

Globalized Business and politics; A View from Muslim world

Weekly report on IRAN

Report # 138

22 September 2010 to 26th September 2010

Presentation Date: 29th September 2010

M. Rasheed

Summary of Report2

IRAN

Politico-Strategic Front 6

- Ahmadinejad's Sept. 11 Claims Have U.S. Diplomats Walking Out on UN Speech
- Ahmadinejad Stature Fades as Pressure Grows on Iran Atomic Work
- Obama Calls Ahmadinejad's United Nations Remarks 'Offensive,' 'Hateful'
- Russia Says Iran 'Heard the Signal' on Its Nuclear Program, RIA Reports
- Stuxnet Computer Virus May Be Targeted at Iran Nuclear Plant, FT Reports
- Computer Worm May Be Targeting Iranian Nuclear Sites
- Ahmadinejad Says Iran Ready to Set Date for Talks on Its Nuclear Program
- US admits futility of anti-Iran sanctions
- Iran, UK foreign ministers meet in NY
- 'Iran may halt 20% enrichment'
- US, Israel behind cyber-attack on Iran?
- IAEA chief criticized for 'partiality'
- Larijani: Obama is international villain
- Iran Confirms Worm Attack, Says Nuclear Plant Is Safe
- Iran defense chief: Russia unreliable
- Ahmadinejad wins MPs backing on 9/11

Economic Front.....21

- Iran Central Bank Says Inflation to Slow to 7% Next Month, Iran Reports
- Iran opens international carpet fair
- 'Iran ready to send more aid to Pakistan'
- Assaluyeh petchem output hits 7m tons
- Iran to boost mine extraction capacity
- 'Iran economy strong despite sanctions'

Social Front25

- IRGC kills Mahabad attack perpetrators
- Iran Army Parade Bombing Kills 12, Injures at Least 80 in West Azerbaijan
- Iran to hold Imam Reza (PBUH) Festival
- Iran sends weekly aid to Pakistan
- Iran's medicine production growing

Summary of Report

Politico-Strategic Front:

Ahmadinejad's Sept. 11 Claims Have U.S. Diplomats Walking Out on UN Speech U.S. and European diplomats walked out of the United Nations General Assembly hall today when Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks possibly were orchestrated to bolster the U.S. economy and “save the Zionist regime.”

Ahmadinejad Stature Fades as Pressure Grows on Iran Atomic Work When Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad first came to the United Nations General Assembly three years ago, he declared the question of Iran’s nuclear program “closed.” Ahmadinejad returned to the UN this week with a different message: that he was open to talks with the U.S. and other Western powers about the nuclear issue.

Obama Calls Ahmadinejad's United Nations Remarks 'Offensive,' 'Hateful' President Barack Obama called Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s remarks at the United Nations yesterday “offensive” and “hateful.” Obama told BBC Persian that “for him to make a statement like that was inexcusable.”

Russia Says Iran 'Heard the Signal' on Its Nuclear Program, RIA Reports Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Iran “heard the signal” and is reviewing the proposals on its nuclear program, RIA Novosti reported.

Stuxnet Computer Virus May Be Targeted at Iran Nuclear Plant, FT Reports A computer worm called Stuxnet, which targets Siemens AG software used to control industrial equipment, may be aimed at destroying a specific plant, possibly Iran’s controversial nuclear facility, according to Ralph Langner, a German industrial controls safety expert, the Financial Times reported.

Computer Worm May Be Targeting Iranian Nuclear Sites A computer worm that has infected industrial computers around the world may be part of a campaign targeting nuclear installations in Iran, computer-security researchers said. The highest concentration of affected

systems -- almost 60 percent -- is in that country, according to data from Symantec Corp., the computer-security software maker.

Ahmadinejad Says Iran Ready to Set Date for Talks on Its Nuclear Program Iran is ready to set a date for talks with a group of six world powers to discuss the Islamic nation's nuclear program, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad told reporters in New York. The Iranian leader said a date could be set if European Union foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton contacts Iran.

US admits futility of anti-Iran sanctions US President Barack Obama has admitted to the futility of tougher sanctions against Iran in forcing the Islamic Republic into giving up its nuclear rights. Obama went on to accuse Iran of being "very resistant to observing basic international norms" and of not willing to engage in "serious negotiations" about its nuclear program which he claimed to have "generated great fear and mistrust in the region and around the world."

Iran, UK foreign ministers meet in NY Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki has held talks with his British counterpart, William Hague, on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York. Mottaki strongly urged London to revise its policies concerning Iran's nuclear program, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and its "double standards" on human rights issues, the foreign ministry said in a Friday statement.

'Iran may halt 20% enrichment' Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad says Tehran will consider halting uranium enrichment to the level of 20 percent when it is assured the Tehran research reactor has the nuclear fuel supply it needs. Ahmadinejad made the remarks during a press conference in New York on Friday.

US, Israel behind cyber-attack on Iran? Experts say a computer worm that has targeted Iran's industrial sites may be part of a cyber-attack by the US or Israel against the Islamic Republic. The Stuxnet, a computer worm that is viewed as potentially the most dangerous piece of computer malware discovered, has targeted industrial computers in Iran. The complex worm recognizes a specific facility's control network and then destroys it.

IAEA chief criticized for 'partiality' Iran's nuclear point-man warns International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Chief Yukiya Amano that his partiality may cost him his legitimacy. In his interview with the German Der Spiegel on Saturday, Salehi gave a "friendly but serious warning" to Amano that Iran would not let itself be used as an instrument for hidden objectives

Larijani: Obama is international villain Iranian Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani has called US President Barack Obama an "international villain" for his earlier remarks about the US support for the Iranian nation.

Iran Confirms Worm Attack, Says Nuclear Plant Is Safe Iran said its Bushehr nuclear power plant is safe after confirming some of its industrial computers have been targeted by a computer

worm and that it is working to counter the cyber-attack. The cyber assault has had no impact on the operations of the plant, Jahfari said. A worm that has infected industrial computers around the world may be part of a campaign targeting nuclear installations in Iran, computer-security researchers said Sept. 24

Iran defense chief: Russia unreliable The Iranian defense minister says Russia's renegeing on an agreement to supply Tehran with the S-300 missile defense system indicates the Kremlin is untrustworthy. He described anti-Iran sanctions as a 'blessing' for the Iranian nation "because they caused the country to pay more attention to domestic capabilities."

Ahmadinejad wins MPs backing on 9/11 Nearly 200 Iranian lawmakers have expressed support for President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's remarks at the UN General Assembly last week. In a statement released on Sunday, 195 lawmakers said Ahmadinejad's remarks brought joy to the Muslim and freedom-seeking nations of the world.

Economic Front

Iran Central Bank Says Inflation to Slow to 7% Next Month, Iran Reports Iran's Central Bank Governor Mahmoud Bahmani said he expects the country's inflation rate to slow to 7 percent by the Iranian calendar month of Mehr, which starts tomorrow, the Tehran-based Iran newspaper reported.

Iran opens international carpet fair Iran's 19th international hand-woven carpet fair has opened with the aim of introducing the Persian carpet and expanding its export market. The seven-day international fair was opened with the presence of Iran's First Vice President Mohammad-Reza Rahimi on Thursday.

'Iran ready to send more aid to Pakistan' Iran's Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki has said that the country is ready to provide more aid to the flood-hit Pakistani people due to the magnitude of the damage. Mottaki made the comment in a meeting with his Pakistani counterpart, Shah Mehmood Qureshi, on the sidelines of the annual UN General Assembly in New York on Friday.

Assaluyeh petchem output hits 7m tons The petrochemical complexes of Assaluyeh produced over 7 million tons of petrochemicals from March 21 to September 6. According to the Iranian Oil Ministry's official news network Shana, some 7,260,069 tons of petrochemicals were produced at the Pars, Nouri (Borzouyeh), Zagros, Jam, Pardis, and Aria Sasol petrochemical complexes in the town in Bushehr province from the beginning of the Iranian calendar year (started March 21, 2010) to September 6. About 2.8 million tons of the petrochemicals were sold on domestic markets.

Iran to boost mine extraction capacity Iran's Deputy Minister of Industries and Mines Mohammad Massoud Sameinejad says Tehran plans to increase the capacity of its mine

extraction to 500 million tons per year. He further explained that currently, mine exploration and extraction capacity amounts to 260 million tons per year.

'Iran economy strong despite sanctions' Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki has played down the impact of US-engineered sanctions on the country over its nuclear program, insisting on Iran's continuous economic growth. The Czech minister, for his part, called for the expansion of relations with the Islamic Republic.

Social Front

IRGC kills Mahabad attack perpetrators Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) has killed the main elements behind the terrorist attack in the northwestern Iranian city of Mahabad. A bomb explosion in West Azarbaijan Province on Wednesday left 12 people dead and at least 80 others injured. The blast took place when people were watching a military parade.

Iran Army Parade Bombing Kills 12, Injures at Least 80 in West Azerbaijan Twelve people were killed and dozens injured in a bombing at an annual military parade in Iran's West Azerbaijan province. The Iranian Foreign Ministry blamed the attack on foreign "elements." The parade is among events throughout Iran marking the start of the annual Sacred Defense Week.

Iran to hold Imam Reza (PBUH) Festival Iran's Islamic Culture and Relations Organization (ICRO) is planning to hold the International Imam Reza (PBUH) Festival in thirty different countries. This year, the ICRO will hold conferences, visual arts exhibitions, and film and theater festivals in an effort to introduce the eighth Shia Imam and his legacy to the world, ICRO cultural deputy Mohsen Pakayin said.

Iran sends weekly aid to Pakistan Commander of the Islamic Republic of Iran Air Force (IRIAF) says the country dispatches 60 tons of humanitarian aid to the flood-stricken Pakistanis every week. Brigadier General Hassan Shah-Safi announced the details regarding Iran's relief operations for the flood-hit Pakistan on the sidelines of a ceremony commemorating pilots that took part in the eight-year Iraqi-imposed war on the Islamic Republic.

Iran's medicine production growing Iran's Health Minister Marzieh Vahid-Dastjerdi says anti-Iran sanctions are the driving force behind the country's progress in the pharmaceutical industry. Presently 96% of the medicinal need of Iranians is produced in the country and the main reason behind Iran's progress in the pharmaceutical industry is Western sanctions," Vahid-Dastjerdi said

Detailed News

Politico-Strategic Front:

Ahmadinejad's Sept. 11 Claims Have U.S. Diplomats Walking Out on UN Speech

U.S. and European diplomats walked out of the United Nations General Assembly hall today when Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks possibly were orchestrated to bolster the U.S. economy and “save the Zionist regime.”

Envoys representing Australia, Canada, Costa Rica and New Zealand also left the speech as Ahmadinejad spoke about the terrorist attacks on New York and the Pentagon near Washington.

“Rather than representing the aspirations and goodwill of the Iranian people, Mr. Ahmadinejad has yet again chosen to spout vile conspiracy theories and anti-Semitic slurs that are as abhorrent and delusional as they are predictable,” Mark Kornblau, spokesman for the U.S. mission to the UN, said in a statement.

During the speech, Ahmadinejad repeated accusations he made earlier in the week that capitalism was the cause of injustice in the world. He also said the U.S. was building up its own nuclear arsenal while pressuring Iran to curtail what he described as legitimate nuclear-energy development work.

Ahmadinejad Stature Fades as Pressure Grows on Iran Atomic Work

When Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad first came to the United Nations General Assembly three years ago, he declared the question of Iran’s nuclear program “closed.”

Ahmadinejad returned to the UN this week with a different message: that he was open to talks with the U.S. and other Western powers about the nuclear issue. He was greeted by a decree signed by Russian President Dmitry Medvedev on Sept. 22 banning weapons sales to Iran, including missile defense systems, in compliance with UN sanctions.

“It was a masterful move and a kick in the teeth of Ahmadinejad,” Suzanne Maloney, a former U.S. State Department policy planner and now a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution in Washington, said in an interview. “His stature certainly has been diminished.”

The contrast between 2007 and this year reflects how Ahmadinejad’s changed status at home and abroad has left him in a weakened position at the UN to counter the growing pressure to scale back his nation’s nuclear program. The U.S. and its allies suspect the program is aimed at developing atomic weapons, while the Iranians say it is purely for electricity generation.

Political turmoil in Tehran has eroded Ahmadinejad's standing in foreign capitals and cast doubt on his ability to negotiate an end to the nuclear dispute, says Cliff Kupchan, an analyst at New York-based risk consultant Eurasia Group.

Political Fights

"Ahmadinejad has been out front in calling for talks with the U.S., but in the context of ongoing factional fighting, the pragmatic conservatives are very unlikely to let him get credit for improving relations with the U.S.," Kupchan said in an e-mail. "Any apparent agreement would likely get torpedoed by domestic rancor."

The U.S., Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia were united this week in telling Ahmadinejad to comply with UN Security Council demands or remain under trade and financial sanctions. The council wants Iran to cease uranium enrichment and answer the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency's questions about whether the effort is designed to achieve a weapons capability.

Iran, home to the world's No. 2 oil reserves, is under UN sanctions because it refuses to curtail uranium enrichment and the development of ballistic missiles that might carry a weapon.

"We cannot tolerate violations" of nuclear non-proliferation accords, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Sept. 22 on the "Charlie Rose" show on PBS.

Sanctions Mount

Ahmadinejad, 53, has been surprised by the strength of the latest Security Council sanctions, adopted June 9, and ensuing penalties imposed by the U.S. and European Union, according to Ilan Berman, vice president of the Washington-based American Foreign Policy Council.

"The experience of Iran, dealing from history, was that the UN Security Council passes a resolution, the global community yawns, and it is essentially business as usual," Berman said in an interview. "But since June there has been a very significant constriction of trade with Iran from countries you would not expect, such as Turkey and South Korea."

South Korea said on Sept. 8 it would ban any new investments for Iranian oil, gas and construction projects. Turkey's gasoline sales to Iran in July plunged to 47.9 million liters from 187.4 million liters a month earlier after U.S. sanctions against Iran took effect, according to Turkey's statistics office.

Turkish View

Turkish President Abdullah Gul, who met with Ahmadinejad in New York, said in a Sept. 22 interview with Charlie Rose that sanctions must be respected. "We are not undermining American policies," he said.

Former Iranian President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani said Sept. 14 that Iran is facing its harshest ever sanctions and Iran's officials should take the threat seriously, according to the Iranian Labor News Agency.

Meanwhile, Ahmadinejad has drawn criticism for his public statements on Israel. Cuba's Fidel Castro chided Ahmadinejad earlier this month for denying the Holocaust and said his anti-Semitism doesn't help the cause for peace.

At the UN yesterday, envoys representing the U.S. and dozens of other countries walked out of the General Assembly when Ahmadinejad suggested the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks were carried out to benefit the U.S. economy and the "Zionist regime." U.S. spokesman Mark Kornblau described the remarks as "abhorrent and delusional."

Supreme Leader

At home, Ahmadinejad is caught in political pressures stemming from allegations of fraud in his re-election last year and power-sharing disputes with Islamic clerics. Ahmadinejad's bid to take control of foreign policy is opposed by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, according to Mohamad Bazzi of the Council on Foreign Relations in New York.

"Under Iran's theocratic system, the supreme leader holds the true levers of power, especially on political and national security matters," Bazzi said in an interview. "When Khamenei has felt Ahmadinejad and his allies went too far, he has reined him in."

A U.S. official said Sept. 22 that while the Obama administration is committed to diplomacy to resolve the nuclear dispute, it isn't clear whether Iran is, due to varying statements from its leadership.

The ambiguity was reflected in President Barack Obama's speech to the General Assembly yesterday.

Obama said while he is willing to bargain with Iran, "the Iranian government must demonstrate a clear and credible commitment, and confirm to the world the peaceful intent of its nuclear program."

Obama Calls Ahmadinejad's United Nations Remarks 'Offensive,' 'Hateful'

President Barack Obama called Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's remarks at the United Nations yesterday "offensive" and "hateful."

In his first comments on the Iranian leader's statement that the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks may have been orchestrated to bolster the U.S. economy and "save the Zionist regime," Obama told BBC Persian that "for him to make a statement like that was inexcusable."

“It was offensive, it was hateful,” Obama said, according to an excerpt of the interview released by the White House.

U.S. and European diplomats walked out of the UN General Assembly hall yesterday when Ahmadinejad delivered his remarks on the Sept. 11 attacks on New York and the Pentagon near Washington. Envoys representing Australia, Canada, Costa Rica and New Zealand also left the speech.

The interview with BBC Persian is part of the president’s attempt to communicate directly with the Iranian people as the U.S. and other nations increase pressure on Ahmadinejad’s government to comply with UN demands that it halt uranium enrichment.

Last year and this year the president released video messages to Iranians hoping to strike “a new beginning” of engagement and coinciding with the festival of Nowruz, when Iranians mark the beginning of spring.

Reaching Iranians

The president did the interview with BBC Persian because it reaches millions of Iranians via television, internet and radio, according to a White House official who briefed reporters on condition of anonymity.

The U.S., Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia were united this week in telling Ahmadinejad to comply with UN Security Council demands or remain under trade and financial sanctions. The council wants Iran to cease uranium enrichment and answer the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency’s questions about whether the effort is designed to achieve a weapons capability.

In his speech to the General Assembly yesterday, Obama said while he is willing to negotiate, “the Iranian government must demonstrate a clear and credible commitment, and confirm to the world the peaceful intent of its nuclear program.”

Political turmoil in Tehran has eroded Ahmadinejad’s standing in foreign capitals and cast doubt on his ability to negotiate an end to the nuclear dispute, said Cliff Kupchan, an analyst at New York-based risk consultant Eurasia Group.

Russia Says Iran ‘Heard the Signal’ on Its Nuclear Program, RIA Reports

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Iran “heard the signal” and is reviewing the proposals on its nuclear program, RIA Novosti reported.

There are “signs” that Iran is taking “seriously” the proposals by five permanent members of the UN Security Council -- the U.S., U.K., China, France and Russia -- plus Germany to help end the deadlock over Iran’s nuclear program, Lavrov told Russian reporters in New York, the state-run news service reported.

Stuxnet Computer Virus May Be Targeted at Iran Nuclear Plant, FT Reports

A computer worm called Stuxnet, which targets Siemens AG software used to control industrial equipment, may be aimed at destroying a specific plant, possibly Iran's controversial nuclear facility, according to Ralph Langner, a German industrial controls safety expert, the Financial Times reported.

Langner was speaking at a closed conference in Maryland this week, the newspaper said.

The virus, which spreads through holes in Microsoft Corp.'s Windows operating system, is the first aimed at destroying physical installations; it's the work of a well financed, highly organized team, probably associated with a national government, the FT said, citing security experts.

According to Symantec Corp., which has been investigating Stuxnet and plans to publish details on Sept. 29, Iran has had more infections than any other country, the newspaper said.

Computer Worm May Be Targeting Iranian Nuclear Sites

A computer worm that has infected industrial computers around the world may be part of a campaign targeting nuclear installations in Iran, computer-security researchers said.

The highest concentration of affected systems -- almost 60 percent -- is in that country, according to data from Symantec Corp., the computer-security software maker. The worm's sophisticated programming and ability to hide itself suggest it may have been built by a government-sponsored organization in a country such as the U.S. or Israel, said Frank Rieger, technology chief at GSMK, a maker of encrypted mobile phones.

He estimated that building the worm cost at least \$3 million and required a team of as many as 10 skilled programmers working about six months.

"All the details so far to me scream that this was created by a nation-state," Rieger said in a telephone interview. Iran's nuclear facilities may have been targets, said Rieger and Richard Falkenrath, principal at the Chertoff Group, a Washington-based security advisory firm.

Iran, which has the world's second-largest oil reserves, is under United Nations sanctions because it has refused to curtail uranium enrichment and the development of ballistic missiles that might carry a weapon. The country started a 1,000-megawatt nuclear-power reactor near the city of Bushehr in August.

'Hides in Windows'

"It is theoretically possible that the U.S. government did this," Falkenrath said during an interview today with Bloomberg Television. "But in my judgment, that's a very remote possibility. It's more likely that Israel did it."

A message left at the Israeli embassy's press office wasn't immediately returned. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security, which is studying the worm, hasn't identified its origins, a spokeswoman said.

The worm initially infects computers running several editions of Microsoft Corp.'s Windows, including older versions such as Windows 2000, and recent ones such as Windows 7, using one of four vulnerabilities known only to the worm's creators, said Liam O Murchu, manager of North American security-response operations for Mountain View, California-based Symantec.

"It hides in Windows and then tries to spread itself to other computers running Windows," O Murchu said. An infected computer shows no ill effects and the worm ensures that no software crashes, which is unusual, he said.

Specific System

As it spreads, the worm searches for connections to a device known as a programmable logic controller, which helps link Windows computers and computerized industrial-control systems, converting commands sent from the Windows machine into a format the industrial machines can understand. The worm targets industrial software made by Munich-based Siemens AG, researchers said.

Once an industrial machine is infected, the worm lies dormant until certain conditions in the machine are met, O Murchu said. For example, when the temperature of a certain component gets hot, the worm might prevent a cooling system from functioning. What conditions the worm waits for are unclear, he said.

"It was designed to go after a specific system set up in a very specific way," O Murchu said. "What we don't yet know is where such a system exists in the real world."

Siemens' Software Fix

Symantec estimated in July that 14,000 individual computers connected to the Internet worldwide had shown signs of Stuxnet infections. The highest concentration -- 59 percent -- were in Iran; 18 percent were in Indonesia; 8 percent in India and less than 2 percent in the U.S.

Siemens learned of the worm in July and issued software within a week to detect and remove it, said Alexander Machowetz, a company spokesman in Erlangen, Germany. The fix was downloaded 12,000 times, and 15 customers said they were affected.

No new cases of Stuxnet infections have been reported since the end of August, and Siemens was not able to determine the worm's country of origin, Machowetz said.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security has been running the worm on test systems to monitor its patterns since July, said Amy Kudwa, a department spokeswoman.

'Preventing the Spread'

"The focus is one of mitigating and preventing the spread," she said. "It is the first malware we have seen that specifically targets control systems."

While the department hasn't concentrated on tracking the origins, "we cannot validate the claims of attribution," Kudwa said.

Microsoft teamed up with researchers at Symantec and at Kaspersky Lab, a Moscow-based antivirus software firm, to create a removal tool for Stuxnet, Jerry Bryant, group manager for the Redmond, Washington-based company's response communications, said in a company blog post dated Sept. 13. Since then "the threat has gone way down from the spike we saw in early August," Bryant wrote.

Symantec plans to publish more details from its analysis of the worm at the Virus Bulletin International Conference in Vancouver on Sept. 29.

There is historical precedent for cyber attacks by nation- states, according to a 2004 book by a former U.S. Air Force secretary.

Spies working for the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency inserted malicious software into computer-control systems for a Soviet natural-gas pipeline in Siberia, Thomas C. Reed wrote in "At The Abyss: An Insider's History Of The Cold War."

Ultimately the effort caused a massive explosion, said Reed, who was Air Force Secretary in the 1970s and later advised President Ronald Reagan on national security policy.

The Financial Times published a story on the worm yesterday.

Ahmadinejad Says Iran Ready to Set Date for Talks on Its Nuclear Program

Iran is ready to set a date for talks with a group of six world powers to discuss the Islamic nation's nuclear program, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad told reporters in New York.

"Possibly in October; we are prepared to talk," Ahmadinejad said at a news conference today at the Warwick Hotel. "The door is open for talks and negotiations" in a "framework of justice and respect."

The Iranian leader said a date could be set if European Union foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton contacts Iran.

Ahmadinejad, 53, has faced growing pressure since arriving in New York six days ago to curb his nation's nuclear program. The U.S., Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia were united this week in telling Iran to comply with UN Security Council demands or remain under trade and financial sanctions.

The council wants Iran to cease uranium enrichment and answer the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency's questions about whether the effort is designed to achieve a weapons capability. Iran, home to the world's No. 2 oil reserves, is under UN sanctions because it refuses to curtail uranium enrichment and the development of ballistic missiles that might carry a weapon.

"We cannot tolerate violations" of nuclear non-proliferation accords, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Sept. 22 on the "Charlie Rose" show on PBS.

Venue for Negotiations

Iran hasn't officially responded to an offer to meet with representatives of the U.S. and other permanent Security Council members plus Germany, which is the "appropriate venue" for talks, Mike Hammer, spokesman for President Barack Obama's National Security Council, said.

"The international community is interested in diplomacy that yields concrete Iranian steps to meet their obligations and demonstrate the peaceful intent of their nuclear program," Hammer said. "But we aren't interested in diplomacy for diplomacy's sake."

Ahmadinejad may not be in position to negotiate a settlement of the nuclear issue because of his battles with political opponents in Iran, according to Fariborz Ghadar, a senior adviser at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington.

Factions in Tehran

"There are difficulties he is having back in Tehran with different factions defying him," Ghadar said in an interview. These elements are warning Ahmadinejad, "cozy too much with the U.S., and we can cause problems. He has got to play gently across this maze he has found himself in."

Ahmadinejad, in his news conference, cast doubt on the likely success of international talks, should they resume. He recalled that the UN Security Council adopted more stringent sanctions against Iran on June 9, in the midst of its talks with Brazil and Turkey over an exchange of enriched uranium that might defuse tensions.

"The end has come for this kind of behavior, this imperialistic behavior," Ahmadinejad said. "They say they want to use a carrot-and-stick policy. They admit they want to use a stick on us. It is an insult to a nation to use that term."

Ahmadinejad said the sanctions adopted by the Security Council, and followed by penalties imposed by the U.S. and European Union, haven't damaged Iran's economy.

"These sanctions have no impact on the Iranian people. Their methods have failed," Ahmadinejad said. "Our economy is indigenously based. In the past four years we have advanced several times faster than we did before" sanctions were imposed, he said.

Tighter Sanctions

Ahmadinejad has been surprised by the strength of the latest sanctions, according to Ilan Berman, vice president of the Washington-based American Foreign Policy Council.

“The experience of Iran, dealing from history, was that the UN Security Council passes a resolution, the global community yawns, and it is essentially business as usual,” Berman said in an interview. “But since June there has been a very significant constriction of trade with Iran from countries you would not expect, such as Turkey and South Korea.”

South Korea said on Sept. 8 it would ban any new investments for Iranian oil, gas and construction projects. Turkey’s gasoline sales to Iran in July plunged to 47.9 million liters from 187.4 million liters a month earlier after U.S. sanctions against Iran took effect, according to Turkey’s statistics office.

Serious Threat

Former Iranian President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani said Sept. 14 that Iran is facing its harshest ever sanctions and Iran’s officials should take the threat seriously, according to the Iranian Labor News Agency.

Asked about criticism of his speech yesterday to the UN General Assembly, in which he suggested the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks might have been carried out to benefit the U.S. economy and the “Zionist regime,” Ahmadinejad said he was only listing existing theories, not making a judgment on their likelihood.

“Did I say anything wrong?” he asked.

The conviction that al-Qaeda committed the Sept. 11 attacks must be questioned because it became the U.S. rationale for invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq that were “wrong to begin with,” Ahmadinejad said.

Dozens of nations joined the U.S. in walking out of Ahmadinejad’s speech in protest. Obama called the remarks “offensive” and “hateful” in an interview today with BBC Persian.

US admits futility of anti-Iran sanctions

US President Barack Obama has admitted to the futility of tougher sanctions against Iran in forcing the Islamic Republic into giving up its nuclear rights.

"There are no guarantees" that the latest set of punitive measures could get Tehran to halt its nuclear activities, Obama said in an interview with the state-run BBC Persian service in New York on Friday, AFP reported.

Obama went on to accuse Iran of being "very resistant to observing basic international norms" and of not willing to engage in "serious negotiations" about its nuclear program which he claimed to have "generated great fear and mistrust in the region and around the world."

Obama made the remarks on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York, and after Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said Tehran was open to talks on its nuclear program.

"The door is open for talks and negotiations within a framework of justice and respect," the Iranian president told reporters.

Officials in Tehran have repeatedly assured the country's nuclear program does not have military objectives and is aimed at medical research and meeting its increasing energy demands at home.

The wielder of the world's largest nuclear arsenals and the first and only nation to have ever used an atomic bomb, the United States spearheaded efforts to persuade the UN Security Council and Europe to impose tougher sanctions against Iran over its nuclear program.

Iran, UK foreign ministers meet in NY

Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki has held talks with his British counterpart, William Hague, on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York.

Mottaki strongly urged London to revise its policies concerning Iran's nuclear program, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and its "double standards" on human rights issues, the foreign ministry said in a Friday statement.

Mottaki said a change in policies and actions of the UK "is the sole way to patch up severely-damaged Tehran-London relations."

"[Possessing a] nuclear fuel cycle is the inalienable right of NPT (Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty) signatory states," read the statement.

"Britain does not want to be presented as an enemy of Iran and is keen on improving relations with the Islamic republic," the statement quoted Hague as saying.

United Kingdom's support for US-engineered UN Security Council and unilateral sanctions against Iran over allegations that Tehran is following a military nuclear program has cast a cloud on the relations between the two countries.

Iran rejects the Western charges, arguing that as a member of the International Atomic Energy Agency and a signatory to the NPT, it is entitled to use peaceful nuclear energy.

'Iran may halt 20% enrichment'

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad says Tehran will consider halting uranium enrichment to the level of 20 percent when it is assured the Tehran research reactor has the nuclear fuel supply it needs.

Ahmadinejad made the remarks during a press conference in New York on Friday.

"We were not interested to enrich to 20 percent. They [the US and its allies] politicized the issue. We were forced to do it to support the patients," he said.

But he added, "We will consider halting [20 percent] uranium enrichment whenever nuclear fuel is provided to us."

He went on to say that Iran would still allow UN inspectors to oversee its nuclear activities, but called on them to conduct their inspections within the framework of IAEA rules and regulations.

Ahmadinejad also stated that Tehran is open to talks over its nuclear energy program, adding that an Iranian envoy will meet with representatives from the P5+1 group — the United States, Britain, France, Russia, China, and Germany — in October for preparatory talks.

"We are ready for talks. The doors are open for talks, within the framework of justice and respect," he added.

The Iranian president also said that some members of the six international powers negotiating on the nuclear issue had had contacts with Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly this week.

He suggested that a specific date could be set should European Union foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton contact the Iranian representative.

Defending his proposal for the formation of an independent UN probe into the September 11, 2001 attacks, Ahmadinejad said, "The event was very suspicious, but I do not wish to pass judgment. I simply tried to offer a proposal for a humane solution to problems that have arisen as a result of 9/11.

"Don't you feel that the time has come to have a fact-finding committee?"

"The fact-finding mission can shed light on who the perpetrators were, who al-Qaida is, where it exists, and who supported it."

In his address at the UN General Assembly session in New York on Thursday, President Ahmadinejad criticized the US response to the 9/11 attacks, saying the incident was used as a pretext to invade Iraq and Afghanistan.

On Saturday, President Ahmadinejad departed from New York and headed back to the Islamic Republic of Iran.

US, Israel behind cyber-attack on Iran?

Experts say a computer worm that has targeted Iran's industrial sites may be part of a cyber-attack by the US or Israel against the Islamic Republic.

The Stuxnet, a computer worm that is viewed as potentially the most dangerous piece of computer malware discovered, has targeted industrial computers in Iran.

The complex worm recognizes a specific facility's control network and then destroys it.

Experts say the worm, which has a very sophisticated design, may have been created by a state-sponsored organization in the US or Israel to target specific control software being used in the Iranian industrial sector, including the Bushehr plant -- Iran's first nuclear power plant.

"All the details so far to me scream that this was created by a nation-state," Bloomberg quoted Frank Rieger, technology chief for a maker of encrypted mobile phones, as saying.

Iran's nuclear facilities may have been the targets, said both Rieger and Richard Falkenrath of the Chertoff Group, a Washington-based security advisory firm.

"It is theoretically possible that the US government did this," Falkenrath said during an interview with Bloomberg Television on Saturday. "But in my judgment, that's a very remote possibility. It's more likely that Israel did it."

Meanwhile, a top US cyber-security official claims that the US does not know who is behind the cyber-attack and is still analyzing the worm.

"We've conducted analysis on the software itself," Sean McGurk, director of the National Cybersecurity and Communications Integration Center, told reporters on Friday.

"It's very difficult to say 'This is what it was targeted to do,'" he said, adding the center was not looking for those behind the attack but it rather sought to prevent the spread.

The US and Israel accuse Iran of developing a nuclear weapons program. Iran rejects the allegation, saying its nuclear program is solely for peaceful purposes.

The International Atomic Energy Agency, in its several reports, has confirmed that it continues to verify the country's non-diversion from its peaceful path.

IAEA chief criticized for 'partiality'

Iran's nuclear point-man warns International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Chief Yukiya Amano that his partiality may cost him his legitimacy.

"Mr. Amano should be careful to not lose his legitimacy due to his partiality in favor of a certain politics," Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran Ali Akbar Salehi said on Saturday.

In his interview with the German Der Spiegel on Saturday, Salehi gave a "friendly but serious warning" to Amano that Iran would not let itself be used as an instrument for hidden objectives.

Salehi said he wondered whether the IAEA chief was looking for an excuse to launch an attack against Iran.

"Does Mr. Amano want to associate his name with a war? Does Mr. Amano want a catastrophe?" AFP quoted the Iranian nuclear chief as telling the German magazine.

Earlier in September, Amano released his latest report on Tehran's nuclear work in which although the "non-diversion of declared nuclear material in Iran" was once again confirmed, the country was urged to "cooperate in clarifying outstanding issues," and also to "act strictly in accordance with the provisions of, and to ratify promptly, the Additional Protocol."

He has also claimed Iran's decision to bar the agency's two inspectors would "hamper the inspection process."

Iran barred two IAEA inspectors from entering the country in June on grounds that they had leaked information to the media before the official issuance of the agency's report on Iran's nuclear program.

In reaction to the IAEA chief's report and his comments, Salehi said Amano won the agency's election for secretary general last year with a very narrow margin because there was a notion that he could be easily swayed by certain countries.

"So far, Amano has unfortunately shown that he is not acting according to the agency's regulations and exerts his personal stance," Salehi expressed.

Amano claimed in his first report on Iran, released on February 18 and amid a US campaign to win international support for adopting sanctions against Tehran, that the IAEA had "concerns about the possible existence in Iran of past or current undisclosed activities" that could enable the Iranian military to develop a nuclear bomb.

His report came while the agency had in its previous reports confirmed the non-diversion of Iran's nuclear program.

Larijani: Obama is international villain

Iranian Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani has called US President Barack Obama an "international villain" for his earlier remarks about the US support for the Iranian nation.

"How dare Obama say these words that he seeks to help the Iranian nation? He should know that he is an international villain who has never supported the Iranian nation," ISNA quoted Larijani as saying in the southern city of Shiraz on Saturday.

"The US is currently standing against the Iranian nation. Obama should know that we do not need a message, what we need is to be able to trust his words," he said.

"The Americans are displaying an attitude that deserves an international evilness medal," the Majlis speaker added.

Larijani's remarks came one day after the US president said the door for diplomacy with Tehran was still open over its long-standing nuclear dispute with the international community.

"Our strong preference is to resolve these issues diplomatically. I think that's in Iran's interest. I think that is in the interest of the international community," Obama said.

Iran Confirms Worm Attack, Says Nuclear Plant Is Safe

Iran said its Bushehr nuclear power plant is safe after confirming some of its industrial computers have been targeted by a computer worm and that it is working to counter the cyber-attack.

"The main systems of the Bushehr nuclear power plant have not been damaged," Mahmoud Jahfari, the plant's project manager, told the official Islamic Republic News Agency today. "Investigations show that some private software of the power plant's employees have been contaminated."

The cyber assault has had no impact on the operations of the plant, Jahfari said.

The IP addresses of 30,000 computer systems infected by the Stuxnet worm have been detected, state-run Mehr news agency reported earlier, citing Mahmoud Liaii, director of the Information Technology Council of the Ministry of Industries and Mines. A worm is a self-replicating piece of malicious software, or malware.

"An electronic war has been launched against Iran," Liaii said in the report published late yesterday. "This computer worm is designed to transfer data about production lines from our industrial plants to locations outside Iran."

A worm that has infected industrial computers around the world may be part of a campaign targeting nuclear installations in Iran, computer-security researchers said Sept. 24. Almost 60 percent of affected systems are in Iran, according to data from Symantec Corp., the computer-security software maker.

The malware's sophisticated programming and ability to hide itself suggest it may have been built by a government-sponsored organization in a country such as the U.S. or Israel, said Frank Rieger, technology chief at GSMK, a maker of encrypted mobile phones.

Liaii said a working group, which includes representatives from the Communications and Information Technology Ministry and the Industries and Mines Ministry, has been set up to look into ways to combat the worm.

Communications and Information Technology Minister Reza Taghipour said no "serious damage" to the country's industrial computer systems have so far been reported. Iranian engineers have the expertise to counter the threat, the Mehr report cited him as saying.

Iran is under United Nations sanctions over its nuclear program, which the U.S. and Israel along with other allies accuse of being a cover for the development of atomic weapons. Iran rejects the claim and says it needs the technology for civilian uses such as electricity generation and medical research.

Iran inaugurated its first nuclear-power plant in the southern province of Bushehr on Aug. 21 when it started the process of loading fuel rods into the Russian-built plant.

Iran defense chief: Russia unreliable

The Iranian defense minister says Russia's renegeing on an agreement to supply Tehran with the S-300 missile defense system indicates the Kremlin is untrustworthy.

"They (the Russians) showed that they are not reliable," Brigadier General Ahmad Vahidi was quoted by Fars News Agency as saying on Sunday.

"What do they think will happen if they do not give us the S-300 [missile defense system]?" the Iranian general asked.

"We don't care. After all, many of our experts do not approve of the Russian S-300 (missile defense system)."

General Vahidi stressed that sanctions had only led to Iran's progress, adding that rescinding the deal was a major disgrace for Russia as it showed "they cannot maintain their independence [even] on simple matters."

He described anti-Iran sanctions as a 'blessing' for the Iranian nation "because they caused the country to pay more attention to domestic capabilities."

Ahmadinejad wins MPs backing on 9/11

Nearly 200 Iranian lawmakers have expressed support for President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's remarks at the UN General Assembly last week.

In a statement released on Sunday, 195 lawmakers said Ahmadinejad's remarks brought joy to the Muslim and freedom-seeking nations of the world.

On Thursday, Ahmadinejad proposed that an independent UN committee investigate the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington over what he called "suspicious" circumstances surrounding the attacks.

Two Iranian lawmakers shared their views on the controversial call with Press TV.

"President Ahmadinejad's revolutionary standings are naturally not pleasant for countries like the United States and Britain, and therefore they are worried," head of the Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Commission Alaeddin Boroujerdi said Sunday.

"Ahmadinejad referred to an issue which has been a big question mark in the minds of Americans. Naturally the United States is not happy about Ahmadinejad's speech, because there are many ambiguities surrounding the 9/11 incident, especially over its connection with the Zionist Regime [of Israel]."

Lawmaker Hassan Ghafourifard said Ahmadinejad "was criticizing the position of the United States about what happened on September 11, because so many people were killed in that incident. Then America felt justified to attack Iraq and Afghanistan."

"No body cares about the kind of killing that is going on in Afghanistan. And President Ahmadinejad said we have to do a researched probe to find out what was really behind that attack," he added.

Economic Front

Iran Central Bank Says Inflation to Slow to 7% Next Month, Iran Reports

Iran's Central Bank Governor Mahmoud Bahmani said he expects the country's inflation rate to slow to 7 percent by the Iranian calendar month of Mehr, which starts tomorrow, the Tehran-based Iran newspaper reported.

Iran's inflation rate fell to 8.8 percent during the 12 month-period through Aug. 22 from an annual rate of 9.1 percent in July, the Central Bank said earlier this month.

Iran opens international carpet fair

Iran's 19th international hand-woven carpet fair has opened with the aim of introducing the Persian carpet and expanding its export market.

The seven-day international fair was opened with the presence of Iran's First Vice President Mohammad-Reza Rahimi on Thursday.

More than 400 Iranian carpet producers and exporters have gathered in the Tehran Permanent International Fairgrounds to display carpets from different parts of the country.

Iran's carpet exports increased by nearly 50 percent to hit \$204 million in the first five months of the current Iranian year — which began on March 21.

Rahimi predicted that the country's carpet exports will pass \$500 million by the end of the year.

Iran exports hand-woven carpets — its main non-oil export — to more than 100 countries.

The country produces about five million square meters of carpets annually — 80 percent of which are sold in international markets.

There is an estimated population of 1.2 million weavers in Iran producing carpets for domestic and international markets.

'Iran ready to send more aid to Pakistan'

Iran's Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki has said that the country is ready to provide more aid to the flood-hit Pakistani people due to the magnitude of the damage.

Mottaki made the comment in a meeting with his Pakistani counterpart, Shah Mehmood Qureshi, on the sidelines of the annual UN General Assembly in New York on Friday.

Qureshi, for his part, hailed Iran for sending relief supplies to Pakistan, beginning at the start of flooding in the country.

The Pakistani foreign minister said that his country is ready to hold the next meeting of the Iran-Pakistan Joint Economic Cooperation in Islamabad.

Qureshi also reiterated on Pakistan's stance regarding Iran's right to nuclear energy for peaceful purposes and said that Iran's nuclear issue can be resolved only through dialog.

The death toll from Pakistan's floods has risen to more than 1,600, with up to 20 million people affected by the floods.

Iran, which was among the first countries to send aid to Pakistan, has so far dispatched 140 tons of humanitarian aid to the flood-stricken country.

In continuation of his meetings on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly, Mottaki also held separate talks with his counterparts from Syria, South Africa, and Mauritania.

They discussed regional and international developments, as well as means to further expand relations.

Mottaki also held talks with Lamberto Dini, the chairman of the Italian Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Both parties called for further cooperation between the two countries.

The Iranian top diplomat also updated the Italian official on the latest developments regarding Iran's nuclear work.

Assaluyeh petchem output hits 7m tons

The petrochemical complexes of Assaluyeh produced over 7 million tons of petrochemicals from March 21 to September 6.

According to the Iranian Oil Ministry's official news network Shana, some 7,260,069 tons of petrochemicals were produced at the Pars, Nouri (Borzouyeh), Zagros, Jam, Pardis, and Aria Sasol petrochemical complexes in the town in Bushehr province from the beginning of the Iranian calendar year (started March 21, 2010) to September 6.

Iran exported 7.14 million tons of petrochemicals worth \$4.2 billion in the first five months of the current Iranian calendar year. The country produced over 16 million tons of petrochemicals in the five-month period, the Mehr news agency reported.

About 2.8 million tons of the petrochemicals were sold on domestic markets.

Iran exported around 14 million tons of petrochemical products worth more than \$9 billion in 2009.

In May, National Iranian Petrochemical Company Managing Director Abdolhossein Bayat said Iran accounts for 25.8 percent of the Middle East's production of petrochemicals.

The Islamic Republic plans to produce 44 million tons of petrochemicals during the current Iranian calendar year, which ends on March 20, 2011.

Iran's 20-Year Outlook Plan envisions the petrochemical output capacity to reach 100 million tons by 2015 — which is the end of the Fifth Five-Year Development Plan (2010-2015) — thus making Iran the world's second largest chemical producer globally after Dow Chemical.

Iran to boost mine extraction capacity

Iran's Deputy Minister of Industries and Mines Mohammad Massoud Sameinejad says Tehran plans to increase the capacity of its mine extraction to 500 million tons per year.

“Considering the needs of the country and the potential investments in this sector, the Industries and Mines Ministry has proposed a plan to increase the capacity of mine extraction to 500 million tons annually by the end of the country's Fifth Five-Year Development Plan (2010-2015),” Sameinejad told IRNA on Sunday.

He further explained that currently, mine exploration and extraction capacity amounts to 260 million tons per year.

The senior official also added that based on the proposed plan, the Islamic Republic also aims to boost the annual production capacity of crude steel, cement, aluminum and copper cathode to 42, 110, 0.91 and 0.45 million tons, respectively.

Sameinejad, however, stressed that the plan has to be approved by the Iranian Parliament (Majlis) before its implementation.

Stressing that at present the share of the industry and mining sector in Iran's gross domestic product equals to 0.8 percent, he added that this value will climb to 1.2 percent by the end of the Fifth Development Plan.

'Iran economy strong despite sanctions'

Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki has played down the impact of US-engineered sanctions on the country over its nuclear program, insisting on Iran's continuous economic growth.

"Despite the global financial crisis, Iran's economy not only averted a recession, but continues to maintain a good position by achieving an eye-catching growth in its stock exchange market and reducing the national unemployment rate," Fars news agency quoted Mottaki as saying in a meeting with Foreign Minister of the Czech Republic Karel Schwarzenberg in New York on Saturday.

He stressed that while Iran manufactured only 10 percent of the equipment used in its oil and gas industry before the US-led sanctions were imposed, that figure has now drastically climbed to 70 percents, reflecting the ineffectiveness of the sanctions.

The Czech minister, for his part, called for the expansion of relations with the Islamic Republic.

Tehran has vehemently rejected the West's accusations that it is developing nuclear weapons, insisting that as a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, it has the right to pursue and utilize many civilian applications of nuclear technology.

However, bending to extraordinary anti-Iran efforts by the US and its European allies, the UN Security Council imposed a fourth round of sanctions on Iran in June which was followed by additional unilateral sanctions by the US and the EU.

Meanwhile, Mottaki and Secretary General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union Anders B. Johnsson exchanged views on the latest developments of parliaments across the world.

The Iranian minister pointed out that all parliaments should exercise equal rights and called for putting an end to interfering measures by certain countries in such strategies.

In another meeting between the Iranian foreign minister and his Turkish counterpart Ahmet Davutoglu, the two sides discussed ways to promote bilateral, regional and international cooperation.

Mottaki praised growing ties with Ankara in political, economic and cultural fields and stressed the significance of implementing all agreements already signed between the two sides.

Davutoglu, for his part, said Iran and Turkey should enhance their cooperation, particularly in setting up a free trade zones on border regions.

Social Front

IRGC kills Mahabad attack perpetrators

Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) has killed the main elements behind the terrorist attack in the northwestern Iranian city of Mahabad.

A bomb explosion in West Azarbaijan Province on Wednesday left 12 people dead and at least 80 others injured. The blast took place when people were watching a military parade.

"The soldiers of Hamzeh Seyyed al-Shohada base have killed the main perpetrators of the recent terrorist attack in Mahabad," the commander of the IRGC Ground Forces Brigadier General Mohammad Pakpour said on Sunday.

Iranian police arrested two people in connection with the terrorist attack on Wednesday.

Earlier on Thursday, Iran's Intelligence Minister Heidar Moslehi had said that the group behind the terrorist attack had been identified.

"Investigations show that the Israeli spy agency [Mossad] was the mastermind of the Mahabad terrorist attack," Fars News Agency quoted Pakpour as saying.

The Iranian commander added that Mossad dispatched the terrorist team to Iran with the cooperation of Americans and some members of Iraq's Baath party.

The enemies should know that old scenarios against the Islamic Revolution such as creating terror can never affect the Iranian nation's resolve to defend the establishment of the Islamic Republic, Pakpour concluded.

Iran Army Parade Bombing Kills 12, Injures at Least 80 in West Azerbaijan

Twelve people were killed and dozens injured in a bombing at an annual military parade in Iran's West Azerbaijan province. The Iranian Foreign Ministry blamed the attack on foreign "elements."

At least 80 people were hurt in the blast early today, the official Islamic Republic News Agency reported. Some were in critical condition, a nurse said by telephone from the emergency room at Imam Khomeini Hospital in the city of Mahabad, about 550 kilometers (340 miles) west of Tehran. She declined to give her name.

“The terrorist attack in Mahabad is the reaction of elements of the Zionist regime and their supporters to our defense might and the success of Iran’s active diplomacy in New York,” where President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is taking part in meetings at the United Nations, IRNA cited Ramin Mehmanparast, the Persian Gulf country’s Foreign Ministry spokesman, as saying.

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, also in New York for UN meetings, condemned the bombing in a statement sent to reporters and said the attack “underscores the international community’s need to work together to combat terrorism that threatening the lives of innocent civilians all around the world.”

“Most of those injured and killed are women and children,” provincial Governor Vahid Jalalzadeh was cited as saying by IRNA. The wives of two military commanders were among the dead, the state-run Mehr news agency said. The bomb was hidden in a bag among spectators, Iran’s Arabic-language al-Alam television reported.

The governor has announced three days of mourning in Mahabad and tomorrow will be a public holiday to honor the dead and injured, IRNA said.

The region has been the scene of anti-government attacks by the Party for a Free Life in Kurdistan, or PJAK, which says it wants autonomy for Iran’s Kurdish areas.

The parade is among events throughout Iran marking the start of the annual Sacred Defense Week.

Iran to hold Imam Reza (PBUH) Festival

Iran's Islamic Culture and Relations Organization (ICRO) is planning to hold the International Imam Reza (PBUH) Festival in thirty different countries.

This year, the ICRO will hold conferences, visual arts exhibitions, and film and theater festivals in an effort to introduce the eighth Shia Imam and his legacy to the world, ICRO cultural deputy Mohsen Pakayin said.

The 8th Shi'a leader, Imam Reza (PBUH), was born in Medina and is widely known for his extraordinary scholarship and saintly characteristics.

He is remembered today for his many outstanding qualities including his all-encompassing knowledge, kindness towards slaves, unshakable faith and nobility.

“Disseminating the Razavi [related to the eighth Shi'a Imam, Reza (PBUH)] culture as a manifestation of Islam is necessary for fulfilling man's cultural and spiritual needs,” he added.

The International Imam Reza (PBUH) Festival will kick off late October in the northeastern Iranian city of Mashhad where the Imam has been laid to rest.

The festival will be held in 31 Iranian provinces and 30 countries, IRNA reported.

Iranian scholars will be sent to other host countries, international researchers will attend the event in Iran, and cultural products will be distributed among participants of the festival.

Iran sends weekly aid to Pakistan

Commander of the Islamic Republic of Iran Air Force (IRIAF) says the country dispatches 60 tons of humanitarian aid to the flood-stricken Pakistanis every week.

Brigadier General Hassan Shah-Safi announced the details regarding Iran's relief operations for the flood-hit Pakistan on the sidelines of a ceremony commemorating pilots that took part in the eight-year Iraqi-imposed war on the Islamic Republic.

“IRIAF fleet transports aid reliefs to Pakistan twice a week via Boeing 747 aircrafts,” Fars news agency quoted General Shah-Safi as saying on Saturday.

Referring to the extensive donations received from the Iranian population, he said that an average of 60-ton plane loads are transported to Karachi and Islamabad airports every week.

“Such flights will continue operating on demand of Iran's Red Crescent Society,” the Iranian commander went on to say.

The death toll from Pakistan's floods has exceeded the 1,600 mark, as up to 20 million people have been affected by the historic tragedy.

The World Health Organization has warned of the threat of an epidemic break-out in Pakistan's flood-hit areas.

Iran, which was among the first countries to send aid to Pakistan, has so far dispatched over 140 tons of humanitarian aid to the flood-stricken country.

Iran's medicine production growing

Iran's Health Minister Marzieh Vahid-Dastjerdi says anti-Iran sanctions are the driving force behind the country's progress in the pharmaceutical industry.

"Presently 96% of the medicinal need of Iranians is produced in the country and the main reason behind Iran's progress in the pharmaceutical industry is Western sanctions," Vahid-Dastjerdi said in a Sunday meeting with her Lebanese counterpart Mohamad Jawad Khalifeh.

"Many pharmaceutical companies in the world have formed international drug cartels...unfortunately individuals with quasi-Zionist mannerism head many of these firms," the Iranian health minister told Fars News Agency.

Vahid-Dastjerdi said working with other Muslim countries such as Lebanon could increase bilateral capabilities to "export medication not only to the region but also [other countries] in the world."

Khalifeh for his part proposed working with Syria and Iran on producing, patenting and exporting medication."

"Advanced labs for quality control and marketing are being opened in Lebanon and Iran is welcome to use this successful experience [as an example] in order to increase its regional export [rate]," the Lebanese minister added.