside the country, a joint proposal has been made to Tehran by Russia, France and the US for swapping fuel.

ECO Meeting in Turkey

Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Mansour Borqei attended the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) Regional Planning Council meeting in Turkey on Monday.

Russian Military Chief Warns U.S. Against Striking Iran

Russia's top military warned the U.S. yesterday against using force against Iran over its controversial nuclear ambitions, saying the consequences would be "dreadful"

Occupying Forces Send Afghan Crack Only to Iran

Deadly narcotics like compact heroin, crack, is only produced, under the guidance of certain Western countries in Afghanistan, for consumption in Iran, commander of the drug squad says.

ETANYAHU: Israel Not Planning War With Iran

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Tuesday his country is not planning a war with Iran and that Tehran's concerns over such a conflict are the result of the threat of additional international sanctions.

U.S. General Accuses Iraqi Politicians of Links to Iran

The U.S. commander in Iraq on Tuesday accused two Iraqi politicians at the center of a dispute over blacklisting electoral candidates of having ties to an arm of Iran's Revolutionary Guards.

France, Italy Back U.S. Push for Sanctions

The French and Italian foreign ministers renew threats of sanctions against Tehran over its nuclear program, as their U.S. allies try to rally support against Iran.

Iran Seeks Arrest of Those Involved in Pune Blast

Offering its condolences to the family members of the victims of the Pune bomb blast, in which one Iranian student was also killed, Iran today asked Indian government to take serious steps to identify and arrest those involved in the ghastly act.

KENT: Military Action Against Iran Still on Table

An attack on Israel would be considered an attack on Canada, junior foreign minister Peter Kent says, suggesting that pre-emptive action may be needed against Iran.

New Conscription Regulations for Iranian Expatriates

Iranian expatriates of compulsory military service age worldwide are allowed to visit Iran for a maximum duration of three months yearly without having to be enlisted, a press release from the Iranian Conscription Organization said.

Russia “Fixing” Technical Issues Delaying S-300 Deliveries

Russia is resolving the technical problems which have delayed the delivery of advanced S-300 air defense systems to Iran, a Russian defense industry official said on Monday.

Major Powers Deny New Nuclear Offer for Iran

The U.S., France and Russia denied a new nuclear fuel supply proposal had been given to Iran, as claimed by Tehran, while Israel pushed for harsh sanctions to contain the regime's atomic ambitions.

MPs Call for Severance of Ties with Britain

Most Iranian lawmakers demand a downgrading and even cutting of ties with Britain following London's hostile stances against Tehran in the last few months ,

SUPREME LEADER: Iran Has No Belief in A-Bombs

Supreme Leader of Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei said Iran has not the least belief in making nuclear bombs.

Iran Urged to Reduce Dependence On Oil For Growth, Revenue

The International Monetary Fund Thursday welcomed Iran's energy price reform agenda, saying the country needs to reduce its reliance on oil revenue

SOLTANIEH: IAEA Chief Says Iran Nuclear Activities Are Peaceful

Iran's IAEA envoy Ali-Asghar Soltanieh said here Thursday that the IAEA Chief Yukiya Amano has confirmed peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear activities.

IAEA Report on Iran Raises Concern in U.S.

After the UN nuclear watchdog head Yukiya Amano issued a two-sided report about Iran's nuclear program, the U.S. renews criticism over Tehran's pursuit of its nuclear activities

Ankara Supports Iran's Peaceful Nuclear Program

Turkey's Parliament speaker said here Wednesday Turkey continues its support for Iran's peaceful nuclear program.

Economic Front

China Enhances Commercial Ties With Tehran

China has overtaken the European Union to become Iran's largest trading partner, according to a new analysis of the commercial ties between the two countries. The growing business links between Beijing and Tehran underline China's reluctance to agree to any further economic sanctions on Iran, Financial Times reported.

Land Rover Seeks to Tap Iranian Market

Land Rover is in talks with Iranian authorities to begin sales in the Islamic Republic, as it actively seeks entry into the largely untapped Iranian market.

The firm, which was sold by US giant Ford to India's Tata Motors in 2008, is seeking official approval from the Iranian authorities.

Iran begins drilling oil well in Caspian Sea

State TV reports that Iran has began drilling its first exploratory oil well in the Caspian Sea.

Over \$4b to back domestic production

Iran has paid some \$4.09 billion from the Forex Fund reserves as the revolving capital to support domestic producers.

Iran-Khodro Registers New Record in Car Production

Iran's largest auto-manufacturer, Iran-Khodro Company (IKCO), announced that it has set a new record in the production of passenger cars in Iran and surpassed its last year production capacity of 600,000 units in just eleven months.

Belarus, Iran to Set up Joint Holding Company

Companies of Belarus and Iran are planning to create a joint holding company, Iran's Ambassador to Belarus Seyyed Abdollah Hosseini said at a meeting between representatives of the organizations subordinate to Belarus' Ministry of Transport and Communications and an Iranian delegation led by Minister of Road and Transportation Hamid Behbahani.

Iran Likely to Halve Economic Ties with Britain

The parliament has presented a proposal to the government to decrease the country's economic relations with Britain to \$500mln following London's hostile stances against Tehran in the last few months, a senior legislator announced yesterday.

Pakistan-Iran Gas Pipeline Agreement Delayed

The operational agreement on the construction of a natural gas pipeline from the South Pars field of Iran has been delayed for another month.

Iran to Present Tourism Attractions in Milan

Iran's tourism potentials and attractions will be presented at the 30th BIT-Tourism exhibition in Milan today.

Iran to Establish Trade Center in Iraq

First Iran trade center will be inaugurated in Soleymanieh, Iraq by the Iran cooperative chamber in a near future.

Tehran-Minsk Development Strategy Discussed

Belarusian Foreign Minister Siarhiey Martynau in a meeting with Minister of Industries and Mines Ali Akbar Mehrabian here on Tuesday discussed ways of developing trade and industry cooperation

First Drilling for Oil in Caspian Sea Starts

Iran started drilling the first exploratory oil well in its territorial waters of the Caspian Sea, official IRNA news agency reported on Sunday.

Stable Crop Production On Agenda

Iran seeks stable crop production despite the fact that agriculture is largely dependent on rain, an official of Agriculture Jihad Ministry said.

Deputy Agriculture Jihad Minister Mohammad Reza Jahansouz said in a press conference that Iran wants to improve its strategic crops production in the near future.

Inflation Above 12%

Central Bank of Iran (CBI) announced an inflation rate of 13.5 up to the closing days of November and the number has reduced to 12.2 in January 2010. CBI Governor Mahmoud Bahmani asserted that the number would fall in late February, IRIB reported. Bahmani said reducing inflation to below 10 percent is a high priority for CBI this year, adding that reorganization of financial institutions and funds played an important role in the reduction.

A Great potential to boost Pak-Iran economic ties: Pak Minister

There is a great potential to boost Pak-Iran economic ties and both the countries could take advantage of their expertise in many sectors, Pakistani Minister for Finance Shaukat Tarin has said.

Azerbaijan to build new gas export pipeline to Iran

The State Oil Company of Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR) intends to build a new pipeline to export gas to Iran, Azerigas PU First Deputy Nazim Samadzade said.

MEDEX 2010 to open today

The 8th International Exhibition of Home and Office Furniture, Decoration and Interior Design, Machineries, Equipment and Accessories (MEDEX 2010) will be kicked off in Tehran Permanent International Fairgrounds today.

Bahrain to Import Gas From Iran

A delegation of oil and gas ministers from Bahrain arrived in Tehran for a fifth round of negotiations on importing gas from Iran

German Insurers Wind Down Iran Business

Germany's Munich Re and Allianz halted all remaining insurance business in Iran as their national representative body said it backed international moves toward tougher sanctions against Tehran

Iran-Hong Kong Trade Exchange Hits \$285m

The value of Iran and Hong Kong trade exchange touched 285 million dollars in 2009, it was announced Thursday.

Social Front

Rights groups urge Iran to free reporters, bloggers

Media rights watchdog groups on Sunday called on Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei to free more than 60 journalists, writers and bloggers held after anti-government protests.

Huge rallies in Iran to mark revolution day

Millions of Iranians took to the streets across the country on Thursday to celebrate the 31st anniversary of the Islamic Revolution.

Iran pro-reform websites hacked

A group calling itself the “Iranian Cyber Army” on Friday hacked two websites belonging to the Iranian pro-reform movement.

Iran, Tajikistan Sign Educational Agreement

A letter of understanding was signed here Monday evening for Iran-Tajikistan educational cooperation by Chancellor of the Islamic Azad University of Iran Abdullah Jasbi and Tajik Education Minister Abdul Jabbar Rahmanov.

Iran Eyes Mafia Gangs Over Malaysia Drug Smuggling

International crime gangs are using Iranians to smuggle a flood of methamphetamines into Malaysia, the Iranian ambassador said according to reports Tuesday.

International Medicinal And Aromatic Plants Symposium 2010 / 2nd Iranian

This is the first international symposium under auspices of the International Society of Horticultural Sciences [ISHS] in Shiraz. The event will offer broad and unique venue in science, research and marketing. This meeting will appeal to a broad audience in Middle East, Asia, Africa, Europe, North America and world-wide. The organizers of this event welcome you to this web page.

Body of Iranian student killed in India to arrive in Tehran today

The Scientific Representative of Iran to India, Mohammad Hossein Karim, has said that the body of the Iranian student killed in terror attacks in India will arrive in Tehran on Tuesday.

Cancer Diagnosed In Iranians Under 25 Yrs.

Cancer diseases have been diagnosed among Iranians under the age of 25.
"Cancer had been most commonly diagnosed among people over 50 years (in 1979).

Detailed Report

Political Front

U.S. wants peaceful solution to Iran nuclear dispute

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said on Sunday that Washington wants peaceful solution to a nuclear dispute with Iran, but does not want to engage with Tehran "while they are building their bomb".

"I would like to figure out a way to handle it in as peaceful an approach possible, and I certainly welcome any meaningful engagement, but ... we don't want to be engaging while they are building their bomb," she said in the Qatari capital, Doha.

Tehran begins enriching uranium to 20%, state media say

Iran announced on Tuesday it has begun work to enrich uranium to 20 percent, dismissing warnings of new sanctions from world powers who suspect the sensitive nuclear project is aimed at making a bomb.

The announcement sent alarm bells ringing in the West, with the United States saying it added urgency to its efforts to clinch new sanctions against Tehran.

"From today we have started the 20 percent enrichment... in Natanz," Iran's atomic chief Ali Akbar Salehi told the official IRNA news agency.

Experts say that once Iran enriches uranium to 20 percent, it can then proceed to the 93 percent needed to produce nuclear weapons since the technology is the same.

Russia, Iran's long-time nuclear partner, questioned its intentions.

"Iran's decision to start its own enrichment of uranium... heightens doubts on the sincerity of Iran's intentions to end the international community's existing concerns" over its nuclear programme, a foreign ministry statement said.

Earlier, news agencies quoted Nikolai Patrushev, secretary of the Russian national security council, as saying: "Iran claims it is not trying to acquire nuclear weapons.

"But actions such as starting to enrich low-enriched uranium up to 20 percent raise doubts in other countries and these doubts are fairly well-grounded."

In Paris, Pentagon spokesman Geoff Morrell said US Defence Secretary Robert Gates, winding up a visit to France, said Washington is now aiming for a fresh UN sanctions resolution against Iran in "a matter of weeks, not months."

"(Gates) thinks that we need it and that we can do it in that time," Morrell added. "In all his meetings he discussed this sense of urgency."

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu added to the clamour, calling for immediate "crippling sanctions" against arch-foe Iran.

The UN nuclear watchdog said a team of its inspectors was in place to monitor the stepped-up enrichment work.

"I can confirm that officials are there in Natanz today," said a spokesman for the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). "What they find and assess will be reported to the board."

Iran has conducted low-level enrichment of uranium in the central city of Natanz for several years, in defiance of three sets of UN sanctions.

Western powers suspect Tehran is enriching uranium to make atomic weapons as the material in highly purified form can be used in the fissile core of a nuclear bomb. Iran says its nuclear programme is for civilian purposes.

Salehi in his announcement said the project involved the use of 164 centrifuges, which rotate at supersonic speed to enrich uranium.

"This can make between three to five kilograms (6.5 to 11 pounds) of 20 percent enriched uranium per month for the Tehran reactor," he said of Iran's internationally supervised facility which produces medical isotopes.

Enrichment is the process to boost the percentage in uranium of the uranium-235 isotope, which splits in a chain reaction and releases energy.

The West is trying to convince Iran to sign on to an IAEA-brokered deal that envisages it being supplied with fuel for the Tehran reactor in exchange for its low-enriched uranium (LEU).

The deal has hit a roadblock as Tehran, despite saying it is ready "in principle" to agree, insists that not all its LEU be shipped out at once as world powers demand.

Foreign ministry spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast on Tuesday left the door open for a deal, saying the stepped-up enrichment did not preclude a swap.

"If other countries or the IAEA meet our needs, maybe we can change our approach... The door is not closed yet. Any time they (world powers) are ready, this (fuel deal) can be done," he told reporters.

Salehi too reiterated on Tuesday that "Iran is ready for the unconditional exchange. If this deal takes place in time we are ready to stop this process (20 percent enrichment)."

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu meanwhile will visit Iran next week in an attempt to find a diplomatic solution. "The proposal is still valid... We believe there is still an important chance" for peace, he said in Ankara.

China also expressed hopes that the impasse can be resolved.

"We hope the relevant parties will exchange views on the draft deal on the Tehran

research reactor and reach common ground at an early date which will help solve the issue," foreign ministry spokesman Ma Zhaoxu said in Beijing.

Iran knows the location of U.S. missile defense shields in region: general

The missile shields have been based around Iran for some time now, Miqani told reporters.

He said the establishment of the missile shields is part of the plan to promote Iranophobia among regional nations, adding that the U.S. is seeking to undermine the unity of the Islamic ummah (community).

Since the U.S. is in the middle of an economic crisis, it is trying to sell arms to Persian Gulf littoral states in order to recover from the economic meltdown, he stated.

The U.S. is also seeking to stabilize its military presence in the region so that it can pursue its evil interests, he added.

Tensions between the U.S. and Iran rose on February 1 after the Obama administration quietly increased the capability of land and sea-based missile defenses in several Persian Gulf nations.

At the end of January, administration officials said that the U.S. was speeding up arms sales to a number of Persian Gulf Arab states and that it had also deployed warships capable of knocking down hostile missiles in flight to the region.

Two senior defense officials told Fox News on February 1 that missile-defense systems, including sea-based Aegis destroyers and Patriot missiles, are being sent to the Persian Gulf region. One official said the build-up was "previewed in the president's strategy on missile defense last year."

The moves, which include the sales of anti-missile systems to Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, and Kuwait, seem to be designed to pressure Iran

US says Iranian-backed insurgents killed in Iraq

The US military said on Friday that five suspected members of an "Iranian-backed terrorist organization" were killed in a shootout during an Iraqi-led anti-smuggling operation southeast of Baghdad.

Twelve people were also arrested during the firefight with suspected members of Kata'ib Hezbollah, a group that the US State Department has designated as a "foreign terrorist organization".

The military said the shootout on Thursday night took place at Ali ash-Sharqi, a village near the Iranian border and 265 kilometers from Baghdad, reports AFP.

While approaching the village, the joint Iraqi-US security team was fired upon, prompting retaliatory fire which killed “individuals assessed to be enemy combatants”.

“While the number of casualties has not yet been confirmed, initial reports indicate five individuals were killed,” the US military said.

Provincial Iraqi officials said eight people were killed and that many of the dead were innocent bystanders, reports Reuters.

The US military said that there has been an increase in weapons smuggling recently by Iranian-backed militias, such as Kata’ib Hezbollah.

Iran has repeatedly dismissed US accusations of providing arms, funds and training to Shiite militants in Iraq.

International broadcasters slam Iran interference

Three major international broadcasters on Friday condemned Iran for blocking broadcasts from abroad, as Tehran sought to suppress protests on yesterday’s anniversary of the 1979 Islamic revolution.

The BBC, Voice of America and Deutsche Welle said the “deliberate act of jamming” contravenes international broadcasting agreements.

The broadcasters said the jamming was affecting services on the Hotbird satellite, which covers audiences across Europe and the Middle East.

“The Iranian authorities are using the same satellite services to broadcast freely around the world including broadcasts in English and Arabic; at the same time they are denying their own people programs coming from the same satellites from the rest of the world,” they said in a joint statement, according to the BBC.

Iran has accused the United States and other Western countries of using the media to foment unrest and destabilize the country.

The broadcasters said they “will not stop broadcasting accurate and impartial news and current affairs into Iran” and “will try every avenue to give our large audiences in Iran the television news services that they want,” reports the Bloomberg news network.

They called on satellite operators and international regulators to “put pressure on Iran to stop this activity.”

On Thursday, the United States accused Iran of using a “near total information blockade” to deal with anti-government protesters.

The Wall Street Journal earlier reported that the Iranian government planned to permanently suspend Google's e-mail service in Iran.

Clinton says no US plan for military action against Iran

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said in an interview broadcast on Wednesday that Washington has no plans for military action against Iran over its nuclear program.

Speaking with Al-Arabiya television in Saudi Arabia, Clinton also said that the Obama administration hopes the United Nations will agree to the strongest possible sanctions against Iran.

Asked if the United States has ruled out military force against Iran, Clinton said that the focus was on “trying to change Iranian behavior”.

“Obviously, we don’t want Iran to become a nuclear weapons power, but we are not planning anything other than going for sanctions,” she added.

The United States and Israel have said that all options, including military force, remain on the table in dealing with Iran’s nuclear ambitions.

On Israel’s refusal to rule out force, Clinton said “there are many countries in the region who are very worried about Iran’s actions.”

But she stressed that Washington believes “the better approach is to join at the international community, to work together toward sanctions, to exert maximum pressure on the Iranians, and to try every way we can to change their thinking.”

Clinton said the sanctions should target in particular individuals and institutions connected to Iran’s Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, which she accused of supplanting the government.

“It is our assessment that increasingly, they’re making the decisions, and they are deeply involved in the economic life of Iran,” she said.

Clinton said that the increasing role of the Guards Corps was a factor in the negative response by Iran to the Obama administration’s outreach.

“When the military and the security forces begin to assert control and seem to be pushing the elected and the clerical leadership out of the way, that raises some serious issues,” she said.

Source: US State Department website

Rights group raps Iran over rejecting UN recommendations

Amnesty International on Wednesday criticized Iran for rejecting recommendations by the United Nations to improve human rights in the country.

Iran rejected 44 recommendations made during a review of its rights record by the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva.

They included ending the death penalty, releasing political prisoners, allowing visits by the UN special investigator on torture and making torture an offense under its laws.

“By rejecting specific recommendations made by dozens of countries, the Iranian authorities showed contempt for international obligations, just as they have done in their treatment of their own people,” said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui, Middle East and North Africa deputy director at Amnesty International.

Iran accepted 123 proposals made during the review, notably to consider abolishing the death penalty for apostasy and heresy and to take measures to ensure that torture does not take place.

It also pledged to ensure freedom of expression, the right to demonstrate peacefully and religious freedom, but rejected a recommendation to end discrimination against members of the Baha’i faith.

Amnesty International said it was “perplexed” by the numerous contradictions between recommendations accepted and those rejected.

“By promising to consider recommendations to eliminate the execution of juvenile offenders, the Iranian authorities are cynically camouflaging their existing obligation under the Convention on the Rights of the Child not to execute juvenile offending,” said Sahraoui.

Despite Iran’s promise to strengthen cooperation with human rights organizations, Amnesty International said Tehran has failed to respond to the group’s repeated requests to meet with members of the Iranian delegation.

“For human rights to really improve in Iran, the authorities must end the double-speak and take concrete measures, like ending the execution of juvenile offenders; ensure fair trials; halt torture and end impunity for all violations,” said Sahraoui.

Source: Amnesty International website

Iran rules out halting work at Tehran research reactor

Iran said on Wednesday that it would not suspend work at its Tehran research reactor in return for medical radioisotopes, as proposed by three world powers.

Last week, Iran began work on enriching uranium to 20 percent, after it failed to agree on the terms of a United Nations-brokered nuclear fuel swap deal with major powers.

On Tuesday, the United States, Russia and France said that Iran’s escalation of its uranium enrichment further undermined international trust in its nuclear program.

The three powers said they recognize Iran's need for medical radioisotopes, adding that a "responsible, timely and cost-effective" alternative to the UN plan would be for Tehran to buy isotopes on international markets, according to AFP.

"It is not at all logical to say that Iran should not produce [uranium and isotopes] and also stop its [enrichment] plants and that they will provide its needed medicine," Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Ramin Mehmanparast, told the semi-official ISNA news agency.

"We will not study proposals which lead to the suspension of the Tehran reactor," he added.

On Tuesday, Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said Iran was ready to buy the 20 percent uranium from abroad, even from the United States.

Ahmadinejad also indicated Tehran could suspend higher-grade enrichment if world powers supplied it the required fuel for the reactor.

Mehmanparast said Tehran would consider the issue of buying the uranium or an exchange of the fuel "under conditions desired by our country".

"But since none of these decisions or proposals are mutually-agreed upon and we are losing time and the fuel for the Tehran research reactor will run out next year and 850,000 patients await its medical products, we cannot wait to see which of the different proposals will lead to a result," the spokesperson said.

Sources: ISNA, Agence France-Presse

Majority of Americans see Iran as a threat – poll

A Gallup poll released on Tuesday found 61 percent of Americans saw Iran's military power as a critical threat to US interests.

The poll showed another 21 percent said Iran is an important, but not critical, threat to the United States.

The findings were based on a poll taken from 1 to 3 February, before US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's visit to the Middle East, during which she drummed up support for new sanctions against Iran.

During her trip, Clinton said Iran was moving towards a "military dictatorship" and that there was "no evidence" to support Tehran's claim that its nuclear program was entirely peaceful.

On Tuesday, the United States, France and Russia said Iran's move to escalate its uranium enrichment was unjustified and further undermines international trust in its nuclear program.

The Gallup poll asked Americans to assess the threat of each of seven international issues to the United States.

Only international terrorism, at 81 percent, was more likely to be rated as a critical threat than Iran.

Americans rated the military powers of North Korea and Iran as equal threats.

Source: Gallup website

Iran speaker to visit Japan on 23 February

Iran's parliament speaker, Ali Larijani, will visit Japan on 23 February, deputy parliament speaker, Hassan Zamani, told the Iran Labor News Agency on Tuesday.

Zamani said Larijani's four-day official visit will take place at the invitation of his Japanese counterpart.

Larijani is due to meet with senior Japanese officials and discuss Tehran-Tokyo ties.

Resource-poor Japan maintains relatively warm political and commercial relations with Iran, in a rare break with the United States, its main ally.

Iran's chief nuclear negotiator, Saeed Jalili, paid a five-day visit to Japan in December.

During that visit, Japan's prime minister voiced concern over the mistrust between the West and Iran over Tehran's nuclear ambitions.

Source: ILNA

Ahmadinejad calls for greater Iran-Turkey ties

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad on Tuesday called for the promotion of ties between his country and Turkey, saying greater mutual ties were in the benefit of regional peace and stability.

In a meeting with visiting Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu in Tehran, Ahmadinejad described relations between the two countries as "brotherly and expanding", reports the official IRNA news agency.

"The two countries can take large steps that are favorable to both nations and peace and security in the region by strengthening brotherly relations," the Iranian president said.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran seeks to expand its ties with Turkey based on goodwill and trust and considers bilateral and multilateral ties between Ankara-Tehran as beneficial to both nations and the region," he added.

Davutoglu, for his part, said Iran has a prominent position in the region, adding that Ankara is making effort to boost cooperation with Tehran in all fields.

He also called for faster implementation of bilateral projects and agreements.

Turkey, which has good relations with Iran, has offered to help in efforts to solve the dispute between world powers and Tehran over its nuclear program.

Source: IRNA

Clinton rejects Iran's claim of peaceful nuclear aims

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on Tuesday questioned Iran's claims that its nuclear ambitions are peaceful, as she defended Washington's push for sanctions against Tehran.

Speaking at a Saudi women's college in the Red Sea port of Jeddah, Clinton also warned that a nuclear-armed Iran could trigger a nuclear arms race in the Middle East.

When asked why Washington was taking a tough line on Tehran when Israel allegedly has nuclear arms and the United States is the only country to have used them in a war, Clinton said the "evidence doesn't support" Iran's claim of a peaceful nuclear program, reports AFP.

She noted Iran's move to enrich uranium to 20 percent purity, its construction of a secret uranium enrichment facility near Qom and rejection of a nuclear fuel swap deal with world powers.

International concerns over Iran's nuclear ambitions are fueled further because the Islamic Republic has threatened other countries and funded groups that have carried out "terrorist" attacks in other countries, including Saudi Arabia, Clinton added.

"Iran is the largest supporter of terrorism in the world today," she told the students.

Clinton further said the Obama administration is seeking a world free of nuclear weapons. "If Iran gets a nuclear weapon, that hope disappears," she added.

Source: Agence France-Presse

Islamic Countries Praise Human Rights in Iran

The Malaysia based NAM news agency has quoted the representative of Qatar at the 7th Human Rights Work Group as saying, "Iran keeps on improving implementation of national strategies aimed at improvement of observing the human rights standards."

"The representative of Malaysia at the gathering, too, said at the work group that as a developing country Iran is entangled with lots of complicated challenges, but Tehran very well comprehends the need for creating a balance in upgrading the people's cultural, social, economic and civil rights while fully observing the human rights," The news agency added.

The report also adds that the representative of Indonesia while praising Iran's efforts aimed at improving the observation of human rights asked for continuation of Tehran's cooperation with the United Nations in order to further improve such rights within the framework of the Islamic norms.

The representative of Pakistan, too, in the meeting asked Iran to share its experiences in the fields of public health and other fields with the other countries.

The representative of Libya in the meeting praised the conduct of the Iranian Judiciary Force in observation of neutrality and its abidance by the Islamic laws, such as granting the culprits the full right to defense.

The Algerian envoy said that Iran is the pioneer of democracy within the Islamic world, criticizing the west for not permitting Tehran to implement the rules of democracy in accordance with the needs of the day and the norms of the dear Islam.

Kuwaiti Envoy: Iran No Threat to Region

Some neighboring countries might have different views in this regard but generally speaking, all of them unanimously say that Iran does not pose a threat to any other country," Al-Zafiri said in a meeting with Iranian officials in the southern province of Bushehr.

Stressing that all the Persian Gulf littoral states are interested in Iran's security and development, he reiterated that all these countries believe in the Iranian people's right to attain their interests.

Al-Zafiri also underlined that his country is making efforts to expand the relations between Iran and other Persian Gulf littoral states.

Elsewhere, he referred to the bilateral and economic ties between the two countries, and said, "As regards the interactions between Iranian and Kuwaiti people, we hope that the volume of trade exchanges between the two countries will increase as well."

Al-Zafiri underlined his country's readiness to cooperate with Iran in industrial and trade fields.

More Fuel Swap Proposals for Iran

It was not clear how far the proposals referred to by Ali Akbar Salehi, the head of Iran's Atomic Energy organisation, went beyond a deal brokered last year by the United Nations nuclear watchdog which Tehran has yet to accept.

"After Iran's decision to internally produce 20 percent enriched uranium, we received some proposals from Russia, America and France and right now we are studying this issue along with other proposals from different countries," he was quoted as saying by the semi-official news agency ILNA.

"These countries' proposal will only stop Iran from enrichment when all our terms and conditions for swapping enriched uranium are observed," Salehi said.

"From now on the continuous production of 20 percent fuel is on the agenda and the first 5.3 uranium capsule for injection at the Natanz facility is finished," he added.

Mullen: Attack on Iran's Nuclear Facilities “Worries

"The outbreak of a conflict will be a big, big, big problem for all of us, and I worry a great deal about the unintended consequences of a strike," Admiral Mullen said.

Apart from saying that "it's pretty hard to be specific about" the issue, the top-ranking U.S. military official did not expand on his comments.

Mullen, who was speaking to journalists during a visit to Israel, went on to say however that U.S. President Barack Obama had been "very clear that from a policy standpoint, Iran cannot have a nuclear weapons."

"We haven't taken off any option from the table," the admiral said, using diplomatic language for keeping open the possibility of launching military strikes.

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was also in the region on Sunday trying to drum up support in the Persian Gulf for imposing tougher sanctions against Iran over its nuclear program.

Russia Commits to Deliver S-300 System

There is the signed contract that we must fulfill, but supplies have not started yet. This deal is not restricted by any international sanctions, because these are merely defensive weapons," Russian Security Council Deputy Secretary Vladimir Nazarov told the Interfax news agency on Sunday.

"Any of our actions must facilitate global and regional stability, respect for international law and international commitments, including under the Non-Proliferation Treaty, and that is another matter," he added.

The possible sale of Russian air defense hardware to the Islamic Republic is a major irritant for Israel and its close ally the United States. Both have pressed Moscow not to go ahead with a deal that may help protect Iran's nuclear facilities from threats.

"Russia received and continues to receive many requests and even demands to supply or not to supply weapons. Those countries that are addressing such calls to us should better look at their own deals with Georgia," Nazarov noted.

Obama Aide: Regime Change Possible in Iran

"We are not actively engineering regime change in the sense that we believe that the people of Iran will carve out their own destiny," National Security Advisor General (rtd) James Jones told the Fox News in an interview.

"We support pro-democracy. We know that, internally, that there's a very serious problem. We're about to add to that regime's difficulties by engineering, participating in, very tough sanctions which we support, not mild sanctions."

These are very tough sanctions. The combination of those things could well trigger regime change. It's possible," Jones said in response to a question.

"The combination of internal and external problems is certainly not going to make life easier for the government of Iran," he said.

U.S. Slaps New Sanctions on IRGC

The Treasury Department said it was freezing the assets in U.S. jurisdictions of Revolutionary Guard Gen. Rostam Qasemi and four subsidiaries of a previously penalized construction firm that he runs over their alleged involvement in producing and spreading weapons of mass destruction.

The sanctions made public Wednesday expand existing U.S. unilateral penalties against elements of the Guard Corps, or IRGC.

The step is in line with statements from administration officials that they want sanctions to target Iranian elites responsible for such activity and not the Iranian people in the hope of changing the government's behavior. However, it will be difficult to gauge their effect as it is not clear what holdings the targets may have in U.S. jurisdictions.

President: Iran Favors Establishment of a Nuclear-Free World

Further elaborating, he said, "The Iranian nation's share in (contribution to) world culture, sciences, and civilization is rarely matched with that of any other nation, which is why the Iranians would have never yielded to the humiliating hegemony of the west (during the past regime's life)."

He added, "It was quite natural then that they upraised against those conditions and as a result we turned from a totally satellite state into a fully independent country, and in other words, from a second rated country (yesterday) into an influential one today."

Ahmadinejad further stressed, “Today Iran and the Iranian nation’s prestige, sovereignty, and independence are incomparable with their status thirty one years ago and in terms of safeguarding the national interests, too, the nation is ruling over its resources and deciding for itself today.”

He said, “From the scientific point of the view, too, it is clear that today’s the status differs drastically with that of 30 years ago.

“A country that had no rank at all in the world then, is ranking from the first to the tenth, and is even among the top few in the world,” he added.

The president referred to the influential status of Iran in international developments today, arguing, “Iran’s status has upgraded to an extent that without harmonizing efforts with Tehran it is impossible either to regulate the international, or the Middle East affairs today.”

He added, “Those who were once after uprooting and annihilating Iran one day are today strongly in need of the Iranian nation’s presence and cannot have a presence in the region regardless of the Iranian nation(’s assistance).”

President Ahmadinejad said that the revolution created a strong sense of self confidence and might among the Iranian nation and this capability is of a cultural and humane nature.

“It is a might at the service of the well being, peace and brotherhood; (it is) a might at the service of the country’s scientific and cultural advancement; (it is) a might after making friends with the others and after peace making (in the world),” he said.

The president said that the ruling world order is totally under question, adding, “The conduct of those who have been chanting freedom and human rights slogans during the past sixty years, and have been in a way ruling over the world during the past 300 years is totally under question today and the world nations are seeking for an alternative (world order).”

Ahmadinejad emphasized that the Islamic Revolution belongs to the entire world nations, not to any certain political party, any group, or race, reiterating, “The Islamic Revolution is the (sound of the) silenced cries of the mankind that had been crashed under the wheels of hegemonic and colonialist powers and it is quite natural that the entire world nations feel close to and sympathetic towards this revolution.”

He said, “Although we have had numerous problems, the revolution is a lot more cheerios, more dynamic, and more powerful than 31 years ago today.”

In response to a question regarding the establishment of a nuclear-free zone in the region, he reiterated, “We basically favor the establishment of a nuclear-free world. We believe the nuclear weapons are inhumane and therefore, propose that not only the Middle East, but also the entire world would get rid of them.

“In addition to that, we believe that the nuclear weapons’ era is over today, since no one is capable of taking advantage of them anymore. We believe that the United States, too, is making a mistake by stockpiling the nuclear weapons. No matter of greater importance than the Iraq and Afghanistan (wars) would occur for the Americans. Did the nuclear weapons bear any fruit for them (in those countries)? Never! The nuclear weapons have lost their efficiency today, since the era of the human beings and cultures has begun.”

The president reiterated, “If anyone is opposed to the existence of nuclear weapons they must first destroy their own atomic bombs as proof for their truth telling. In our region there are rouge regimes that are illegitimate and they are armed with nuclear warheads, but are backed up by them, which is proof for the fact that they are not opposed to the existence of nuclear weapons, but opposed to the advancement of the Iranian nation.”

President Ahmadinejad said, “Of course although they tried all their best to halt our progress they could not do that and have they have faced defeat. We are not worried about the westerners’ efforts against us, since we are capable of defending ourselves and also able to dismantle their plots.”

Ahmadinejad reiterated, “Their opposing has become an incentive for the hard work and sever efforts of the Iranian nation, but if we had requested them to give us this technology they would not have delivered even a drop of it even at the price of our independence.

“He said, “Their opposing made us accelerate our efforts and that led to our advancement based on internal capabilities, for which maybe we should even thank them!”

Elsewhere in the interview President Ahmadinejad put under question mark the veto right of Britain, arguing, “Britain was among the beginners of the World War II; then how come after the war it was granted the veto right?”

He said that a country with a 200 year record of colonialism and a record of looting the wealth of the world nations that maintained its position as a main warmonger throughout the war should not have been granted the veto right.”

The president added, “If the Second World War occurred in Europe, and the Europeans are to be blamed for it, why then should the Palestinians and the Middle East nations have to pay fines for it?”

He added, “The Iranian nation’s arguments are clear for everyone. We feel sorry for the entire people who have got killed in the wars. We have never been the initiators of any wars as we hate wars, but if someone would on the pretext of being anti-war set the foundations for the occurrence of a new war, we would be opposed to him. In our region there has been insecurity for 60 years and the people of Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and lately Yemen, have been getting killed.”

Accusing the western intelligence organizations of sponsoring the international terrorism, he said, “The western intelligence services that claim to be (capable of) monitoring even

the breathing of the people, how can they not identify the passages of the terrorists then? Who trained these terrorists in Afghanistan and then dispatched them to Pakistan? Which countries' intelligence organizations were they?

“If terrorism is to be uprooted basically one day, many of them should be put to trials since that's the way for solving the problems basically. Terrorism is the result of expansionist mentalities and the fruit of the western espionage and intelligence organizations' work.”

Referring to the case of twin World Trade Center building in New York on 9/11th, he said, “The US government makes a claim in that respect and it does not permit an independent inspection team to survey the matter. On that pretext so far hundreds of thousands of people have got killed; they are still getting killed, and no one know till when this massacre is going to continue. They make a claim and expect the entire world nations to accept it as total truth without even questioning its authenticity.

In response to a question about Iran's internal status and the recent presidential elections, he reiterated, “Iran is a vast, free country with naturally various and differing tendencies among its people. The freest, most fair elections in the world, too, are held in Iran.

“Quite naturally, some people are opposed to the idea of the majority, whose dossier is definitely separate from those who breach the laws. In a large country some people, too, might be outlaws, in which case the judiciary must interfere and check the criminals' dossiers. Today, political and social stability abound in Iran and the country is quite mighty and independent, but Iran's opponents are interested in aggrandizing trivial matters, hallucinating and assuming that their dreams about Iran would come true. The Iranian nation has got used to their behavior during the past 30 years attaching no importance to their propagations. They wish for the weakening and the fall of the Iranian nation, right today, but by grace of God the thing that would be overthrown is oppression, aggressiveness, and hegemonic tendencies, and everyone knows who pursues such lines in the world today.”

The enemies and antagonists of the Iranian nation can propagate as much as they wish, but they had better know they would be hated among the world nations respectively and to the same extent.”

Regarding Afghanistan and the continuation of NATO's presence there, Ahmadinejad reiterated, “They wish to hide their defeats in Iraq, in Afghanistan, and in the entire region by raising so much hue and cry, but the reality of their defeat would be revealed in the long run.”

In response to a question on Iran-Russia relations, too, he said, “There are deep affectionate and historic ties between Tehran and Moscow and the two countries and nations are naturally neighbors and in need of living side by side of one another amicably. There are shared interests and threats for and against both, heeding which call for long term cooperation and shared planning.”

Saudi Arabia seeks “immediate resolution” over Iran

Saudi Arabia on Monday called for an “immediate resolution” to the standoff over Iran’s nuclear program rather than sanctions.

While Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal did not openly back Western calls for new sanctions against Tehran, he did not say Riyadh was opposed to such measures, reports the BBC.

“Sanctions are a long-term solution. They may work, we can't judge,” he said at a joint news conference in Riyadh with US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

“But we see the issue in the shorter term maybe because we are closer to the threat ... So we need an immediate resolution,” he added.

A Saudi foreign policy official on Tuesday stressed that Riyadh was not advocating military action, but rather a linkage with the Middle East peace process as a faster and more effective means to ease regional tensions, reports AFP.

Prince Saud also said China, a top importer of Saudi oil, did not need to be prodded by Riyadh to know what it ought to do about sanctions against Iran.

China “carries its own responsibilities” within the United Nations Security Council, Prince Saud said.

“And they need no suggestion from Saudi Arabia to do what they ought to do,” he added.

Clinton visited Saudi Arabia and Qatar in a bid to isolate Iran from its Arab neighbors and to gain support for tougher sanctions against the Islamic Republic.

US officials traveling with Clinton said they were “very pleased” following her lengthy talks with Saudi King Abdullah on Monday.

Turkey offers to host Iran nuclear fuel swap

Turkey’s Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Sunday that his country is willing to serve as the venue for an exchange of Iran’s low-enriched uranium for nuclear fuel rods from the West, in a bid to salvage a United Nations-brokered deal.

“The International Atomic Energy Agency has said Turkey could serve as the center for the exchange of uranium ... but there is not agreement until now,” Erdogan said at a press conference in the Qatari capital of Doha, according to AFP.

“If Turkey is chosen, it will do what it is asked to do,” he added.

Turkey, which has strengthened its ties with Iran in recent years, has offered to help solve the dispute between world powers and Tehran over its nuclear program.

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu travels to Tehran this week for talks that will include the nuclear fuel swap deal, reports Reuters.

Iran has so far rejected the draft deal, under which it would ship most of its low-enriched uranium abroad for conversion into nuclear fuel rods for a medical reactor in Tehran.

Iran said last week it has started the process of producing 20 percent enriched uranium, defying Western threats of new sanctions.

AEOI Studying New Fuel Swap Offer

Chief of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) on Monday said that following the decision to refine uranium to 20 percent inside the country, a joint proposal has been made to Tehran by Russia, France and the US for swapping fuel. "We are studying the proposal and other proposals by some other states. Several countries have contacted us for exchanging nuclear fuel," Ali Akbar Salehi told ILNA. He did not provide details. A similar proposal engineered by the IAEA late last year was rejected by Tehran on the premise that "there were too many conditions attached" to the deal by the western powers.

Iran made counterproposals to facilitate the agreement and in the process address "concerns" over its nuclear program. But the offer was turned down by the western governments who insisted that Tehran accept the deal as it is. As the stalemate continued, Iran started enriching uranium to 20 percent at its Natanz facility last week and under the supervision of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

The move came after President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad instructed the AEIO to refine uranium at a higher level to meet local medicinal demands. Salehi said that last Tuesday concurrent with production of 20 percent enriched uranium injection of uranium 5.3 also commenced at the Natanz facility near Isfahan.

Permanent Feature
"Enriching uranium to 20 percent is a permanent process so that we can produce the fuel needed by the Tehran research reactor. We have no problem in our decision and determination to produce the fuel at higher levels. From now on production on a regular basis of 20 percent enriched uranium is on the agenda," he was quoted as saying. He referred to the proposal by some members of Group 5+1 for swapping 20% enriched uranium for Iran's 3.5 percent low enriched uranium (LEU). The so-called G5+1 includes the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (US, Russia, China, France and Britain) plus Germany. The six powers have been involved unsuccessfully for several years in talks regarding a peaceful solution to Iran's nuclear issue.

The West claims Tehran is secretly developing a nuclear weapon. Iran denies the charge and has said its nuclear program is only for producing electricity

ECO Meeting in Turkey

Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Mansour Borqei attended the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) Regional Planning Council meeting in Turkey on Monday. According to Mehr News Agency, Borqei, who serves as deputy foreign minister for economic affairs, will discuss Iran's views on economic topics during the three-day meeting in Antalya. ECO is an intergovernmental regional organization established in 1985 by Iran, Pakistan and Turkey for the purpose of promoting economic, technical and cultural cooperation among the member states. The organizations' members include Islamic State of Afghanistan, Azerbaijan Republic, Islamic Republic of Iran, Republic of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Republic of Tajikistan, Republic of Turkey, Turkmenistan and Republic of Uzbekistan

Russian Military Chief Warns U.S. Against Striking Iran

"The consequences, I believe, would be dreadful for Iran, as well as Russia, the entire Asia—Pacific community," said Gen. Nikolai Makarov, chief of Russia's General Staff.

The statement came as world powers are mounting pressure on Tehran to accept a UN-drafted compromise to enrich uranium for Iran's research reactor abroad or face a new set of tougher sanctions.

The White House repeatedly said it did not rule out any options, including a military operation, in dealing with Iran's nuclear aspirations.

Gen. Makarov suggested Washington might turn its military attention on Iran once its operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have been completed.

Russia, which has strong business ties with Iran and was earlier reluctant to back new sanctions, recently joined Western calls on Tehran for curbing its nuclear ambitions which are feared to be geared towards weapons production.

Iran, the world's fifth largest oil exporter, insists its nuclear program is for civil electricity purposes only.

Occupying Forces Send Afghan Crack Only to Iran

During the latest visit to neighboring countries, we found no signs of crack use. Crack is produced in Afghanistan under the guidance of western countries and sent to Iran," Commander of the drug squad General Hossein-Abadi told IRNA.

Crack is a purified and potent form of cocaine that is smoked rather than snorted. The freebase narcotic is considered a highly addictive drug. But what is known as Crack in

Iran is the compact heroine that is often compounded with psychedelic drugs, potent acids, Ammoniac, stimulant drugs (amphetamine) and etc.

Hossein-Abadi said Europe is the main producer of the basic ingredients of crack and other narcotics extracted from heroin.

"Some 13,000 tonnes of acetic anhydride and hydrochloric acid, which are the main ingredients for producing crack, are brought to Afghanistan from Europe. The production of crack will cease if the acids are not provided," he said.

"Heroin appears to constitute 80 percent of the drugs seized by the Iranian police. It seems that western countries have direct influence in drug trafficking," Hossein-Abadi noted.

"All western countries worry about is business. According to UN statistics, one kilogram of heroin that is sold for \$2,180 in Afghanistan, costs \$80,000 in London," he said.

"Crack has become popular because it has very strong psychological addictive properties. Crack gives an instant high and then the user wants more," the commander of the drug squad said.

"It carries a lot of health risks, particularly with its association to violent crime. To feed their addiction, users spend hundreds of dollars a day and they get that money from burglary, robbery and shoplifting," Hossein-Abadi finalized.

ETANYAHU: Israel Not Planning War With Iran

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said Tuesday he believes Israel or its allies are considering a military strike against his country, which has thus far failed to prove that its nuclear program is peaceful.

"We are not planning any wars," Netanyahu said, speaking in Moscow after meetings urging Russian officials to approve tougher sanctions against Iran.

In Tehran, Ahmadinejad said Israel is "seeking to start a war next spring or summer, although their decision is not final yet," without saying where he got that information.

Netanyahu dismissed that talk as "manipulations."

"I wouldn't be surprised if the things we are hearing are a result of Iran's feeling there is an increase in talks about sanctions," he said.

Israel has been at the forefront of calling for crippling sanctions against Iran because of its nuclear program.

Israel, like the U.S., believes Iran's program is aimed at developing a nuclear bomb, which Iran denies. While Israel says it hopes diplomacy will resolve the nuclear standoff, it has not ruled out military action and Iran has frequently mentioned it could suffer a military strike from Israel or its allies.

Speaking to reporters after meeting with Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, Netanyahu denied this, saying the international community was getting closer in agreement over slapping tough sanctions on Iran, which was making the Islamic regime nervous.

Iran already has defied three sets of U.N. sanctions. While Russia has generally resisted new sanctions, it has shown increasing frustration over the past week as Iran proceeds with uranium enrichment despite growing international pressure.

China, which relies on Iran for energy supplies, is the only other major power resisting further sanctions.

U.S. General Accuses Iraqi Politicians of Links to Iran

General Ray Odierno said Ali al-Allami and Ahmed Chalabi "clearly are influenced by Iran."

"We have direct intelligence that tells us that," the commander told an audience at the Institute for the Study of War in Washington.

Allami heads a committee responsible for ensuring that individuals with links to executed dictator Saddam Hussein's Baath party are barred from standing in next month's elections in Iraq.

Chalabi also sits on the committee and has fallen out of favor with Washington after intelligence he provided to back the U.S. case for the Iraq war turned out to be flawed.

The dispute over who can stand in the March 7 general election has raised tensions in Iraq and alarmed Washington, which views the polls as a crucial precursor to a complete military withdrawal by the end of 2011.

Odierno said Allami and Chalabi have had several meetings in Iran with a close aide to the commander of the Quds force, the covert operations arm of Iran's powerful Revolutionary Guards.

"And we believe they're absolutely involved in influencing the outcome of the election. And it's concerning that they've been able to do that over time," he said, apparently referring to the Tehran regime.

France, Italy Back U.S. Push for Sanctions

Bernard Kouchner made his familiar call for sanctions after a meeting with his Italian counterpart Franco Frattini in Paris on Tuesday.

The French minister said that Tehran could not avoid sanctions for long, because of what he called its failure to engage in meaningful negotiations.

"We will work, and are working in New York in the Security Council," he told the reporters.

Frattini also backed Kouchner's sanction rhetoric suggesting that such a measure would be effective in preventing others from using force against Tehran.

The two European foreign ministers made the remarks as US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton ended a Middle East visit, which focused on drumming Arab support against Tehran's nuclear program.

The U.S. and its allies accuse Tehran of following a military agenda under its civilian nuclear program, despite contrary announcements made by the UN nuclear watchdog, the Pentagon's top intelligence official and the United States' leading spy agencies.

Iran Seeks Arrest of Those Involved in Pune Blast

In a statement issued in New Delhi, the Iran embassy said it "condemns in the strongest possible words such terrorist acts and calls upon the government of India to, while ensuring the security of the Iranian nationals, take serious steps to identify and arrest those involved in the blast."

It said it was "offering condolence and sympathy to the family members of the victims of the terrorist act in which one Iranian student was killed and five others were injured."

In the first major attack after 26/11, terror struck Pune on Saturday as a powerful bomb ripped apart at a popular bakery-cum-cafe near the Chabad House, killing ten people, including two foreigners and injuring 57 others.

KENT: Military Action Against Iran Still on Table

"Prime Minister (Stephen) Harper has made it quite clear for some time now and has regularly stated that an attack on Israel would be considered an attack on Canada," said Kent, minister of state for foreign affairs (Americas).

Kent made the comments in an interview with the news site Shalom Life, based in Greater Toronto.

Discussing the nuclear ambitions of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Kent said Ottawa favors further sanctions against Iran but only in "concert with other countries."

"It may soon be time to intensify the sanctions and to broaden those sanctions into other areas ... which we hope would discourage Iran from its current course."

"I think the realization that it's a dangerous situation that has been there for some time. It's a matter of timing and it's a matter of how long we can wait without taking more serious pre-emptive action."

He said military action, while a long shot, is still on the table.

New Conscription Regulations for Iranian Expatriates

All Iranians of enlistment age who have left for abroad before March 2004, and have been living outside Iran for at least two years, can enter the country and stay here for a quarterly visit, the press release further added. The new legislation is valid and enforceable till March 2012.

According to the release, those subject to the service obligation can also be issued an exemption card at the cash payment of 50 million rials (almost \$5,000).

The applicants in need of further information must log into the websites www.police.ir or www.iranianshouse.ir

Russia "Fixing" Technical Issues Delaying S-300 Deliveries

A few technical faults have been detected in the radio-frequency band [command and control system]. We are currently fixing them," first deputy director of the Federal Service for Military and Technical Cooperation Alexander Fomin said.

Russia signed a contract with Iran on the supply of at least five S-300 air defense systems to Tehran in December 2005. However, Moscow has not so far honored the contract, which many experts say is due to pressure from Washington and Tel Aviv.

Both the United States and Israel have not ruled out military action if diplomacy fails to resolve the dispute over Iran's nuclear program and have expressed concern over S-300 deliveries, which would significantly strengthen Iran's air defenses.

Matters came to a head last week after Iran announced it had developed its own air defense system comparable to and even more sophisticated than the Russian S-300 system.

Iranian Ambassador to Russia Seyyed Mahmoud-Reza Sajjadi earlier said the S-300 contract had been plagued by technical problems.

Russian defense industry officials have repeatedly said that Russia is interested in fulfilling the contract, which is worth hundreds of millions of dollars, but the future of the contract would largely depend on the current situation in international affairs and the Kremlin's position.

Major Powers Deny New Nuclear Offer for Iran

There is no new proposal on the table," insisted White House spokesman Mike Hammer after the head of Iran's atomic energy organization, Ali Akbar Salehi, said a new offer had been levied by the major powers beyond the previous offer for Tehran to ship out low enriched uranium and get fuel from France and Russia.

MPs Call for Severance of Ties with Britain

Boroujerdi made the remarks in a letter to British Envoy to Tehran Simon Lawrence Gass who had urged him to withdraw a bill drafted by Boroujerdi's commission on cutting relations with Britain.

"...due to the hostile positions of your country against the Islamic Republic of Iran, a majority of the representatives of the great Iranian nation underline the necessity for lowering and even cutting the relations of the two countries and have called for a reaction to the British government's measures against the Iranian nation," he said in his letter.

Boroujerdi advised the British ambassador to demand the British government to change its policies towards Iran and correct its previous mistakes by adopting a regional approach coupled with understanding the realities.

"You should know that the policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is to increasingly develop relations with the countries which regulate their policies on the basis of the known international principles, mutual respect and interests and non-intervention in the other countries' domestic affairs," he added.

Following Britain's support for a group of wild demonstrators who disrespected Islamic sanctities and damaged private and public amenities and properties on December 27, members of the Iranian parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Commission drafted the bill of a law requiring the country's Foreign Ministry to cut relations with Britain.

The British government's blatant stance and repeated remarks in support of the recent unrests inside Iran along with London's espionage operations and financial and media support for the opposition groups are among the reasons mentioned in the bill for cutting ties with Britain.

SUPREME LEADER: Iran Has No Belief in A-Bombs

“We have said times and again that our religious beliefs and fundamentals consider nuclear weapons as a symbol of annihilation of generations, thus forbidding them. Accordingly we do not have the least belief in gaining nuclear arms,” said Ayatollah Khamenei in an address to ceremonies, marking launching of `Jamaran` destroyer into the southern Bandar-Abbas waters.

The Supreme Leader said the claims of the U.S. President Barack Obama and several other U.S. officials over recent days are all signs of their anger and mishap over Iranian nation.

“The threadbare and vain claims that nuclear arms are being made in Iran indicate that enemies of the nation have resorted to repetition even in the field of propaganda out of extreme helplessness. In response to such vain claims, the Islamic Republic of Iran will not fall into emotions because we have repeatedly said that our religious ideas and beliefs consider such weapons, which are the symbols of mankind degeneration, forbidden and "Haram" (religiously prohibited). Due to the same reason, we do not have the least belief in nuclear arms and bombs and do not go after them.”

The Supreme Leader made the remarks here yesterday after launching of `Jamaran` destroyer into Bandar-Abbas waters in the Persian Gulf.

Ayatollah Khamenei said there will be times more valuable and magnificent works in the field of navy construction in Iran in the future. The Supreme Leader noted, “Some causes might initially seem to be ambitious but under high endeavors, overshadowed by faith and trust, any seemingly impossible goal will be possible. By the same token, definitely future works in the field of navy construction will prove to be more giant and valuable.”

The Supreme Leader said Islam and Islamic Republic will not allow degradation of Iran and Iranians’ potentialities, dignity and fame worldwide.

The Supreme Leader recalled hundreds of years of navy industry background in Iran and said domination of the corrupt and despotic rulers over the country over the past centuries have made the country weak in the field.

Hailing high public turnout in the Bahman 22 (February 11) rallies, Ayatollah Khamenei said that on such an unforgettable day, tens of millions of people in chorus chanted their hatred of the arrogant powers, insisting on their Islamic faith and dignity. “Such a beautiful and everlasting fact had made the hegemonic powers, especially the U.S., bewildered, disappointed and angry.”

Jamaran which was launched yesterday, is a multi-mission destroyer and can carry 120-140 personnel on board and is armed with a variety of anti-ship and surface-to-air missiles.

It has a top speed of up to 30 knots and has a helipad.

The vessel has also been equipped with torpedoes and modern naval cannons. The destroyer's launch marks a major technological leap for Iran's naval industries.

More ships in its class are under construction.

Iran Urged to Reduce Dependence On Oil For Growth, Revenue

"Looking forward, the authorities' main macroeconomic challenges are to support non-oil GDP growth, further reduce inflation, and lessen Iran's fiscal dependency on oil by expanding domestic sources of revenue," the IMF said in its annual Article IV assessment of Iran's economy.

A reform package passed by Parliament in December should improve Iran's fiscal and external positions, boost investment in the energy sector and support economic growth, the fund said.

The IMF's executive board "stressed that the success of the planned energy price reform will depend importantly on the effective and timely implementation of a well-targeted mechanism of cash transfers to the poor as well as the transition to using energy efficient technologies," according to the statement.

Iran's economy is estimated to have slowed to about 2.3% in fiscal year 2008-2009 from 6.7% the previous year amid declining oil production and slower growth in the non-oil sector, the IMF said.

The rial is considered broadly in line with fundamentals, but the board said that given volatile oil prices, "greater exchange rate flexibility would help adjust the external current account and preserve a strong international reserves position."

Meanwhile the IMF in its report said Iran, long accused by the West of funding terrorism, has asked the International Monetary Fund for technical assistance in drafting a law to combat terrorism financing.

In an annual assessment of Iran's economy, the Washington-based global financial institution "noted progress in establishing a more comprehensive" framework in Iran for tackling terrorism financing and money laundering.

In the review the IMF urged Iran to strengthen those efforts.

"The authorities have requested additional technical assistance with the drafting of a law on combating the financing of terrorism and to bring Iran's AML/CFT (Anti-Money Laundering/Combating the Financing of Terrorism) more in line with international standards," the IMF said.

Earlier on Thursday, the international body fighting money laundering and terrorist financing put Iran on its blacklist of countries that pose risks to the international financial system.

The Financial Action Task Force said Iran had been put on the list due to the ongoing and substantial money laundering and terrorist financing risk.

"The FATF remains particularly concerned about Iran's failure to address the risk of terrorist financing and the serious threat this poses to the integrity of the international financial system," the FATF said in a statement.

The IMF'S technical assistance is likely to be legal in nature and would probably include training within ministries that have regulatory responsibilities.

IMF member countries, especially the United States, have pressed the institution since 2000 to expand its work on fighting money laundering. But since the Sept. 11, 2001 terror attacks, the IMF has expanded that work to include combating the financing of terrorism.

SOLTANIEH: IAEA Chief Says Iran Nuclear Activities Are Peaceful

Soltanieh said the IAEA Director General had in his new report admitted to peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear activities and non-diversion of nuclear substances and activities towards military purposes.

He said that in fact, the IAEA Chief laid seal of approval to all the reports released six years ago on peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear activities.

The IAEA Chief Yukiya Amano released a 10-page report on Thursday regarding inspections to Iran's nuclear activities under the IAEA supervision.

The report shows Iran's continued cooperation with the IAEA within framework of its commitments.

IAEA Report on Iran Raises Concern in U.S.

The report continues "to demonstrate the failure of the Iranian government to live up to its international obligations," US President Barack Obama's spokesman said on Thursday.

The report is the first one under new International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Chief Amano who has reportedly wants to see his job as "just the facts," and to pursue a more technical approach than former IAEA Director General Mohamed El Baradei.

"The president has on a number of occasions talked about engagement, talked about the benefits of living up to those international obligations," White House Spokesman Robert Gibbs told reporters.

"We always said that if Iran failed to live up to those international obligations that there would be consequences," he added.

The report once again verified the non-diversion of declared nuclear material in Iran.

"The information available to the agency is extensive... broadly consistent and credible in terms of the technical detail, the time frame in which the activities were conducted and the people, and organizations involved," the Vienna-based IAEA said in the report.

However, the a 10-page report called on Iran to further discuss and cooperate on alleged issues.

"Iran has not provided the necessary cooperation to permit the agency to confirm that all nuclear material in Iran is in peaceful activities," it added.

"Altogether this raises concerns about the possible existence in Iran of past or current undisclosed activities related to the development of a nuclear payload for a missile," Amano said.

This is while the UN nuclear watchdog has carried out the highest number of inspections in its history on Iran's nuclear energy program and has also found nothing to indicate that the program has diverted toward weaponization.

In a reaction to Amano's report, Iran's IAEA ambassador Ali Asghar Soltanieh said on Thursday the agency's chief confirmed the fact that the country's nuclear program is peaceful in nature.

"In fact Amano's report once more confirmed all previous reports over the past six years which showed that Iran's nuclear program is peaceful," Soltanieh said.

Ankara Supports Iran's Peaceful Nuclear Program

Ankara, Mohammad Ali Shahin was hosting the delegation led by Education Minister Hamid-Reza Hajibaba'ie, inclusive of Foreign Ministry officials, who are in Turkey on an invitation extended by Turkey's Education Minister Ms. Nemat Chubukchu.

The Turkish Parliament speaker, during the meeting with Hajibaba'ie, described the two countries' relations, particularly during the recent years, as satisfactory, arguing, "Turkey-Iran parliamentary relations, too, grew rapidly during this period."

Shahin also expressed satisfaction over bilateral regional cooperation, arguing, "Taking peaceful advantage of the nuclear energy is the natural right of any country and Turkey has very clear stands on the matter."

He emphasized, "Iran's nuclear dispute with the west needs to be settled resorting to peaceful measures and Turkey would do anything necessary in that respect."

Shahin reiterated, “Ahmad Davoud Uglu’s Tuesday visit of Iran was aimed at securing the same objective.”

He said, “So long as you (the Islamic Republic of Iran’s officials) pursue your righteous policies in your nuclear program, we (the Turkish officials) would continue our support for you.”

Hajibaba’ie, too, during the meeting conveyed the warm respects of Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani to his Turkish counterpart Shahin and said, “Mr. Larijani is longing for receiving you in Tehran.”

Pointing out that the head of the Iranian Parliament’s National Security Commission Ala’eddin Boroujerdi and the members of the Iran-Turkey Parliamentary Friendship Group, too, are planning to visit Turkey, he said, “After the Turkish Parliament Speaker’s visit of Iran we would be after finalizing the dates for the Iranian parliamentary groups’ visits of Turkey.”

The education minister referring to the educational cooperation protocol signed on Tuesday between Iran and Turkey, said, “We have had fruitful and constructive meetings during this visit with Turkish officials.”

Hajibaba’ie earlier on Wednesday also met and conferred with Turkey’s Minister of Culture and Tourism, that country’s Deputy Prime Minister, and the Managing Director of Turkey’s Religious Affairs Organization.

The minister is scheduled to visit Ankara’s Bahman 22nd Educational Center on Thursday and then to head for Istanbul, from where he would depart for Iran.

Economic Front

China Enhances Commercial Ties With Tehran

China has overtaken the European Union to become Iran’s largest trading partner, according to a new analysis of the commercial ties between the two countries. The growing business links between Beijing and Tehran underline China’s reluctance to agree to any further economic sanctions on Iran, Financial Times reported. Official figures say the EU remains Tehran’s largest commercial partner, with trade totaling \$35 billion in 2008, compared with \$29 billion with China. But this number disguises the fact that much of Iran’s trade with UAE consists of goods channeled to or from China.

Majid Reza Hariri, deputy head of the Iran-China Chamber of Commerce, said transshipments to China accounted for more than half of Tehran's \$15 billion trade with the UAE.

When this is taken into account, China's trade with Iran totals at least \$36.5 billion, which could be more than with the entire EU. No definite conclusion is possible because it is unclear how much of Iran's trade with Europe is channeled via the UAE. Iran imports consumer goods and machinery from China and exports oil, gas and petrochemicals. Today, China depends on Iran for 11 percent of its energy needs, according to the chamber.

Land Rover Seeks to Tap Iranian Market

Land Rover is in talks with Iranian authorities to begin sales in the Islamic Republic, as it actively seeks entry into the largely untapped Iranian market. The firm, which was sold by US giant Ford to India's Tata Motors in 2008, is seeking official approval from the Iranian authorities. "We're currently studying the opportunity in Iran, which as you know is a country with very significant oil wealth, but it also has a very significant population," Robin Colgan, managing director of Jaguar Land Rover in the MENA region, told Arabian Business. Colgan did not reveal a timeline for the firm's entry into the Islamic Republic. "The complication with Iran is that they have very stringent homologation (official approval) requirements that are very specific to that country," Colgan stated. "They have extremely strict rules on fuel economy, because while there are significant oil reserves there, there are limits to their refining capacity. "So there's quite a long process of homologation and testing that's actually very well controlled and processed and that's work that is in process for us just now," the Land Rover executive added. Colgan indicated that while all of the PGCC markets are wealthy, the smaller populations resulted in smaller growth opportunities. The Jaguar Land Rover executive added that in some local PGCC markets, the Range Rover--one of the firm's top brands--has a penetration by some measures of 30-45 percent of the marketplace. Iran has a burgeoning local automotive market, although the majority of cars are produced locally, rather than imported. Atieh Bahar Consulting Company confirmed in 2008 that only six foreign firms had secured licenses to import cars into the country. These companies were Mercedes Benz, Toyota, BMW, Hyundai, Lexus and Mitsubishi. Last week, Land Rover signed an agreement with the Sardar Group, the largest privately-owned automotive group in Iraq, as the exclusive importer to represent the Land Rover brand--marking Land Rover's first official entry in the region. As part of the deal, Sardar Group has invested into a new state-of-the-art facility for Land Rover vehicles. A 2,400-sqm showroom and 1,700-sqm after-sales center will be built in the city of Irbil.

Iran begins drilling oil well in Caspian Sea

State TV reports that Iran has began drilling its first exploratory oil well in the Caspian Sea.

The Sunday report quotes head of Iran's North Drilling Company Hedayatollah Khademi as saying the well is one of the three planned to gauge the amount of recoverable oil available in Iran's territorial waters of the sea.

Khademi said the drilling began last week and is taking place at 1,550 meters under the seabed.

The move is the latest Iranian push to take a bigger stake of the natural resources of the sea, which is shared by Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Russia and Turkmenistan.

In 2009 Iran inaugurated its first offshore oil platform in the Caspian.

Over \$4b to back domestic production

The facilities have been given to 904 manufacturing units mainly in weaving and leather, electronics, mining, metal and non-metal industries, MOJ news agency reported.

Based on a cabinet's approval which was ratified in mid-June 2009, \$5 billion should be allocated to help expand domestic industries.

The Iranian administration has previously approved the allocation of \$3 billion to provide non-governmental producers (including the private and the cooperative sectors) with their required capital to import raw materials and machinery.

According to the Constitution, the economy of Iran consists of three sectors: state, cooperative, and private. The state sector is to include all large-scale industries, foreign trade, major minerals, banking, insurance, radio and television, aviation and transportation.

The cooperative sector includes cooperative companies and enterprises concerned with production and distribution, in urban and rural areas, in accordance with Islamic criteria.

The private sector consists of those activities concerned with construction, agriculture, animal husbandry, industry, trade, and services that supplement the economic activities of the state and cooperative sectors

Iran-Khodro Registers New Record in Car Production

The company produced 600,460 units of different types of passenger cars and pickups since the beginning of the current Iranian year (starts March 21, 2009) to February 13, 2010, while it had produced 600,006 units last year," IKCO Deputy CEO Javad Dehnadi said.

"We achieved the new record eleven days earlier than the last year's record breaking," he stated, adding that IKCO has targeted the production of 680 thousand cars for the current year.

Dehnadi reiterated that 93,920 different types of Samand, 150,929 units of Peugeot 405, 93,253 units of Peugeot Pars, 101,285 different types of Peugeot 206, 47,070 units of Peugeot Roa, 103,692 Bardo pickups, 6,552 units of Tondar 90 and 3,616 units of Grand Vitara as well as 143 units of other vehicles have been produced in IKCO so far.

Earlier this month, IKCO had announced that it has increased its production rate by 16% since the beginning of the current Iranian year (March 20,2009).

Iran's state-owned Iran-Khodro is the largest carmaker in the Middle East, Central Asia and North Africa, with an annual production of more than one million vehicles of various models, including cars, trucks, minibuses and buses

Belarus, Iran to Set up Joint Holding Company

The holding company is expected to comprise the companies that will handle the bilateral trade and also a joint Belarusian-Iranian transport company. "Tapping into the potential of the North-South international transport corridor will benefit the two states. This will be the best scenario of transportation between Hindustan and Europe," the Ambassador said.

Today BAMAP (Association of International Road Carriers), including 1,100 private transport companies, informed Ivan Mankevich, deputy director general of BAMAP. Many of them are interested in setting up joint Belarusian-Iranian transport companies. "This would make the life of international road carriers much easier," he added.

In 2009 Belarus-Iran trade reached \$93.8 million. Belarus' major export items to Iran were synthetic fibers, metal products, trucks, tractors, potash fertilizers and others. Belarus imported from Iran car component parts and fruits. In 2009, Iranian capital investment in Belarus' construction industry reached \$3.9 million.

Iran Likely to Halve Economic Ties with Britain

The economic relations between Iran and Britain stood at over a billion dollars and the government has been proposed to decrease its economic ties with Britain to \$500mln," member of the parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy commission Mohammad Karim Abedi told FNA.

Abedi also announced that Iran has lowered its diplomatic and political ties with Britain and has expelled a number of experts from the British embassy in Tehran.

Following Britain's support for a group of wild demonstrators who disrespected Islamic sanctities and damaged private and public amenities and properties on December 27, members of the Iranian parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Commission drafted the bill of a law requiring the country's Foreign Ministry to cut relations with Britain

Pakistan-Iran Gas Pipeline Agreement Delayed

Sources from the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Resources told DawnNews on Tuesday that both sides had planned to sign off the agreement before Feb 15 but now due to some formalities and technical aspects, it has been delayed.

The sources added that Iran wants to ship some of the gas from the offshore South Pars complex.

According to the sources, another reason for the delay was that Pakistani government had been unable to allocate proper financing for this project and the U.S. was not willing to give financial assistance in this regard.

Initially proposed as an offshore pipeline through Pakistan's exclusive economic zone, the current plan under discussion is an overland route from the South Pars fields in southern Iran.

In the first phase, the pipeline would supply 60 million cubic meter of gas per day to Pakistan

Iran to Present Tourism Attractions in Milan

"Superior promotional items as well as catalogues featuring Iranian tourism capacities, specially those registered by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) will be presented in Italian language at the two-day event," Head of the Headquarters for Publicity and Tourism Exhibitions Mohammad Hossein Barzin said.

In order to introduce the Iranian culture, the country's entertaining customs and traditions will be featured in a two-day exhibition.

Describing the International Milan BIT-Tourism Fair as a chance for attending the European tourism market, Barzin said the fair is one of the successful tourism markets with a history of 30 years which is attended by many mega tours and tourism experts from around the world.

Iran to Establish Trade Center in Iraq

The secretary general of the Iran cooperative chamber said on Wednesday that the center aims to expand Iran foreign trade and non-oil export.

Hossein Rahmani said the second Iran trade center will be established in Africa or Central Asia in a near future.

“The share of cooperative sector in the nationwide economy will increase to 25 percent from the current level of five percent by 2014,” he said.

Rahmani said some 150 cooperative centers, with 25 million members, are active across the country.

Tehran-Minsk Development Strategy Discussed

On the sidelines of the meeting, Mehrabian told reporters that the two countries have good capacities in the field of industry and developing ties would be beneficial for both Iran and Belarus.

He said that experts of the two countries are considering ways to develop cooperation in different fields.

Iran has commissioned several factories in Belarus and by developing the second phase of car manufacturing plant in Belarus, the production capacity of Iranian automobile there will increase another 25 thousand units.

According to an agreement signed last year, Iran requested to buy mining machinery and equipment and today the first consignment of the goods is ready to be shipped to Iran, Mehrabian said.

Referring to the necessity of expansion of ties with other countries, Mehrabian said that Iran wants to expand economic cooperation with all countries of the world, except the Zionist regime, and in the first 10 months of the current Iranian year, Iran exported goods and merchandise to over 160 countries.

First Drilling for Oil in Caspian Sea Starts

"The drilling of the first oil well is taking place at the dept of 1,550 metres in Iran's territorial waters of the Caspian Sea," a senior oil official Hedayatollah Khademi, who heads the state owned Iran's North Drilling Company, was quoted by IRNA as saying.

State television also reported the move was the first from the three planned drillings to estimate the amount of recoverable oil available in Caspian Sea waters.

Iran is the world's fifth-largest crude exporter, with most of its existing reserves located in its southeast and offshore in the Persian Gulf.

Head of the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) Seifollah Jashnsaz said early in February that the country's oil and gas sector needed to attract more foreign investment.

Stable Crop Production On Agenda

Iran seeks stable crop production despite the fact that agriculture is largely dependent on rain, an official of Agriculture Jihad Ministry said. Deputy Agriculture Jihad Minister Mohammad Reza Jahansouz said in a press conference that Iran wants to improve its strategic crops production in the near future. "We want stability in production of crops with regard to Iran's volatile climatic conditions," Mehr News Agency quoted him as saying. He also said over the last 31 years the population has increased from 36 million to 72 million and the annual agricultural output has increased from 20 million to more than 100 million tons. Jahansouz said one can hardly find a country like Iran in the world which has been able to increase crops up to five times in such a tough period of time. The Agriculture Jihad Ministry is also taking steps toward an efficient use of water in agriculture, the official noted. Jahansouz said although precipitation in Iran is around one third of the world average, vaporization is three times more than international levels; so the country has no choice but to increase efficiency in water use. He further stated that energy saving and production of healthy foods by observing standards in using fertilizers and chemicals is another priority for the ministry. "Iran has great potentials to reach self-sufficiency in production--and even export--of citrus fruits," he said, adding that the ministry has started cultivating bananas on 10,000 hectares of land. Currently, as much as 2.7 million hectares are under cultivation of fruits, producing about 16 million tons of crops, including 2.4 million tons of orange. Iran ranks the first in production of fruits in the Middle East and eighth in the world. The country has also taken steps to reach self-sufficiency in production of rice and cooking oil as anticipated in the Fifth Economic Development Plan (2010-15). According to the ministry officials, about 30,000 hectares of land are also under cultivation for medicinal herb which will expand in the future. Iran has also started production of crops through tissue culture technology. Akbarlouei, a ministry official, told reporters that Iran is the only country in the world that has started the production of 10 kinds of dates through tissue culture with the cooperation of the private sector. The country has also started production of potato seeds through mini-tuber method and sugar beet seeds through mono-germ method. As mentioned earlier, roughly one-third of Iran's total surface area is suited for farmland, but because of poor soil and lack of adequate water distribution in many areas, most of the area is not under cultivation. Only 12 percent of the total land area is under cultivation (arable land, orchards and vineyards) but less than one-third of the cultivated

area is irrigated; the rest is devoted to dry farming. Some 92 percent of agro products depend on water. The western and northwestern portions of the country have the most fertile soils. Iran's food security index stands at around 96 percent. One third of the total land area (35 percent) is used for grazing and small fodder production. Most of the grazing is done on mostly semi-dry rangeland in mountain areas and on areas surrounding the large deserts of central Iran. The wide range of temperature fluctuation in different parts of the country and the multiplicity of climatic zones make it possible to cultivate a diverse variety of crops, including cereals (wheat, barley, rice and maize), fruits (dates, figs, pomegranates, melons and grapes), vegetables, cotton, sugar beets and sugarcane, pistachios (world's largest producer with 40 percent of the world's output in 2005), nuts, olives, spices, saffron (world's largest producer with 81 percent of the world's total output), raisin (world's third largest producer and second largest exporter), tea, tobacco, berry (world's largest producer) and medicinal herbs. More than 2,000 plant species are grown in Iran; only 100 of which are being used in pharmaceutical industries. The land covered by Iran's natural flora is four times compared to that of Europe

Inflation Above 12%

Central Bank of Iran (CBI) announced an inflation rate of 13.5 up to the closing days of November and the number has reduced to 12.2 in January 2010. CBI Governor Mahmoud Bahmani asserted that the number would fall in late February, IRIB reported. Bahmani said reducing inflation to below 10 percent is a high priority for CBI this year, adding that reorganization of financial institutions and funds played an important role in the reduction. Iran's inflation rate has fallen over the last 10 months, reaching 12.2 percent in the Iranian month of Dey, which ended January 22. "A plan to lessen the inflation rate had been put on the government's agenda at the beginning of the year (March 21, 2009)," Economy Minister Shamseddin Hosseini told reporters after a Cabinet session on Wednesday. He said this success has been achieved in light of financial discipline and monetary policies, adding that the plan to reduce the inflation rate will be continued next year by CBI until it reaches a single digit. However, despite major efforts by the central bank, inflation has consistently remained at double-digit levels, and the balance of the Oil Stabilization Fund reduced during the period of exceptionally high oil prices. The result is boom and bust cycles in economic performance which increase the uncertainty faced by private firms, thus further impeding private investment and job creation

Great potential to boost Pak-Iran economic ties: Pak Minister

There is a great potential to boost Pak-Iran economic ties and both the countries could take advantage of their expertise in many sectors, Pakistani Minister for Finance Shaukat Tarin has said.

Talking to IRNA at the reception at Iranian embassy to mark the 31st anniversary of Islamic Revolution's victory, the minister said that political relationship between Iran and Pakistan is much stronger than the economic ties.

“I think that the two-way trade is no more than 6 to 7 billion dollars and we can easily raise it to 10 billion dollars in next five years”, he added.

Shaukat Tarin said that he has been talking with his Iranian counterpart to find ways to enhance bilateral economic relations.

“I think the major area in which we can cooperate with Iran is the Iran–Pakistan gas pipeline project”, the minister viewed.

Shaukat Tarin opined that Pakistan should get more and more gas from Iran.

“After the completion of the gas pipeline project we should also think about the electricity which Iran is offering us”, he said

The finance minister opined that Pakistan could take advantage of Iran’s experience in the field of mining. “I think we have lots of reserves and Iran can help us”, he believed.

Shaukat Tarin was of the view that Iran can also use the expertise of Pakistan mostly in textile sector. “We can export textiles to Iran and leather goods along with many other

things”,

he

said.

The finance minister stressed the need to enhance Pak-Iran cooperation in the banking sector.

“We have good banking sector on services side and telecom sector and I think we can help one another”, he suggested.

Azerbaijan to build new gas export pipeline to Iran

“Presently, work on a new Sangachal-Azadkend-Astara pipeline is underway,” he said. “It is expected that construction of the new pipeline will begin in 2010.”

According to him, the capacity of the new pipeline, 200-kilometer long, will be 18 million cubic meters of gas (6.57 billion cubic meters per year). The decision to build a new pipeline was made because the existing pipeline connecting Azerbaijan and Iran makes it impossible to increase gas exports to the South.

Construction is expected to end in 2012 and it will be financed by SOCAR.

Currently, daily volume of Azerbaijani gas transported to Iran is 1.2-1.3 million cubic meters.

Commercial export of Azerbaijani gas to Iran will start in late February.

Along with gas intended for the Autonomous Republic of Nakhchivan, total transfers to Iran will amount to 2.6-2.7 million cubic meters per day.

SOCAR and National Iranian Gas Export Company (NIGEC) signed a short-term contract for gas supplies to Iran in January. The contract envisages supplying Azerbaijani gas to Iran until March-April of 2010; totaling about 100 million cubic meters (1.2 million cubic meters of gas per day). Supplies will be delivered to the northern Iranian regions, which are isolated from the main gas fields.

Azerbaijan and Iran are connected with the Gazi-Magomed-Astara-Bind-Biand gas pipeline, 1,474.5-kilometers long. Its capacity was 10 billion cubic meters a year, but now it is lower.

This route is a branch of the Gazakh-Astara-Iran pipeline commissioned in 1971. Three compressor stations -- Gazi-Magomed, Aghdash and Gazakh -- were built.

MEDEX 2010 to open today

Some 350 domestic and 130 foreign companies will take part in the four-day event, ISNA news agency reported.

Spain, the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, Malaysia, Belgium, Indonesia, Romania, China, Pakistan, Syria, Turkey, India, Switzerland, Germany, Austria, Canada, the United Arab Emirates, Britain, Italy and Bangladesh are the foreign countries taking active part in the fair

Bahrain to Import Gas From Iran

The issue of Iran's gas exports to Bahrain through cooperation with Russia has been raised during a tripartite meeting, Iranian official says.

Iran's Deputy Oil Minister, Hossein Noghreker-Shirazi, told Shana News Agency that Bahrain's need for gas imports from Iran is around 300mn to 500mn cubic feet per day.

He added that Bahrain wants to import gas from Iran and Russia is interested in investing in Iran's energy projects.

"Iran has expressed readiness to provide Bahrain with its needed gas, in line with... the priority of exporting gas to neighbors," he said.

He said that the investment in Iran's upstream oil and gas projects is proposed to any country interested in importing gas from Iran.

"Iran emphasizes Bahrain's investment in Iran's energy projects as a clause in the potential long-term gas contract with Bahrain," Noghrekar said

German Insurers Wind Down Iran Business

Against a backdrop of rising political tensions, the world's biggest reinsurer, Munich Re (MUVGn.DE), said on Thursday it was stopping business with insurance firms in Iran, becoming the second major German company this year to cut ties with the country.

Siemens last month said it would wind down its operations there.

"A tightening of economic sanctions against Iran is understandable and will be supported by the German insurance sector," industry body GDV said in a statement.

German politicians have also turned up the heat, with Defence Minister Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg this month saying the international community needed to make clear to Iran that "patience is at an end" in the nuclear dispute.

That message has resounded with the country's insurers.

"Due to the political situation in Iran, Munich Re has decided to not renew existing business or write any new business with insurance companies there," it said in a statement, adding that the decision would hit its premium volume by about 10 million euros (\$13.6 million) annually.

Iran-Hong Kong Trade Exchange Hits \$285m

Almost 179 million dollars of the total number belonged to Iran's exports to Hong Kong while the remaining 106 million dollars was related to the latter's imports to the country.

According to Iranian diplomats in HK, the two sides enjoyed great potentials for promotion of bilateral cooperation.

Social Front

Rights groups urge Iran to free reporters, bloggers

Media rights watchdog groups on Sunday called on Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei to free more than 60 journalists, writers and bloggers held after anti-government protests.

"By our count, at least 60 writers, journalists and bloggers remain behind bars today in violation of the protection guaranteed in the Islamic republic of Iran constitution and in international law," six groups said in an open letter to Khamenei.

"This list constitutes the largest number of our colleagues jailed by any country on earth at one time in over a decade," it said ahead of a hearing on Iran at the UN Human Rights council in Geneva on Monday.

The list covers those detained in the aftermath of a disputed June election which returned Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to power and was followed by huge anti-government protests and a strong crackdown.

The street protests were the worst political violence to rock Iran in the 30-year history of the Islamic republic, shaking the regime and dividing the ruling elites and powerful clerical groups.

The letter to Khamenei was written by the Committee to Protect Journalists, PEN, Index on Censorship, Reporters Without Borders, Canadian Journalists for Free Expression and the International Publishers Association.

“We do not ask you to act outside your laws or the ideals of the Iranian revolution,” the letter said.

“Rather, we entreat you to uphold the pledges of Ayatollah Khomeini (the founder of the Islamic republic) and the promises of the Iranian constitution by releasing all writers, journalists and bloggers currently behind bars for covering the news and expressing their views in Iran.”

Huge rallies in Iran to mark revolution day

The revolution day known as Bahman 22nd, which fell on February 11 this year, marks an end to the dictatorial rule by the Western-backed regime of Pahlavi in 1979.

In the capital Tehran hundreds of thousands of people converged on the streets leading to Azadi Square (Freedom Square) where President Ahmadinejad addressed the people.

Some marchers carried pictures of Imam Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic Republic, and Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the leader of the Islamic Revolution.

The marchers chanted slogans: “God Is Great,” “Death to the U.S.,” “Death to Israel”. Sometimes the marchers also cried slogans against Britain and France.

The demonstrators also issued a statement insisting that velayat-e faqih (the rule of supreme jurisprudent), who represents the system's Islamism and republicanism, is a guarantor of national unity and the health of the ruling system.

Some demonstrators carried papers reading: “Velayat-e faqih prevents dictatorship.”

In a symbolic sign the demonstrators in Azadi Square also carried the coffin of the “Western liberal democracy” on carts in an allusion to a statement by President Ahmadinejad who had said the February 11 rallies would mark the death of liberal democracy.

Security forces were also deployed in and around the streets where rallies were held to maintain order and counter possible protests by opposition groups

Iran pro-reform websites hacked

A group calling itself the “Iranian Cyber Army” on Friday hacked two websites belonging to the Iranian pro-reform movement.

The image of the Iranian flag hanging from an AK-47 rifle replaced the home pages of the kaleme.org website, of pro-reform leader Mir Hossein Mousavi, and rahesabz.net.

“Stop being pawns for those who are safely in America and are using you,” the group said in a message on the hijacked websites.

The attack comes one day after security forces clashed with anti-government protesters, on the sidelines of official rallies marking the anniversary of the 1979 Islamic revolution.

The “Iranian Cyber Army” has launched similar hacking attacks on the popular blogging site, Twitter, the Chinese search engine, Baidu, and the website of the Dutch-based Persian-radio station, Radio Zamaneh.

Iran, Tajikistan Sign Educational Agreement

Based on the document, a course on Tajik studies is to be established in the Islamic Azad University which would, in return, establish research centers in the Tajik universities.

Jasbi arrived in Dushanbe Saturday evening heading a delegation to discuss bilateral issues with the Tajik officials.

He was to leave Dushanbe yesterday.

Iran's Ambassador to Tajikistan Ali Asghar Sherdoust was also present in Jasbi-Rahmanov meeting.

Iran Eyes Mafia Gangs Over Malaysia Drug Smuggling

Malaysian police have said they suspect a new Iranian syndicate is using the country as a transit point for drug smuggling to the region, after arresting 41 Iranians on drugs offences over the past two months.

"We are of the view that there may be mafia or gangs beyond the borders of Iran which are conducting and directing these activities," Iran's ambassador Mohammad Mehdi Zahedi said according to the Star newspaper.

Malaysian police have boosted surveillance of passengers from Iran and several other countries at airports nationwide.

"With so many of these drug couriers coming from Iran in the last two months, there is a very strong possibility that this is a new Iranian syndicate that is trying to use Malaysia as a transit point," Khalid Abu Bakar, police chief from Selangor state, told AFP last week.

Federal Narcotics Department deputy director Othman Harun reportedly said that the Iranian syndicates are supplying methamphetamines to the local market at nearly half the regular price.

"The quality of the ice supplied by the Iranians is similar if not better than the drug sold here," he said according to the New Straits Times Tuesday.

He said that 90 kilos (200 pounds) of "ice" has been seized at Kuala Lumpur's international airport over the past two months, much of it destined for export to China, the Philippines and other neighboring countries

International Medicinal And Aromatic Plants Symposium 2010 / 2nd Iranian Phytochemistry Seminar

Shiraz Medical University and Shiraz University, and SHMEN Inc of Canada the conveners of this conference, will welcome you to Shiraz in April 2010. Co-chairs of the event, Dr. Jalal Ghaemghami and Dr. Paul Kostecki along with Scientific Directors Dr. Morteza Khosh-Khui, Dr. Lyle Craker and Dr. Payman Salehi would like to invite you to join others at this exciting event in Shiraz.

Cancer Diagnosed In Iranians Under 25 Yrs.

Cancer diseases have been diagnosed among Iranians under the age of 25. "Cancer had been most commonly diagnosed among people over 50 years (in 1979). But now after three decades, there is an increased incidence of cancer in those under 25 years and in some cases even 18," Iraj Khosrownia, director of the Iranian Society of Internists, was quoted as saying by Mehr News Agency. Khosrownia noted that prostate cancer is mostly seen among Iranian men while breast cancer is common among women. Blaming environmental factors and genetic factors for the spread of cancer among Iranians, he said poor nutrition, smoking and air pollution are the main causes of cancer in all types. According to latest official figures, 90 percent of various types of cancers are caused by smoking. Cancer is responsible for 30 percent of deaths across the country. Khosrownia described examinations every six months for men or every year for women as the simple method of detecting cancer in its early stages.

Body of Iranian student killed in India to arrive in Tehran today

"The body of the student will be transferred to Tehran within 24 hours," he told the Mehr News Agency on Monday.

Karim also predicted that the other Iranians who were injured in the attacks will be released from hospital within 48 hours.

At least nine people were killed and 57 others injured in the attack at a restaurant popular with tourists, BBC reported.

The bombing is the first major strike of its kind in India since the deadly Mumbai attacks in November 2008.

The blast came a day after India and Pakistan agreed to meet for the talks in Delhi -- their first formal negotiations since the Mumbai attacks.

No conclusions could be drawn yet as to who was responsible for Saturday's blast, Indian Home Secretary GK Pillai was quoted by the Associated Press news agency as saying on Saturday.

Nobody has claimed responsibility for the Pune attack.

The explosion tore through the German Bakery restaurant, on North Main Road, at about 1900 local time (1330 GMT), when it was packed with diners.

Reports say an unattended package exploded when a waiter in the restaurant attempted to open it.

The Indian home ministry has advised all state governments to be on high alert.