

**Business and politics in Muslim world**

**Weekly report on Iran**

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## Summary

### **Experts: Preparedness to exchange 1,200 kg uranium is next tactical game of Iran**

Iran's statement that it is ready to exchange on its territory 1,200 kilograms of 3.5-percent enriched uranium to 20-percent fuel is another ploy and an attempt to gain time, experts say.

"Iran is stalling for time by playing on the contradictions of the world community, its confidence and desire to find at least some way, except force, President of Russia's Middle East Institute Yevgeny Satanovsky told Trend News via e-mail. - And Iran makes this with great success".

### **Thinking About Bombing Iran**

According to an article in the *Financial Times*, "Do Not Even Think About Bombing Iran" by Michael O'Hanlon and Bruce Riedel, both of the Brookings Institution, "the strike option" on Iranian nuclear facilities "lacks credibility." The authors believe that this is so because of "Iran's ability to retaliate against the U.S. in Iraq and Afghanistan..." This logic, like much else in this anti-war polemic posing as analysis, just doesn't withstand scrutiny

### **Clinton in Russia, on Iran, Israel and nuclear arms limitation**

US secretary of state Hillary Clinton is in Russia for talks on a wide range of international issues, including how to revive the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

On March 18 2010, she urged Russia to delay starting up the nuclear plant that it built for Iran at the port city of Bushehr, the Voice of America said.

Russia says the nuclear reactor it is building for Iran will be ready to start operations by the middle of this year.

### **Iran jails top reformist**

IRAN has jailed a top reformist after an appeals court upheld a one-year sentence for spreading propaganda against the Islamic republic, an opposition website said on Friday.

Hossein Marashi, a leading member of the Executives of Construction group close to former president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, 'was taken to Tehran's Evin prison on Thursday,' the kaleme.com website said.

The appeals court also upheld a ban on his engaging in any party political activity for six years, the website added.

### **Iran Opposition Leader Lashes Out at Regime**

Iran's top opposition leader said his protest movement would persevere despite a blistering crackdown, and he leveled fresh criticism at the regime's handling of the economy and foreign policy.

### **Annals of Engagement: Iran Still Arming Taliban in Afghanistan**

Border officials have reported that a wide range of material made in Iran – including mortars, plastic explosives, propaganda materials and mobile phones – is ending up in insurgents' hands.

### **Former Iranian vice-president jailed**

Former Iranian vice-president Hossein Marashi has been jailed for propaganda against the Islamic establishment, the Fars news agency reported Friday.

The Iranian appellate court on Wednesday confirmed Marashi's original sentence by the initial court, and ordered the execution of the sentence on Thursday, Fars said.

The 51-year-old Marashi is a relative of ex-president Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani and the spokesman of the moderate Kargozaran party, which is close to Rafsanjani.

### **Report: Saudi Arabia Seeks Strike on Iran**

The German news magazine *Der Spiegel* has reported that Saudi Arabia is hoping Israel will strike Iran's nuclear facilities, and is even prepared to open its skies to Israeli warplanes to allow such an operation to take place. Similar reports were published in 2009, and denied by both Israel and Saudi Arabia.

### **US, Russia clash over Iran's nuclear power station**

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and her Russian counterpart have clashed over the planned opening this year of Iran's first, Russian-built nuclear power station, highlighting a split over how to steer Iran away from nuclear weapons.

### **Iran Calls on Muslim to Act against Israel's Provocations**

Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki on Thursday urged the Islamic states to take proper measures against the provocative acts recently shown by the Zionist regime of Israel.

### **Israel attack on Iran could ignite MidEast – Hezbollah**

Violence could spread across the Middle East with Israel paying a "heavy price" if it launched military action against Iran, the deputy leader of Hezbollah said on Thursday.

Israel sees Iran's nuclear programme as a threat to its existence and has not ruled out military action if diplomacy fails to curb the Islamic Republic's atomic work.

### **Iran fights for democracy online**

At a time when the Obama administration is pressing for harsher sanctions against Iran for its nuclear program, democracy advocates in Iran have been celebrating the recent decision by the United States to lift sanctions on various online services, which they say only helped Tehran to suppress the opposition.

### **Putin says Iran's Bushehr plant should be on line by summer**

Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin announced on Thursday that the Bushehr nuclear power plant, which Russia is building in southern Iran, should come online this summer, Russian news agencies reported.

### **Medvedev does not rule out sanctions against Iran: Russian FM**

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev does not rule out the possibility of imposing reasonable sanctions on Iran, the Russian foreign minister said on Friday.

### **Tehran to host nuclear disarmament conference in April**

Iran will host an international conference on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation in April. A number of major international figures, nuclear experts, and foreign ministers from over 60 countries have been invited to participate in the international conference on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, which is scheduled to be held on April 17 and 18 in Tehran, the Mehr News Agency reported on Wednesday.

### **Iran and Pakistan: Six decades of brotherly relations**

Pakistan won its independence from the British Empire on August 14, 1947. Iran was the first country to extend diplomatic recognition to the newborn Islamic state. Since that time Pakistan and Iran enjoyed close brotherly relations.

### **5+1 group should avoid repeating its mistakes: Rafsanjani**

Expediency Council Chairman Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani has advised the 5+1 group to avoid repeating its previous mistakes.

“These countries (the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany) did not treat us well after the revolution and took inappropriate actions. Now there are new issues, such as the nuclear and missile issues... and they are intensifying their hostility, and I am confident that they are making a mistake. They will trouble themselves and us but will not gain anything,” Rafsanjani told reporters in Tehran on Wednesday.

### **Iran and Pakistan gas pipeline**

The gas pipeline project represents the most important milestone on the road to enhancing bilateral economic relationship. In June, 2009, Pakistan and Iran signed Gas Sale and Purchase Agreement (GSPA) while the attached agreements that is, operations Agreement and Heads of Agreement for Transit and Transportation of Iranian gas to India have been finalized and will be signed shortly. The gas flow is scheduled to start in mid 2014. This will lay solid foundation for economic collaboration and bring economic progress and prosperity in both the countries.

## Economic News

### **Iran to Unveil First National Truck in Spring**

Managing Director of Saipa Diesel Company announced on Saturday that his company plans to unveil Iran's first national truck with a home-made design within the next two or three months.

### **Iran Stresses Maintaining OPEC's Output Level**

Iranian Oil Minister Masoud Mir-Kazsemi called on the members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) to maintain the current level of crude oil output.

### **Iran, Turkey to Build Industrial Town at Joint Borders**

Iran and Turkey are due to construct an industrial town in Iran's northwestern border city of Makou, an Iranian official announced on Tuesday "Based on the agreements made (during a visit) by the Islamic Republic's officials to Turkey, the industrial zone and town is due to be established at Iran- Turkey joint borders," Makou's Governor Hamid Ahmadian said.

### **Iran, Pakistan sign \$7.6b gas pipeline deal**

Iran and Pakistan have signed a deal paving the way for the construction of a much-delayed pipeline pumping Iranian natural gas to the energy-starved South Asian country, officials said on Wednesday. The \$7.6 billion project is crucial for Pakistan to avert a growing energy crisis already causing severe electricity shortages in the country of about 170 million.

## Social News

### **86 persons involved in post-vote incidents convicted**

The Judiciary announced on Wednesday that 86 persons arrested in the post-election riots have received final sentences. They have been charged with collusion against national security, propaganda against the system, membership in hostile and anti-revolutionary groups, participation in illegal gatherings, and disturbing public order

### **Official: 14 Provinces in Iran Affected by Dust Pollution**

Head of Iran's Department of Environmental (DoE) Mohammad Javad Mohammadizadeh reiterated that 14 Iranian provinces are entangled with the problem of dust pollution. Mohammadizadeh also reiterated that dust pollution is Iran's greatest environmental problem, addressing a ceremony held in Tehran on Monday to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between Iran and Japan

### **Police Seize Tons of Narcotics in Western Iran**

Iran's law enforcement police squads have seized 3 tons of different types of narcotics in the country's western province of Lorestan during the last Iranian year (ending on March 20), a provincial police chief announced on Wednesday. Elaborating on police achievements in his province during the last year, Commander of Lorestan's Law Enforcement Police General Hossein Rahimi told reporters that his forces had seized 3 tons of illicit drugs during the past 12 months.

### **Ahmadinejad Stresses Women's Presence in High Posts in OIC**

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad called on the Secretary General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, to choose one of the elite women of the Muslim world as his deputy. In a letter to Ihsanoglu, the Iranian president suggested him to appoint an "elite Muslim woman" as one of his deputies.

## **Detailed Report**

Political Front

### **Experts: Preparedness to exchange 1,200 kg uranium is next tactical game of Iran**

Iran's statement that it is ready to exchange on its territory 1,200 kilograms of 3.5-percent enriched uranium to 20-percent fuel is another ploy and an attempt to gain time, experts say.

"Iran is stalling for time by playing on the contradictions of the world community, its confidence and desire to find at least some way, except force, President of Russia's Middle East Institute Yevgeny Satanovsky told Trend News via e-mail. - And Iran makes this with great success".



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The Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, Ali Akbar Salehi, said in an exclusive interview with Javan newspaper that his country was ready to transfer to the West 1,200 kilograms of 3.5 percent enriched uranium in exchange of 120 kilograms of 20 percent enriched fuel for research reactor in Tehran. Prior to that, Iran has stated that it was ready to exchange only 400 kilograms of uranium.

Any proposal of Iran, which suggests that it is ready to meet the global community, is perceived by the community with enthusiasm and give Iran an opportunity to reach the next level of development of the nuclear program, Satanovsky said.

"Iran is just playing a tactical game and assumes no responsibility for such statements, which are of importance only for the newspaper ["Javan"]," the expert on nuclear issues Reza Taghizadeh said.

According to Professor of the University of Glasgow Taghizadeh, Salehi would never talk about such an important step to any newspaper. "If Iran really made such a decision, it would have declared it to the IAEA, the UN Security Council and other international organizations," he said.

In addition, Taghizadeh believes that Iran will not easily give up the result of its many years of nuclear activities. "It is inconceivable that having the tool of such pressure, Iran intends to voluntarily give it away, he said. Iran has spent billions of dollars to produce 2,150 kilograms of 3.5-percent enriched uranium, has suffered damage in billions of dollars because of the sanctions by the UN Security Council , moreover, that Iran could buy fuel for a nuclear reactor in Tehran for five or six million dollars"

In 2006, Iran's nuclear dossier was sent by the IAEA to the UN Security Council. Up to now, to suspend Iran's nuclear program, the Security Councils has adopted five resolutions, three of which impose economic sanctions against Iran.

Taghizadeh added that the exchange of 1,200 kilograms of 3.5 percent enriched uranium with 120 kilograms of 20 percent enriched fuel will inflict damage to Iran.

In October last year, the IAEA made an initiative to exchange Iran's low-enriched uranium (up 3.5 percent) to 20 percent fuel for research reactor in Tehran, which produces medical isotopes.

Later, the IAEA, with the participation of Russia, France and the United States, devised and presented a specific project of agreements for exchange, according to which Iran was to convey to Russia 1.2 tons (70 percent of the total) of low-enriched uranium accumulated at the plant in the Iranian city of Natanz. Russia had to enrich the uranium to 20 percent with onward delivery to France, and transfer to Tehran. However, Iran demanded that the exchange was carried out simultaneously on its territory.

"Little has changed in Iran's position, it was ready to cooperate only under certain conditions," the director of Center for the Study of Modern Iran Rajab Safarov told Vedomosti newspaper.

He also added that the volume, which is ready to be parted with Iran, is 70 percent less than required by the IAEA because if last autumn the uranium reserves were estimated at about 1,200 kg, but now, according to the IAEA, the figure exceeds 2,000 kilograms.

In early February, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad expressed his readiness to accept the plan of the IAEA and to send abroad the low-enriched uranium in exchange for fuel enriched at 20 percent. However, a few hours later, Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki said the Islamic Republic is not yet ready to conclude a deal with the IAEA, because a "formula" of exchange must be prepared to start the exchange.

## **Thinking About Bombing Iran**

According to an article in the *Financial Times*, "Do Not Even Think About Bombing Iran" by Michael O'Hanlon and Bruce Riedel, both of the Brookings Institution, "the strike option" on Iranian nuclear facilities "lacks credibility." The authors believe that this is so because of "Iran's ability to retaliate against the U.S. in Iraq and Afghanistan..." This logic, like much else in this anti-war polemic posing as analysis, just doesn't withstand scrutiny.

It would have been far better if O'Hanlon/Riedel admitted from the beginning that they, like the Obama Administration, have no stomach for an attack on a murderous, ambition-crazed, self-perpetuating and self-justifying theocracy in the Middle East that seeks to dominate the region. Instead the authors prefer to present unsupported arguments such as, "... even a massive strike would not slow Iran's progress toward a bomb for long."

What militarily and technically inaccurate pap! For some reason O'Hanlon/Riedel seem to believe that operational nuclear weapon and development sites are actually capable of being hidden from counteraction. They present as evidence the fact that the media discovered a new nuclear development site in Qom last year. Digging in the middle of a major city can't be seen on the ground or by satellite, eh?

Obviously these authors -- and other liberal Washington pundits -- are thinking only in conventional weapon terms in relation to any attack on Iranian nuclear weapon facilities. There is no reason for such a limitation. There are a panoply of classified exotic systems currently available to disrupt and destroy any and all Iranian attack modes, nuclear or not. The claim that O'Hanlon/Riedel make that "Iran can rebuild fairly fast..." is again based on a perception that only conventional weapons would be available for use in the current international political context.

The *FT* column argues that President Obama would not militarily attack Iran because he is bound by "his effort to recast the U.S. as a country playing by international legal norms." Here is where O'Hanlon/Riedel may be completely correct. Obama has shown very little stomach for directly countering military threats. He certainly will stretch out as long as possible the program of sanctions along with diplomatic threats.

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A key point in the O'Hanlon/Riedel argument is that Iran has already supported terrorist attacks and proxy wars on Israel and the United States. They contend that the danger of Iranian nuclear weapon buildup is lessened by the fact that Tehran has done quite well in its efforts at conventional and irregular warfare. Suggesting that Iran shouldn't waste time pursuing nuclear weapons when it's already doing so well with terrorists and surrogate forces doesn't seem to hold much potential.

The O'Hanlon/Riedel commentary neglects to consider Israel's unilateral capability to defend itself whenever it perceives imminent danger from Iran. The article offers the suggestion: "We should also pledge to provide a nuclear umbrella over Israel and other threatened states." The authors ignore this protection has been implicit in the Middle East, and elsewhere, for decades.

It is also possible, however, to consider the use of the currently highly classified weapons mentioned earlier. Certain of these weapons are already available and could be utilized at a point when Iran is seen to have created its first nuclear-armed missile or just before. These capabilities should be emphasized more. The perspective would be improved.

Among the best known would be the electro-magnetic pulse (EMP) weapon that might be detonated at an altitude up to 400km in salvos above a central Iranian target set. This action effectively would disable all electricity-dependent instruments from automobiles to home appliances and on to missile batteries and even deep underground facilities (as discovered by the Russians years ago in their own test firings).

Ultimately all power grids throughout the targeted areas in Iran would be shorted out for hundreds of miles. There would be no need for selective targeting other than to avoid "spill-over" into non-Iranian border regions. The details of such range and target control mechanisms remain some of the most highly sensitive and thus of the strictest classification.

To compliment and supplement the EMP barrage there would be a massive computer hacking effort before and during the attack. This cyber offensive pulverizing Tehran's tactical command and control systems reportedly has been gamed successfully on several occasions -- again highly classified. The combination of the two attacks is believed to be able effectively to bring Iran to a standstill.

Defense consultant Chet Nagle, U.S. Naval Academy graduate and author of the acclaimed work, *Iran Covenant*, characterized the overall effect: "In fact, if the strike [EMP] was at noon on a sunny day, the people below would not know it happened except their lights would go out, cars would stop, fridges die, power line transformers short out, oil refineries shut down, and those uranium enrichment centrifuges in caverns would stop spinning."

Such an action would immobilize Iran and allow conventional U.S. sea and air forces time to attack the already degraded Iranian coastal defense, thus preventing the closing of

the Straits of Hormuz. Such a scenario supports the fact that the issue is not whether Iran can be shut down, but whether the Obama Administration would have the will to do so.

The Iranians and O'Hanlon/Riedel are betting against American will. The Israelis may agree with them, but such a view only further insures an Israeli preemptive strike. So perhaps it might be better if we did talk about -- "bombing" Iran!

### **Clinton in Russia, on Iran, Israel and nuclear arms limitation**

US secretary of state Hillary Clinton is in Russia for talks on a wide range of international issues, including how to revive the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

On March 18 2010, she urged Russia to delay starting up the nuclear plant that it built for Iran at the port city of Bushehr, the Voice of America said.

Russia says the nuclear reactor it is building for Iran will be ready to start operations by the middle of this year.

Moscow has been helping Iran build the Bushehr facility since 1995, but work has been delayed several times.

Reporters asked Clinton about the Bushehr facility during an appearance with Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov.

"(But) we have consistently said that Iran is entitled to civil nuclear power. It is a nuclear weapons programme that it is not entitled to," Clinton said.

"And if it reassures the world, or if its behaviour has changed because of international sanctions, then they can pursue peaceful civil nuclear power. In the absence of those reassurances, we think it would be premature to go forward with any project at this time, because we want to send an unequivocal message to the Iranians," she said.

The US and other Western powers say that Iran is pursuing nuclear technology in order to produce nuclear weapons. Iran insists its nuclear operations are for peaceful purposes.

Lavrov insisted the Bushehr facility eventually will open.

"The project will be finished. All of the technical issues related to Bushehr are reaching their final stages and this plant will open and produce electricity," Lavrov said.

Russia has denied previous delays at Bushehr were related to ongoing concerns about Iran's nuclear programme.

Moscow says the plant will come under the supervision of the International Atomic

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Energy Agency, and that Iran must return all used fuel rods to Moscow.

Earlier this month, Russian president Dmitri Medvedev said his country is ready to consider new sanctions against Iran, if Tehran refuses to stop enriching uranium.

On another matter, both Clinton and Lavrov indicated negotiators are close to finalising a new treaty to cut the nuclear arsenals of the their two countries, amid signs that the Obama administration policy of resetting bilateral relations with Russia is gaining traction.

Lavrov praised US and Russian arms negotiators in Geneva, saying that they had reached the culminating stage of the final stretch toward a new bilateral nuclear arms agreement.

While neither official provided details about remaining differences, both agreed about the example they set for the world as nuclear powers.

"And it especially is important for the United States and Russia who bear the responsibility to continue the way forward on non-proliferation, and to work as partners in the global effort to secure fissile materials and counter the threat of nuclear terrorism," Clinton said.

Clinton said progress in Geneva leads both sides to believe agreement will be reached soon.

But when asked about a recent Ukrainian proposal to have the treaty signed in Kyiv, she indicated that it was too soon to talk about success.

Clinton thanked Lavrov for Russian cooperation with respect to Afghanistan, noting that a transit agreement between the presidents of both countries has resulted in 111 flights as of this week that have ferried more than 15 000 soldiers over Russian territory to Afghanistan.

Ways to control illegal drugs coming out of Afghanistan were also discussed. Clinton said commissions set up by presidents Obama and Medvedev are exploring energy efficiency, nanotechnology and bilateral cooperation is expanding in the fields of information technology, education, e-government, people to people exchanges and other fields.

Clinton was scheduled to meet Medvedev on March 19. She will also join Lavrov in talks with the Quartet of Middle East peacemakers. In addition to Russia and the U.S., the group includes the European Union and the United Nations.

The situation in the Middle East was the focus of discussions between Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and Medvedev in Moscow on March 18, a day ahead of the Quartet meeting, the UN News Service said.

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The gathering of the Quartet comes amid rising tensions between Israel and the Palestinians.

Ban and Medvedev also discussed nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation; climate change; peacekeeping operations; and co-operation between Russia and the UN.

Ban signed a joint declaration with the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) to enhance co-operation between the two groups.

Ban "said that he saw potential for enhanced cooperation with the CSTO in a number of areas of common interest, including counter-terrorism, drug trafficking and conflict prevention," his spokesperson Farhan Haq told reporters in New York.

After meeting Lavrov, in talks covering Afghanistan, Iran, North Korea and Somalia, among other topics, Ban emphasised the need for direct peace talks between the Israelis and Palestinians.

"Proximity talks are not an end in themselves," Ban said conference. "They should lead eventually to direct negotiations. There is no alternative to direct negotiations through dialogue."

The Quartet meeting, Ban said in an address at Moscow State Institute of International Relations, "comes at a critical moment," given "worrying developments" such as Israel's announcement to build housing units in East Jerusalem.

"We need to see an end to provocations from any quarter," Ban said. "Meaningful dialogue must begin on all the core issues of this conflict – including Jerusalem."

Ban reiterated his call for a two-State solution to the problem, calling it "the only route to peace and security for both peoples."

Also in his speech, he underlined the need for Russian leadership in world affairs, including nuclear proliferation and rising poverty.

"Together, we can, and must, build a stronger UN for a better world," Ban said. "On this, I know we have Russia's support."

From the Russian capital, Ban was scheduled to travel to Israel and hopes to see the situation on the ground in Gaza more than a year after the end of Operation Cast Lead, the three-week Israeli military offensive against rocket attacks by Palestinian militants.

Ban condemned the March 18 rocket attack from Gaza which killed a civilian in Israel, and emphasised that all acts of violence are "totally unacceptable."

The rocket reportedly struck the Netiv Ha'assera kibbutz in southern Israel, killing a

foreign agricultural worker.

"All such acts of terror and violence against civilians are totally unacceptable and contrary to international law," Ban's spokesperson said in a statement.

### **Iran jails top reformist**

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The appeals court also upheld a ban on his engaging in any party political activity for six years, the website added.

Marashi's group was a leading supporter of former prime minister Mir Hossein Mousavi in his election campaign against hardline President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad last June.

Official results giving Mr Ahmadinejad victory drew hundreds of thousands of protesters onto the streets alleging fraud, prompting a crackdown on dissent.

The courts have sentenced several top reformists and political activists to varying jail terms after convicting them of acting against the regime. Several detainees have been released on bail in recent weeks, but news reports say 10 protesters charged with taking part in the post-election unrest have been sentenced to death.

### **Iran Opposition Leader Lashes Out at Regime**

Iran's top opposition leader said his protest movement would persevere despite a blistering crackdown, and he leveled fresh criticism at the regime's handling of the economy and foreign policy.

The message, broadcast in a video release on the Internet to supporters marking the Iranian new year, appeared aimed at continuing Mir Hossein Mousavi's strategy of broadening the appeal of his movement. He and other opposition leaders have recently moved beyond domestic political complaints to focus on, among ...

### **Annals of Engagement: Iran Still Arming Taliban in Afghanistan [**

Border officials have reported that a wide range of material made in Iran – including mortars, plastic explosives, propaganda materials and mobile phones – is ending up in insurgents' hands.

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Rahmutallah Safi, the head of Border Police in Herat, an Afghan city on its western border with Iran, said seized material was marked with Persian writing, Channel 4 News reported last night.

"In this place you can see, we have discovered five mines," he said. "All the international monitors have seen it. You yourselves can check to see which country has made it. You can see the [Persian] marks on the weapons and the type and show it to the world."

A Taliban commander admitted that the insurgents had grown more dependent on Iran as Pakistan stepped up operations against the group on its territory.

"Day by day the Iranian border becomes more important for us," he said. "Especially now in Pakistan there are many problems for the Taliban and many of the Taliban have been imprisoned and also they arrest any Taliban who comes out of the [religious schools]."

Not to worry, though. A NATO spokesman says Iran's support for the Taliban is only "limited."

### **Former Iranian vice-president jailed**

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The Iranian appellate court on Wednesday confirmed Marashi's original sentence by the initial court, and ordered the execution of the sentence on Thursday, Fars said.

The 51-year-old Marashi is a relative of ex-president Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani and the spokesman of the moderate Kargozaran party, which is close to Rafsanjani.

Marashi also served as vice-president to the former reformist leader, and as head of the heritage and tourism organization.

In June's presidential election, Marashi and the Kargozaran party supported Mir-Hossein Mousavi, the leader of the opposition Green Movement.

Following the election, Marashi joined the opposition in refusing to acknowledge President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's re-election and accusing the government of fraud.

Another former vice-president, Mohammad-Ali Abtahi, was sentenced in November to a six-year jail term for his involvement in the post-election unrests.

Scores of demonstrators were killed and thousands arrested in the political unrests after the disputed election.



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More than a hundred are still in jail, some of them serving heavy sentences on charges of propaganda against the Islamic establishment.

At least 10 have reportedly been sentenced to death and are currently going through the appeals court.

Those on death row have been convicted of plotting against the establishment and committing 'moharebeh,' or acting against God.

Two members of monarchist groups were hanged in January for conspiring to topple Iran's Islamic establishment.

### **Report: Saudi Arabia Seeks Strike on Iran**

The German news magazine *Der Spiegel* has reported that Saudi Arabia is hoping Israel will strike Iran's nuclear facilities, and is even prepared to open its skies to Israeli warplanes to allow such an operation to take place. Similar reports were published in 2009, and denied by both Israel and Saudi Arabia.

report stated that officials in Riyadh had spoken to United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton about the importance of stopping Iran's nuclear program, even if doing so requires the use of military force.

The London *Sunday Times* claimed in 2009 that Saudi Arabia would allow Israel to use its airspace to attack Iran. The paper quoted a former Israeli intelligence officer as saying, "The Saudis are very concerned about an Iranian nuclear bomb, even more than the Israelis."

Der Spiegel writer Bernhard Zand stated this week, "These days, the Arabs fear the terrorists of al-Qaeda and Iran's leadership, with its rabid rhetoric and nuclear program, as much as the Israelis do. Never before since the time of Israel's creation were Jews and Arabs as united as they are in the face of the Iranian threat."

Zand accused Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu of failing to take advantage of Israel's newfound common ground with the Arab world.

Iranian media dismissed the *Der Spiegel* report. "*Der Spiegel* is greatly influenced by the Israeli regime and has previously published reports that were meant to serve as an Israeli propaganda campaign or psychological warfare against the Islamic Republic," accused Iran's Press TV.

The fear of terrorist takeovers of their governments and of Iran's weaponization is the reason several Arab regimes, such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt, do not protest with U.S. military offensives against al-Kaeda and other terrorist groups in Afghanistan and Iraq, even though they are not part of the CENTCOM coalition that fights alongside the U.S.. These regimes are worried that the U.S. response to Iran will be too little and too late, according to a JINSA (the American based Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs) analysis of the issue this week.

## **US, Russia clash over Iran's nuclear power station**

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and her Russian counterpart have clashed over the planned opening this year of Iran's first, Russian-built nuclear power station, highlighting a split over how to steer Iran away from nuclear weapons.

Mrs Clinton said the Obama administration was opposed to the timing of the nuclear plant's launch.

Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin announced the plans on Thursday, soon after Mrs Clinton arrived for a two-day visit.

At a news conference with Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, Mrs Clinton said Iran must reassure the world it is not trying to build a nuclear weapon.

## **Iran Calls on Muslim to Act against Israel's Provocations**

Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki on Thursday urged the Islamic states to take proper measures against the provocative acts recently shown by the Zionist regime of Israel.

Mottaki made the request by forwarding official letters to Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, Secretary-General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC); Amr Moussa, the Arab League Secretary-General, plus Walid al-Muallem, Ali al-Shami, Nasser Judeh and Marty Natalegawa, the respective foreign ministers of Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Indonesia.

On March 15, Israel reopened the Hurva Synagogue, as part of what Tel Aviv's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has claimed as Israel's "heritage." The Hurva Synagogue is a ruined synagogue on Hurva Square in al-Quds.

The move has sparked protests by Palestinians who took to the streets in the holy city and elsewhere in the West Bank to protest against the move, which is seen as a threat to the sanctity of the al-Aqsa Mosque, which is Islam's third holiest place.

Israeli occupation forces fired rubber bullets and stun grenades to disperse thousands of angry Palestinians.

Speaking today, Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki said that "serious measures" were

needed to stop Israel's inhumane and destructive acts at the holy site.

Mottaki said that the continued silence and inaction of Muslim and Arab countries would further embolden Israel in advancing its plans.

In his letter to Ihsanoglu, Iran's foreign minister called on the OIC to hold an emergency meeting on the issue.

He also suggested that Lebanon, as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, propose an initiative at the Council to stop Israel's destructive measures.

Despite Israeli claim that there is no political motive behind the move, the reopening of the synagogue is widely regarded in the Muslim world as part of Tel Aviv's ploy to Judaize al-Quds.

### **Israel attack on Iran could ignite MidEast - Hezbollah**

Violence could spread across the Middle East with Israel paying a "heavy price" if it launched military action against Iran, the deputy leader of Hezbollah said on Thursday.

Israel sees Iran's nuclear programme as a threat to its existence and has not ruled out military action if diplomacy fails to curb the Islamic Republic's atomic work.

The United States and other western powers suspect Iran is pursuing a nuclear weapon and are currently discussing the imposition of new economic sanctions against Tehran.

Iran says its nuclear programme is peaceful and aimed at generating electricity.

"Israel or the United States cannot just bomb Iran and (expect) things to continue normally," Sheikh Naim Kassem told Reuters. "Any attack on Iran could ignite the whole region and the assailant will pay a heavy price whether its Israel or the United States."

He said any countries which allowed an attack on Iran to be launched from U.S. bases on their territory would also face reprisals.

Kassem refused to discuss details of Hezbollah's role in responding to any attack on Iran.

Israeli officials say Hezbollah, and to a lesser degree the Palestinian group Hamas, would launch cross-border rocket salvos on Iran's behalf should it come under attack and this scenario was featured in an Israeli-U.S. air defence exercise last year.

Hezbollah, a Shi'ite Lebanese group, was set up with the help of Iranian Revolutionary Guards to fight Israeli forces that invaded Lebanon in 1982 and still enjoys strong support from Tehran as well as Syria.

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The group fought a 34-day war with Israel in 2006 that cost 1,200 lives in Lebanon and 159 in Israel. Despite U.N. resolutions and a U.N. peacekeeping force, Hezbollah has since rearmed.

Earlier this month, the U.N. special coordinator for Lebanon expressed concern that a wave of bellicose rhetoric between Israel and Lebanon has fuelled fears the two hostile neighbours could be headed for another conflict.

Lebanese and Syrian officials have accused Israel of pushing for a new war in the Middle East but Kassem said he did not expect a war soon.

"Based on our expectations ... there are no signs for a war soon, but Israel is planning for one and whether this day is far or near we have to be ready and prepared and that is what we are now."

### **Iran fights for democracy online**

At a time when the Obama administration is pressing for harsher sanctions against Iran for its nuclear program, democracy advocates in Iran have been celebrating the recent decision by the United States to lift sanctions on various online services, which they say only helped Tehran to suppress the opposition.

But it is still a long way from the activists' goal of lifting all restrictions on trade in Internet services, which opposition leaders say is vital to maintaining the open communications that have underpinned the protests that erupted last summer after the disputed presidential election. In recent months the government has carried out cyber-warfare against the opposition, eliminating virtually all sources of independent news and information and shutting down social networking services.

The sanctions against online services - provided through free software like Google Chat or Yahoo Messenger - were intended to restrict Iran's ability to develop nuclear technology, but democracy advocates say they ended up helping the government repress its people. "The policies were contradictory," said Ali Akbar Moussavi Khoini, a former member of Parliament who now lives in Washington, where he pressed for the change.

The new measure will enable users in Iran to download the latest circumvention software to help defeat the government's efforts to block Web sites, and to stop relying on pirated copies that can be far more easily hacked by the government.

But the government's opponents say they need still more help in getting around the government's information roadblocks.

"The Islamic Republic is very efficient in limiting people's access to these sources, and Iranian people need major help," said Mehdi Yahyanejad, the founder of one of the largest Persian-language social networking Web sites, the U.S.-based Balatarin. "We need some 50 percent of people to be able to access independent news sources other than

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the state-controlled media."

Web sites, social networking and satellite television became major sources of news and tools for organizing and mobilizing people. The opposition posted news about the demonstrations and videos of the security forces' use of violence against protesters. A video of her final moments turned Neda Agha Soltan, the 26-year-old woman who was shot by government forces, into an international symbol.

But the authorities came to realize the significance of the networking tools and began efforts to eliminate them. In December its "cyber-army" attacked Twitter, which was a major communications tool for the opposition. The hackers redirected Twitter users to a page in English that read, "This page has been hacked by the Iranian cyber-army."

In recent months the government slowed the Internet to a crawl, so that users were unable to perform the simplest operations, like opening Gmail or Yahoo accounts. It has become impossible to post a video, and opposition Web sites have been blocked. The government has also jammed opposition and news satellite channels, including Persian-language Voice of America television and BBC Persian, which were watched by millions.

The government has jailed many cyber-experts in recent months, charging some with "waging war against God," potentially a capital crime, for sending political e-mail messages. This month Parliament announced a \$500 million budget for cyber-warfare, the Fars news agency recently reported.

The opposition tried to fight back with software designed to circumvent the restrictions, but that became a losing battle after Internet service was slowed.

Opposition leaders say they would like to have access to Internet hardware - any products made by Cisco Systems, for example, are subject to sanctions - and high-speed satellite Internet service, which experts say is generally harder to jam than broadcasts. That service is available from the American company Hughes Global Services, in Europe and the Middle East, and could be used by Iranians. But Payam Herischi, senior director at Hughes, said that the company was reluctant to allow its satellites to provide service to Iran until sanctions are lifted.

Iran, which has no communications satellites of its own, is dependent on foreign companies for broadcasting all its local channels as well as English, Persian and Arabic channels. Its jamming of BBC Persian and Voice of America violated international regulations.

"What Iran is doing can cause serious chaos in the international satellite order," said Sadeq Saba, the director of Persian-language BBC television. "If other countries begin to retaliate and jam Iran's channels, there will be serious chaos."

## **Putin says Iran's Bushehr plant should be on line by summer**

Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin announced on Thursday that the Bushehr nuclear power plant, which Russia is building in southern Iran, should come online this summer, Russian news agencies reported.

"The launch of the first unit of Iran's nuclear power station should be implemented already this summer," Putin said at a meeting on nuclear industry matters in the city of Volgodonsk.

Vladimir Pavlov, the official in charge of the project at state-run Atomstroieexport, the state-controlled company building the reactor, said "the physical launch of the station is scheduled for July."

The announcement by Putin sparked a criticism from visiting U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton who claimed such a decision would be "premature".

Clinton was in Moscow for a meeting of Middle East peace mediators and talks with Russian officials including President Dmitry Medvedev.

## **Medvedev does not rule out sanctions against Iran: Russian FM**

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev does not rule out the possibility of imposing reasonable sanctions on Iran, the Russian foreign minister said on Friday.

"Sanctions seldom work but sometimes they are inevitable," Sergei Lavrov quoted Medvedev as saying after talks with U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

Earlier in the month, the Iran Six discussed a possible new UN Security Council resolution that imposes further sanctions against Tehran over its nuclear program. The six countries, including the United States, France, Britain, Germany, China and Russia, comprise a group of mediators negotiating with Iran on its nuclear program.

"We are convinced and President Medvedev has also mentioned today that sanctions must be intelligent, unaggressive and not paralyzing and should have no negative impact on the Iranian people but should be imposed on those who make decisions on cooperating with the international community," Lavrov said.

## **Tehran to host nuclear disarmament conference in April**

Iran will host an international conference on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation in April. A number of major international figures, nuclear experts, and foreign ministers from over 60 countries have been invited to participate in the international conference on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, which is scheduled to be held on April 17 and 18 in Tehran, the Mehr News Agency reported on Wednesday.

The organizers of the conference are planning to arrange panel discussions on various topics, such as the challenges of disarmament, nation-states' international obligations in regard to disarmament and non-proliferation, and scientific strategies for the realization of disarmament.

On the sidelines of the conference, the participants will also visit an exhibition about the people who were killed or injured by chemical weapons during the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war.

They will wrap up their trip to Iran with a visit to the historic city of Isfahan.

## **Iran and Pakistan: Six decades of brotherly relations**

Pakistan won its independence from the British Empire on August 14, 1947. Iran was the first country to extend diplomatic recognition to the newborn Islamic state. Since that time Pakistan and Iran enjoyed close brotherly relations.

These bonds of friendship and brotherhood, based on commonality of interests, shared traditions, common faith and Islamic heritage are destined to grow stronger in the years ahead to the mutual benefit of the two nations.

Hafiz, Saadi, Rumi and Iqbal are household names in Pakistan and Iran. The leadership of Pakistan and Iran, at all levels, acknowledge and highlight the importance of all these common bonds.

There is a strong desire of the two peoples to further strengthen the bilateral ties in all fields. These relations have been marked by frequent high-level consultations between the leadership of the two countries.

The leadership and the governments of the two countries are fully committed and dedicated to carry forward the strong bonds of friendship and to utilize the institutional framework already in place for promoting political, economic and commercial relations for mutual benefit of the peoples of the two countries. The two governments are

determined to continue their efforts to further build on the mutual bonds and commonalities.

Pakistan and Iran share common perception on international and regional issues and closely cooperate at various world fora. Pakistan and Iran understand and appreciate each other's position on different regional and international issues. As both countries are founding members of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), they are working together to promote cultural and economic cooperation among the member states of the organization.

In the regional context, the peace process initiated by Pakistan with India holds a great promise for the future of South Asia and in turn for peace and security of the whole region. Pakistan is fully committed to the dialogue process and is willing to go the extra mile to revive and revitalize it.

Pakistan and Iran are equally determined to fight the scourge of terrorism. Both countries are victims of it and are opposed to it in all its forms and manifestations.

The commercial and economic relations between Pakistan and Iran constitute an important aspect of their relations. It is a matter of satisfaction that these relations are growing with each passing day. The volume of bilateral trade in the year 2008-2009 was over 1 billion dollars.

### **Iran and Pakistan gas pipeline**

The gas pipeline project represents the most important milestone on the road to enhancing bilateral economic relationship. In June, 2009, Pakistan and Iran signed Gas Sale and Purchase Agreement (GSPA) while the attached agreements that is, operations Agreement and Heads of Agreement for Transit and Transportation of Iranian gas to India have been finalized and will be signed shortly. The gas flow is scheduled to start in mid 2014. This will lay solid foundation for economic collaboration and bring economic progress and prosperity in both the countries.

It is a matter of great satisfaction that Pakistan and Iran are working in tandem to develop their deep-rooted historical ties strengthen regional and international cooperation and safeguard the interests of the Muslim Ummah. Both have made remarkable contribution towards global peace and security. The bonds of brotherhood between Pakistan and Iran would continue to grow in years ahead to the mutual advantage of the two brotherly peoples as well as for regional peace and security.



Every year, on March 23, the Pakistani people commemorate their National Day in remembrance of “The Pakistan Resolution” passed on March 23, 1940, in the historic city of Lahore.

On this day, the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent pledged to create an independent homeland, where they could live in accordance with their religious and cultural values.

This day reminds us of the momentous times when the Indian Muslims rallied around the dynamic leadership of Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah and carved out an independent sovereign country.

From that momentous day in 1940, Pakistan has come a long way. Having attained independence on 14th August 1947 against seemingly insurmountable odds, the country has been confronted with many challenges both external and internal after independence.

It most certainly goes to the credit of the Pakistani nation that they have always risen to the occasion and successfully overcome adversity by demonstrating patriotism, steadfastness, resilience and unwavering faith in Almighty Allah.

The country is rapidly moving on the path of progress and development. Reforms in all sectors have been successfully introduced and are bearing fruit. A new direction has been given to the country in line with the principles observed by nation’s founding fathers. It is encouraging to note that the economic sector has witnessed impressive gains with around 6% GDP growth rate over the last five years.

### **5+1 group should avoid repeating its mistakes: Rafsanjani**

Expediency Council Chairman Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani has advised the 5+1 group to avoid repeating its previous mistakes.

“These countries (the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany) did not treat us well after the revolution and took inappropriate actions. Now there are new issues, such as the nuclear and missile issues... and they are intensifying their hostility, and I am confident that they are making a mistake. They will trouble themselves and us but will not gain anything,” Rafsanjani told reporters in Tehran on Wednesday.

He also said that Iran has always insisted that the Islamic Republic does not seek to produce nuclear weapons.

“The Leader has said that, and all officials have said that,” he noted.

If there are any doubts about Iran’s nuclear energy program, efforts should be made to address the problem, Rafsanjani said.

The Expediency Council chairman also stated that Iran does not seek anything beyond its own rights and neither should the 5+1 group

### **Economic Front**

#### **Iran to Unveil First National Truck in Spring**

Managing Director of Saipa Diesel Company announced on Saturday that his company plans to unveil Iran's first national truck with a home-made design within the next two or three months.

"This commercial truck will be unveiled in Ordibehesht or Khordad (May-June 2010)," Ali Malek said in an interview with FNA.

"The National truck will use a 400 horsepower NT4 engine," he added.

Saipa Diesel is a leading company in truck production in the country, dominating the domestic market in the heavy section.

The company produces over 10,000 trucks per year, mostly European and Chinese brand.

Saipa assembles and produces trucks from Volvo, Renault, Yutong, Dong Feng and Foton companies.

#### **Iran Stresses Maintaining OPEC's Output Level**

Iranian Oil Minister Masoud Mir-Kazemi called on the members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) to maintain the current level of crude oil output.

"Iran's position is to maintain the current crude oil output during the upcoming OPEC meeting," Mir-Kazemi told reporters on Monday.

The remarks by the Iranian oil minister came ahead of an OPEC meeting due to be held in Vienna on March 17 to review its oil supply policy.

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The minister underlined that OPEC is not expected to make any change in the output, reminding that there have not been considerable changes in the oil market.

The world oil cartel has left its quota unchanged since December 2008 when it agreed to cut 4.2 million barrels per day (bpd) but compliance of the group's members has waned to 53 percent.

Many OPEC members announced on Monday that there was no need for the group to change its official target output owing to the current supply, demand and price situation amid a global economic recovery.

Iran and Venezuela, Algeria, Angola, Ecuador, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Nigeria, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are the 12 members of OPEC.

OPEC, which produces around 40 percent of the world's crude oil, has an official target level of 24.84 million barrels a day but is actually producing more.

### **Iran, Turkey to Build Industrial Town at Joint Borders**

Iran and Turkey are due to construct an industrial town in Iran's northwestern border city of Makou, an Iranian official announced on Tuesday "Based on the agreements made (during a visit) by the Islamic Republic's officials to Turkey, the industrial zone and town is due to be established at Iran- Turkey joint borders," Makou's Governor Hamid Ahmadian said.

Ahmadian also reiterated that representatives of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad have visited the location for building the town in Makou in a move to provide the ground for the implementation of the plan.

He further name Bouralan as among the proposed regions in Makou for the implementation of the project.

Iran and Turkey have in recent years boosted their cooperation in the different fields of economy, security, trade, education and culture.

Earlier this month, Iranian and Turkish officials signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to expand mutual cooperation in different industrial fields, specially in textile, auto-manufacturing and power industries.

The agreement prioritizes cooperation in a number of fields, namely auto-manufacturing and supply of spare-parts, construction industry, agricultural machinery and equipment industries and wood and paper industries.

Also in the document, Iran and Turkey stressed the necessity for supporting private sector and international trade in a bid to make reciprocal investments and investment in third countries.

Turkey expects Iran trade volume up to \$20 bln in 2011

Turkey aims to increase trade volume with Iran to \$20 billion in 2011, a Turkish minister said on Thursday.

Friday, 19 March 2010 08:29

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State Minister Hayati Yazici, who met with Iranian assistant first vice-president and the spokesman for Iran's Supreme National Security Council Ali Agha Mohammadi, said that trade volume between the two countries was \$10 billion in 2008, however it dropped to \$5.5 billion in 2009.

"Nevertheless, we have a large trade activity. So, we want to modernize customs gates jointly, and increase trade volume to \$ billion in 2011," Hayati Yazici told the meeting.

Two customs gates, Gurbulak and Esendere, are now operating between Turkey and Iran, Yazici said, adding that officials of the two countries had agreed to open two more.

On his part, Mohammadi said that Iran was eager to set up joint customs gates which he said could make trade easier for Turkish and Iranian businessmen.

Iran wants to take tangible steps on the matter, he added.

### **Iran, Pakistan sign \$7.6b gas pipeline deal**

Iran and Pakistan have signed a deal paving the way for the construction of a much-delayed pipeline pumping Iranian natural gas to the energy-starved South Asian country, officials said on Wednesday. The \$7.6 billion project is crucial for Pakistan to avert a growing energy crisis already causing severe electricity shortages in the country of about 170 million.

Pakistani Petroleum and Natural Resources Minister Naveed Qamar hailed the signing of the deal in Turkey on Tuesday as an "historic achievement."

"It's a milestone towards meeting energy needs of the country," a Pakistani government statement quoted Qamar as saying.

The pipeline will connect Iran's South Pars gas field with Pakistan's southern Baluchistan and Sindh provinces.

Under the deal, 750 million cubic feet of gas will be pumped to Pakistan daily from Iran by mid-2015.

Dubbed the "peace pipeline," the project has been planned since the 1990s and originally would have extended from Pakistan to India.

However, India has been reluctant to join the project due to political tensions with Pakistan.

Under the deal, Pakistan is allowed to charge a transit fee if the proposed pipeline is eventually extended to India.

Iran has the world's second-largest gas reserves after Russia.

## **Social Front**

### **Police Seize Tons of Narcotics in Western Iran**

Iran's law enforcement police squads have seized 3 tons of different types of narcotics in the country's western province of Lorestan during the last Iranian year (ending on March 20), a provincial police chief announced on Wednesday. Elaborating on police achievements in his province during the last year, Commander of Lorestan's Law Enforcement Police General Hossein Rahimi told reporters that his forces had seized 3 tons of illicit drugs during the past 12 months.

Rahimi further announced that in addition to the said seizures, Lorestan has succeeded in promoting its rank from the 28th to the 14th Iranian province in fighting drugs and drug-trafficking.

Iran lies on a major drug route between Afghanistan and Europe, as well as the Persian Gulf states. Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the Iranian police have lost more than 3500 of their personnel in the country's combat against narcotics.

The Islamic Republic has emerged as the leading country fighting drug trafficking after making 85 percent of the world's total opium seizures.

During the past Iranian year (ended on March 20, 2009) Iran seized more than 1,000 tons of opium smuggled from Afghanistan, the largest producer of opium poppy in the world.

According to official estimates, Iran's battle against drugs cost the country around \$1 billion annually. Strategies pursued by Tehran include digging canals, building barriers and installing barbed wire to seal the country's borders, specially in the East.

### **Ahmadinejad Stresses Women's Presence in High Posts in OIC**

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad called on the Secretary General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, to choose one of the elite women of the Muslim world as his deputy. In a letter to Ihsanoglu, the Iranian president suggested him to appoint an "elite Muslim woman" as one of his deputies.

President Ahmadinejad said that he made the suggestion regarding the progressive view

of Islam about women and their major role in the development of Muslim societies.

He added that he made the proposal in line with the OIC approvals on promotion of women's status and role as half of the Muslim world's population.

He added that choosing a female deputy for the OIC chief would be a major step towards restoring women's rights and boosting their capabilities.

That would also indicate the OIC support for strengthening Women's status in the society, stressed the president.

### **Official: 14 Provinces in Iran Affected by Dust Pollution**

Head of Iran's Department of Environmental (DoE) Mohammad Javad Mohammadizadeh reiterated that 14 Iranian provinces are entangled with the problem of dust pollution. Mohammadizadeh also reiterated that dust pollution is Iran's greatest environmental problem, addressing a ceremony held in Tehran on Monday to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between Iran and Japan.

He went on to say that Iran and Japan have signed agreements on three environmental cooperation projects.

The goal of one of the projects is reducing air pollution in Tehran, he added.

He also said regional countries are cooperating in efforts to efficiently manage water resources and prevent desertification.

Dust storms in Iran added an extra concern to air pollution levels of some cities, raising the particulate concentration to 9 times greater than standard levels.

Dust from the Arabian deserts enters Iran from the neighbors of Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Kuwait, forcing Tehran offices, educational and industrial centers to close.

Particulate concentration in the capital reached 936 micrograms per cubic meter in July. The standard level is 150 micrograms per cubic meters.

Silicon dioxide, calcium, potassium, carbon, and other elements are found in the haze, which can have damage people's respiratory systems.

The latest study by Tehran's Air Quality Control Company (AQCC) finds the level of pollution unprecedented in 30 years in Iran.

The Arabian haze also forced a number of domestic flights between the capital and the southern city of Abadan to be canceled as a thick dust blankets the country.

The Public Relations department of the Ministry of Health and Medical Education in a statement at the time advised that in Iran's western and southwestern areas, including the provinces of Qom, Kurdistan, Chahar-Mahal and Bakhtiari, Zanjan and Fars,

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Kermanshah, Lorestan, and Khuzestan, children, the elderly, and people suffering from heart and lung disease should stay indoors because the haze contains dangerous levels of pollutants.

Desertification of several lagoons in Iraq and the strong winds from the deserts of Saudi Arabia are to blame for the blanket of smog in Iranian cities.

### **86 persons involved in post-vote incidents convicted**

The Judiciary announced on Wednesday that 86 persons arrested in the post-election riots have received final sentences. They have been charged with collusion against national security, propaganda against the system, membership in hostile and anti-revolutionary groups, participation in illegal gatherings, and disturbing public order