

Business and politics in Muslim world

Weekly report on Iran

Report # 104

31st January 2010 to 06 February 2010

Presentation Date: 10th February 2010

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Summary

Commander Warns of West's Attempts to Undermine Islamic Republic

A senior military commander on Saturday cautioned against the plots hatched by the world powers to undermine the Islamic Republic.

Ahmadinejad Urges Need for Committed Managers

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad says Iran needs revolutionary, skillful and committed managers to fulfill aspirations of its 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Leader Commends Plan to Issue New IDs

Supreme Leader of Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei has commended a plan to issue new identity cards for Iranians.

Iran Eyes Further Cooperation with South Korea

Secretary General of the Chamber of Cooperatives said Iran is ready to deepen cooperation with South Korea, particularly in the field of cooperatives

Larijani: U.S. Striving to Sow Discord Among Muslims

Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani lashed out at the United States for its attempts to create a rift among the Muslim nations, saying that Washington is seeking to sow discord among Islamic states in a bid to establish a presence in such countries.

Pakistani Speaker Due in Iran

Pakistan's National Assembly Speaker Fehmida Mirza is scheduled to pay a visit to Tehran on Wednesday, Iranian Ambassador to Islamabad Mashallah Shakeri told FNA

Iran Proposes Establishment of Islamic Parliament

Iran proposed the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) Inter-Parliamentary Union to prepare the ground for establishment of an Islamic Parliament.

Iranian Experts to Construct Iran-Turkmenistan Railway

Tehran's Envoy to Turkmenistan has announced that the country's experts are to construct a railway to link Iran to the Central Asian states of Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan.

Ugandan President Supports Iran's N. Rights

Ugandan President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni supported Iran's right to access nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.

Three US hikers held in Iran for six months

Three young American hikers have been detained in Iran for six months now, and their parents on Sunday reiterated their call for Iran to release their loved ones.

Iran dismisses Clinton's comments on sanctions

Iran's Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki on Sunday dismissed remarks made by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton over the need for new sanctions against Tehran.

US slams Iran over lack of consular access to detained hikers

The United States on Tuesday voiced deep concern about the welfare of three Americans detained in Iran since last July and condemned Tehran's refusal to allow Swiss diplomats to visit the trio in three months.

US senators press Obama on Iran sanctions

Key US senators from both parties on Wednesday urged President Barack Obama to pursue sanctions against Iran, with or without United Nations support.

Iran military chief slams remarks by US commanders

The chief of staff of Iran's armed forces, Major-General Hassan Firouzabadi, said in remarks published on Friday that recent remarks by US military commanders on Tehran's nuclear program were "irrational".

Iran rejects Saudi claims on Yemen

Iran on Sunday rejected Saudi Arabia's charge over Tehran's role in Yemen and called on Riyadh to change its policies in Yemen.

Iranian Cyber Army" hacks Dutch-based Persian website

The website of the Dutch-based Persian language radio station, Radio Zamaneh, was hacked over the weekend by a group calling themselves the "Iranian Cyber Army", Reuters reported on Sunday.

Eyeing Iran, US boosts defenses in Persian Gulf

The United States and its Arab allies in the Persian Gulf have stepped up their military defense in recent months, to counter what is seen as Iran's growing missile threat, US officials said on Sunday.

Blair points to growing threat from Iran

Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair on Friday voiced serious concerns about Iran's links with terrorist organizations and said Tehran was partly to blame for instability in the region

OIC approves Iran's proposal for Gaza Day

The Parliamentary Union of the Organization of the Islamic Conference has approved Iran's proposal to designate a day on the official calendars of Islamic countries as the Day of Gaza and Resistance.

Pressuring Judiciary to make political decisions is illegal:

Judiciary Chief Ayatollah Sadeq Larijani says that it is against the national law and the sharia (Islamic law) to pressure the judicial system to make political decisions.

Iran left with no choice but to produce 20% enriched fuel:

A former lawmaker stated here on Sunday that the West has left Iran with no alternative but to enrich uranium to 20 percent level needed for its medicine reactor.

Case of German Diplomats to Be Reviewed

Iran is studying the case of two German Embassy staffers linked with the recent post-election unrest in the country, a diplomat close to the case said.

U.S. Sanctions to Hit Indian Oil Companies Engaged in Iran

Indian companies engaged in Iran's energy sector could be in for some turbulence as legislation seeking to curb foreign participation in Iran's fuel sector reaches the final stage in the U.S. Congress.

Foreign Trade Boosts Despite Sanctions

Iran enjoys enhanced foreign trade despite the economic sanctions, head of chamber of commerce, industries and mines said yesterday.

4 New Satellites to Be Unveiled

Defense Minister Ahmad Vahidi announced yesterday that tens of projects in the field of aerospace technologies will be inaugurated on Wednesday February 3.

Iran Rejects Saudi Claim of Meddling in Yemen

Foreign Ministry rejected Saudi claims of Tehran's interference in Yemen, urging Riyadh to revise its own policies regarding Sana'a rather than pointing fingers at others.

Tehran to Host Iran-AU Summit in 2010

Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki announced that the Iranian and African Union (AU) heads of state are due to attend a summit here in Tehran in the second half of 2010.

EU Official Says Iran "Worrying"

European Union's new foreign affairs chief says disappointed in Islamic Republic's failure to accept dialogue, next step would be debate at Security Council.

ABB, Other Swiss Firms Halting Iran Business

Swiss engineering group ABB AG has stopped taking new orders in Iran with a view to ending operations there, a spokesman said, confirming a newspaper report

Cooperation with Africa is Iran's strategic goal: Ahmadinejad

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has said strengthening ties with African states is one of Iran's strategic aims.

All political groups will hold Ten-Day Dawn ceremonies: Khatami

Former president Mohammad Khatami said that this year, people of all political persuasions loyal to the Islamic system will celebrate the Ten-Day Dawn ceremonies

President, cabinet renew allegiance to ideals of Imam Khomeini

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and his cabinet visited the mausoleum of Imam Khomeini to renew their commitment to the ideals of the Founder of the Islamic Republic on Monday, which was the 31st anniversary of the return of the late Imam Khomeini.

Iran Test-Fires Satellite Carrier Into Space

Iran on Tuesday test-fired the Kavoshgar 3 satellite carrier, sending its third explorer — with living organisms onboard — into space.

Berlusconi: We Cannot Accept a Nuclear Iran

Italy's prime minister told the Israeli parliament Wednesday that the world "cannot accept" a nuclear-armed Iran and defended the Jewish state's much-criticized war against Palestinian militants in Gaza last year.

Russia Positive on Iran Uranium Offer

Russia would welcome a Iranian decision to send uranium to third countries for further enrichment and processing into fuel for power plants, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on Wednesday.

U.S. Urges Iran to Inform IAEA of Nuclear Stance

As Iran has expressed a readiness to see about sending its uranium abroad for processing, the U.S. says Tehran should inform the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Vahidi: Enemies, Friends Surprised at Iran Space

Defense Minister Ahmad Vahidi says Iran's achievements in space technology posted surprise for country's enemies and friends.

EU foreign policy chief cautions against hasty Iran sanctions

The European Union's foreign policy chief on Wednesday cautioned against any hasty move by European nations to impose new sanctions against Iran over its controversial nuclear program

Biden says Iran leaders "sowing seeds" of own destruction

US Vice President Joe Biden said on Tuesday that Iran's leaders were "sowing the seeds of their own destruction" through their harsh crackdown on protesters.

Israeli president says Ahmadinejad is a "dictator"

Israeli President Shimon Peres on Tuesday criticized Iran's human rights record, including its crackdown on peaceful protests, and called Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad a "dictator".

Mousavi says "dictatorship" still exists in Iran

Senior Iranian pro-reform leader, Mir Hossein Mousavi, said on Tuesday that he would continue his struggle against the government, despite pressure by authorities to end anti-government protests.

Iran denies link to seized North Korean arms

Iran on Tuesday denied claims by Thailand that a shipment of North Korean weapons seized there in December were headed to the Islamic Republic.

Iran slams US defense buildup in Persian Gulf

Iran on Tuesday condemned plans by the United States to beef up military defenses in the Persian Gulf against potential Iranian missile threats, including placing anti-missile defense systems in Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates.

Ahmadinejad says Iran ready to send uranium abroad

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said on Tuesday that his country was ready to send its low-enriched uranium abroad for further enrichment, under a United Nations-brokered deal to ease concerns about Tehran's nuclear program.

Iran president suggests prisoner exchange for US hikers

Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad on Tuesday suggested a prisoner exchange of Iranians in the United States with three American hikers arrested six months ago.

Australia blocks Iran shipments over weapons fears

Australia has blocked three cargo shipments to Iran over fears that the contents could have been used in Tehran's nuclear program, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd said on Thursday.

Israel warns Iran of force over nuclear defiance

Israeli Vice Prime Minister Moshe Ya'alon on Wednesday called on the international community to make it clear to Iran that military force was not ruled out in efforts to curb its controversial nuclear program.

US defense chief says Iran faces tough sanctions

US Defense Secretary Robert Gates told US lawmakers on Wednesday that Iran will be hit with "severe sanctions" from both the United Nations and the United States and its allies over its controversial nuclear program.

Turkey calls for diplomatic solution on Iran

Turkey on Wednesday reiterated its call for a diplomatic solution to the standoff between the West and Iran over its controversial nuclear program.

White House says Iran rocket launch a “provocative act”

White House deputy spokesperson Bill Burton on Wednesday called Iran’s rocket launch a “provocative act”.

US says Iran threat drives missile plan for Europe

The United States said on Thursday that a planned missile defense shield in Europe was aimed at protecting the region against the “emerging threat” from Iran.

Pakistan opposes sanctions against Iran

The speaker of Pakistan’s National Assembly on Thursday called for a peaceful settlement to the standoff over Iran’s nuclear program, and said her country opposed sanctions against Tehran.

Economic Front

Judiciary Chief Stresses Fight Against Economic Corruption

Minister of Economic Affairs and Finance Sayyed Shamseddin Hosseini accompanied with deputies and director generals of the ministry met and conferred with Head of the Judiciary, Ayatollah Sadegh Amoli Larijani

Iran, Turkey to Hold Joint Economic Commission

Iran and Turkey are scheduled to hold their 21st joint commission meeting on economic cooperation in the Turkish capital city of Ankara this Wednesday, Iran's Economic Attaché' in Ankara told FNA.

Iran, Belarus Sign Banking Agreement

Central Bank of Iran and National Bank of the Republic of Belarus signed an agreement which facilitates monetary transactions between the two countries

Non-Oil Exports to Italy Up 27%

Iran's non-oil exports to Italy showed a 27% growth in the last 9 months, an Iranian official announced on Sunday.

Iran Transportation Projects Over \$27b

Middle East Business Intelligence (MEED) in a report on transportation projects in the Middle East announced that the underway projects in Iran's transportation sector are worth \$27.32 billion.

Iran Opens Trade Center in Sulaimaniyah

Iran's Central Cooperative Chamber has set up a trade center in Sulaimaniyah, Iraq, in a bid to facilitate commercial interactions between the two countries.

Iran to Export Gasoline

Iran plans to build seven new oil refineries with a capacity of 1.6 million barrels that could turn the country into a gasoline exporter.

UAE Company to Import Iran Gas Soon

Dana Gas, the United Arab Emirates-based oil and gas company, Monday said long-awaited natural gas imports from Iran could "potentially" start as testing and commissioning of the project's relevant facilities was under way on the Iranian side.

ENI Still in Talks Over Iran Oilfield

Italy's ENI SpA has not withdrawn from talks on developing the third phase of Iran's Darkhovin oil field, the managing director of the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) was quoted as saying yesterday.

Azadegan Oil Field Output Stands at 40,000 bpd

The output of Iran's Azadegan oil field has reached 40,000 barrels per day (bpd) and will soon hit 50,000 bpd, Deputy Oil Minister Seifollah Jashnsaz said yesterday.

Chemical Exports Over \$2b

Iran's chemical exports increased in the current Iranian fiscal year, Ministry of Industries and Mines reported.

Non-Oil Exports to Arab, African Countries on Rise

Iran's non-oil exports to Arab and African countries remarkably increased during the first 9 months of the current fiscal year, a Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) of Iran official said.

Iran, Turkey Hold 21st Economic Commission

The 21st meeting of the Iran-Turkey joint economic commission started work yesterday in Turkey.

US business groups urge Obama to resist Iran sanctions bill

US business groups, including the US Chamber of Commerce, warned the Obama administration on Tuesday that congressional plans to expand US sanctions against Iran would damage US economic and security interests.

Italy says will block new Iran energy deals

Italian Foreign Minister Franco Frattini said on Tuesday that the Italian government had taken a firm stance on blocking new oil and gas investments in Iran, including suspending export credit guarantees for Italian firms investing there.

Petroleum Revenues Top \$31b

Iran's gas and oil revenues have reached \$31.3 billion during the first half of the current Iranian year (started March 21, 2009).

Roadmap for Turkish Trade

The 21st meeting of Iran-Turkey Economic and Trade Commission is expected to upgrade ties between the two countries

2010s Age of Scarcity

The 1990s was "the age of abundance", argued Brink Lindsey in a book of that title. Round the world, incomes were rising, capital markets were processing endless flows of money and investment, and technological gains meant ever more information was available more cheaply. And politics in the age of abundance, Lindsey claimed, was all about values.

Iran Facilitating Armenia-Turkey Trade

Trade figures between Turkey and Armenia represent an amazing success, said the co-chairman of Turkish-Armenian Business Development Council (TABDC), Kaan Soyak.

Social Front

Education Minister: Changes in Educational System Product of Broad Research

Education Minister Hamid-Reza Haji-Babaei says recent changes in Iran's educational system are a by-product of comprehensive survey into 110 world countries pedagogical approaches.

Official: Iran on Verge of Great Scientific Development

Deputy Science Minister Mohammad Mehdi Nouri hailed the country's scientific and technological progress in recent years, and said that Iran is on the threshold of a giant scientific leap.

Exhibit explores women's role in Iranian revolution

Veteran photographer Akbar Nazemi is holding an exhibition at Tehran's Art Bureau Gallery depicting women who participated in the Islamic Revolution of 1979

Iran may need fatwa to lift ban on "Journey to Hidasou"

An official from the Iranian Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance has said that they may need a fatwa to lift the ban on the premiere of "Journey to Hidasou", a film which was at one time banned because of a sex scandal involving its actress.

Longest Urban Tunnel Opens in Tehran

Iran's longest urban tunnel opened here yesterday on the first day of the Ten-Day-Dawn ceremonies which mark the victory anniversary of the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran.

First Iranian woman to Take Part in Winter Olympics

Alpine skier Marjan Kalhor is the first woman to represent Iran at the Winter Olympics, next month in Vancouver.

Exhibit Explores Women's Role in Iranian Revolution

Veteran photographer Akbar Nazemi is holding an exhibition at Tehran's Art Bureau Gallery depicting women who participated in the Islamic Revolution of 1979. A total of 85 photos that have not previously been published are currently on display at the gallery.

Iranian journalists call on UNESCO for enlightenment on Isfahani monuments

A number of Iranian journalists have recently sent a letter to Tehran's UNESCO Office, asking them to hold a press conference to resolve the ambiguities about the Naqsh-e Jahan Square and other monuments being threatened in Isfahan.

Perspolis Break Tehran Derby Hoodoo

Perspolis finally broke the Tehran soccer derby here yesterday by beating their archrivals Esteghlal 2-1.

Iran to hang nine more over post-election unrest

senior Iranian Judiciary official said that nine people arrested during anti-government protests would soon be executed, the Fars news agency reported on Tuesday.

Detail

Political News

Commander Warns of West's Attempts to Undermine Islamic Republic

The global powers, along with their supporters inside the country, desperately sought to undermine the principles of the Islamic Revolution," Iran's Armed Forces Chief of Staff Major General Hassan Firouzabadi stated.

The commander warned that enemies used media outlets as well as hirelings inside the country in a bid to foment a climate of distrust over the Iranian election process and pose challenge to the ruling system.

Firouzabadi further pointed out that the Iranian nation is resolved to try those who have committed acts against the country, and underlined, "The public believes that those who spared no effort to undermine the legitimacy of the Islamic Republic of Iran must be strongly and harshly dealt with and must receive tough penalties."

Meantime, the commander lauded the country's scientific and technological progress, and predicted a bright future for the Islamic Republic of Iran

Ahmadinejad Urges Need for Committed Managers

He made the remarks in a meeting with young advisors who should, according to the president, help reform the complicated structures of the past and provide the grounds for training revolutionary and committed managers who are, in turn, to help fulfill major aspirations of the Islamic Revolution.

“One of the major aspirations of the Islamic Revolution is to remove the existing unjust world order and replace it by a justice-based system,” President Ahmadinejad stated.

Leader Commends Plan to Issue New IDs

In a meeting with Interior Minister Mostafa Mohammad Najjar and the State Personal Status Registration Organization officials yesterday, Ayatollah Khamenei lauded crucial importance of the project for issuance of new IDs for Iranian citizens above the age of 15.

The Supreme Leader said the new ID issuance project will mark a new era in registration of the personal status documents in the country.

The paramount Leader said authenticity and reliability of the documents will have a great impact on different national affairs and issues.

“The track record of personal registration (in the country) is valuable work and will be evaluated by future generations too. So, exercise maximum care and precision in registration of individuals’ identity and issuance of IDs,” the Supreme Leader said.

Under Interior Ministry estimates, by next three years new IDs, which were formerly issued for those aged below 15 and enjoy high levels of security, will be released for 70 million citizens. The first such ID was issued and submitted to Supreme Leader of Islamic Revolution yesterday.

Prior to the Supreme Leader’s speech, Interior Minister said that the new IDs will be such that no forgery will be possible so easily.

Najjar said the new IDs and the smart national cards will make rendering of services and facilities to citizens very easy and swift.

Iran Eyes Further Cooperation with South Korea

Hossein Rahmani-Nia made the remarks in his meeting in Tehran on Saturday with South Korean Ambassador to Iran Kim Young-Moke.

Rahmani-Nia said Iran is keen on sharing South Korea’s experiences in the fields of agriculture and fishing.

Meanwhile, the South Korean ambassador hoped the ground will be soon prepared for further bilateral cooperation.

Young-Moke said his country wants not only agricultural relations with Iran but transportation cooperation with the country as well.

Larijani: U.S. Striving to Sow Discord Among Muslims

The U.S. and the Zionists strive to sow discord among Muslim countries by creating frequent crises and inducing false anxieties," Larijani said, addressing the inauguration ceremony of the sixth meeting of the Islamic Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in Kampala, Uganda.

He also reiterated that the US and Israel aim to create a rift among Muslims to establish a presence in the Islamic countries to dominate their energy resources and use up their energy revenues in exchange for useless weapons.

Larijani further urged Muslim politicians and intellectuals to take action against enemies' plots and redefine the position of the Islamic countries on the world scene through initiatives.

He also called on the Muslim countries to plan for optimizing the use of their resources and opportunities, and stressed that the rich energy resources, Islam's vanguard culture - which, he said, can underlie a modern Islamic civilization - vast population of experts and the prominent geopolitical position of some Muslim countries are golden opportunities for strengthening the IPU.

The speaker also urged the Inter-Parliamentary Union to prepare the necessary ground for establishment of an Islamic parliament.

The speaker said that the Islamic countries should not regard the IIPU as the ultimate of their goals and should work to prepare the ground for establishment of an Islamic parliament.

Outlining the present situation in Palestine, he urged the IIPU to adopt a decisive position on the issue in its current session.

Pakistani Speaker Due in Iran

.He said the visit by the Pakistani speaker will come at an invitation by her Iranian counterpart Ali Larijani.

Shakeri said that during the 4-day-long trip to Tehran, Mirza is slated to meet with President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Ali Larijani and Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki to discuss ways to expand bilateral tie as well as regional and international issues.

"Ms. Fehmida Mirza who is also the head of Iran-Pakistan Parliamentary Friendship group will discuss expansion of parliamentary ties with her Iranian counterpart," Shakeri added.

Elsewhere, the envoy said that Tehran is waiting to hear Islamabad's decision about the exact date for the second tripartite summit of the Iranian, Pakistani and Afghan presidents, which is due to be held in Islamabad in the near future.

"Iran is pursuing the case with the prompt arrangement and holding of the summit," Shakeri stated.

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

Iran Proposes Establishment of Islamic Parliament

Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani who heads Iranian delegation in Kampala, Uganda, where the annual OIC Inter-Parliamentary Union summit is held, said at the inauguration of the gathering, "Islamic countries Inter-Parliamentary Union must prepare the stage for establishment of Islamic parliament through farsightedness."

More than fifty years ago the European countries laid the ground for peaceful relations by establishment of union and European parliament and could step towards development of Europe, he noted.

Energy reserves, rich Islamic culture, human resources and geopolitical situation of a number of Islamic countries make great opportunities to boost the OIC Inter-Parliamentary union, he said and added, the West problems also paves the way for influential presence of Islamic countries in international scene.

Therefore, the OIC Inter-Parliamentary union is not the ultimate convergence of Islamic countries, it is only a first step so that they can prepare the stage for establishment of Islamic Parliament, he asserted.

Iranian Experts to Construct Iran-Turkmenistan Railway

During the recent visit to Turkmenistan by the president of the Islamic Republic, the construction project of Atrak-Barakat-Gorgan was approved and the construction operation will be started by Iranian experts soon," Iran's Ambassador to Ashgabat Mohammad Reza Forqani told FNA.

He noted that the project would come online in two years, adding that the project is worth \$700 mln.

"Our country's goods will be exported to Turkmenistan and other commonwealth countries through this rail link," Forqani noted.

The primary agreement on the construction of the railroad between Iran-Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan was signed between presidents of Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan in April

2007 in the city of Turkmenbashi and its final agreement was signed in a summit meeting in Tehran in September of the same year among the three presidents.

The total route of the railway is 1000 kilometers, of which 90 kilometers would be in Iran, 700 kilometers in Turkmenistan and 210 kilometers in Kazakhstan.

The operational phase of the railway project, one of Iran's biggest contracts on the export of engineering-technical services to a foreign country, began simultaneously with the visit by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to Turkmenistan on January 6.

Ugandan President Supports Iran's N. Rights

Iran has the right to use civilian nuclear energy. The westerners are using the nuclear energy to produce electricity but we are not allowed to make this use and this policy is unacceptable," Museveni said in a meeting with Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani on the sidelines of the annual meeting of the Islamic Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in Kampala.

He pointed to Iran's advancements in different fields, and stressed that his country views relations with the Tehran as a special case.

Museveni also underlined his country's efforts to bolster ties with all Muslim countries, and said, "Relations with Islamic states are of great importance to us."

Larijani, for his part, lauded Iran's major steps in nuclear technology, and underlined that all Iran's nuclear activities are under the surveillance and supervision of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

The parliament speaker pointed to western claims against Iran's peaceful nuclear program, and said that the West is seeking to hinder Iran's mastery of nuclear technology to maintain its monopoly in the field.

"These policies are continuation of their (the west's) previous colonial policies. They do not want the Asian, African and Latin American states to reach advanced capabilities in science and technology."

Three US hikers held in Iran for six months

Three young American hikers have been detained in Iran for six months now, and their parents on Sunday reiterated their call for Iran to release their loved ones.

The three Americans – Shane Bauer, Sarah Shourd and Josh Fattal – were arrested on 31 July for allegedly crossing into Iran while hiking along the poorly marked border in northern Iraq.

“When we learned of their detention, we hoped that Iran would quickly establish that they had strayed into the border area inadvertently and deport them,” their families said in a statement.

“Instead, our loved ones continue to be held in Evin Prison in Tehran and their fate is uncertain. In the six months since their arrest, Shane, Sarah and Josh have not been allowed to have any contact with us – not a single telephone call, not a single letter,” they added.

The families said that their appeals for the release of their loved ones on humanitarian grounds have gone unanswered and that even hiring a lawyer in Iran has brought no new information on how they are doing.

Iran’s Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki has said that the three Americans entered Iran illegally with “suspicious aims”.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has called the case against the Americans “totally unfounded”.

“We do not understand why Iran, a country committed to the rule of law, continues to hold our loved ones without due process,” the families said.

Swiss diplomats, who represent US interests in Iran, have only been allowed to visit the trio twice during their six months in detention, the most recent on 29 October.

Iran dismisses Clinton’s comments on sanctions

Iran’s Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki on Sunday dismissed remarks made by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton over the need for new sanctions against Tehran.

During a visit to London last week, Clinton said Iran’s continued defiance of its nuclear obligations is leaving the international community with no recourse but to apply “further pressure”, including sanctions.

“As long as domestic prospect of White House policy on Iran-US relations has not been clarified, we will not take statement of the US secretary of state seriously,” Mottaki told reporters in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa.

Mottaki accused Clinton of following the “failed policies” of former US President George W. Bush’s administration, saying such moves would have no benefit for the current administration or the American people.

The “conflicting” statements made by US officials about Iran stemmed from current “problems” with US foreign policy, the Iranian foreign minister added.

“The Islamic Republic of Iran has for the past three decades been faced with the hostile approaches of certain US officials, but has always tried to maintain peace and stability in the region,” Mottaki told reporters.

He further said that “sanctions” and “threats” could not prevent Iran from seeking its right to peaceful nuclear technology.

On Friday, Clinton stepped up pressure on China to recognize the threat from Iran’s nuclear program and join international calls for sanctions.

Clinton called on Beijing to overlook its short-term interest in Iranian oil and consider the long-term implications of an arms race in the Persian Gulf, reports AFP.

US slams Iran over lack of consular access to detained hikers

The United States on Tuesday voiced deep concern about the welfare of three Americans detained in Iran since last July and condemned Tehran’s refusal to allow Swiss diplomats to visit the trio in three months.

Assistant Secretary of State Philip Crowley was responding to an account by two Belgian tourists who were detained in Tehran for three months and said that they had some contact with three American hikers imprisoned there and were concerned about the Americans’ well-being.

“What that tells us is that our three American citizens are potentially in deplorable conditions,” Crowley told reporters at the State Department.

“It is outrageous that Iran refuses to abide by international standards and international agreements in terms of treatment of those who are in their care,” he added.

Crowley said that the United States had repeatedly demanded consular access to the three American, but that Tehran had not allowed Swiss diplomats to visit them in Evin Prison since the end of October.

“We will continue to press the Iranian government so that we can see for ourselves what the conditions of our citizens are,” he stressed.

The three Americans – Shane Bauer, Sarah Shourd and Josh Fattal – were arrested on 31 July for allegedly crossing into Iran while hiking along the poorly marked border in northern Iraq.

US senators press Obama on Iran sanctions

Key US senators from both parties on Wednesday urged President Barack Obama to pursue sanctions against Iran, with or without United Nations support.

In a letter to Obama that called for “crippling sanctions” against Tehran “as early as this month”, the senators also criticized China’s role in the nuclear standoff.

The senators – who include Democrats Chuck Schumer, Evan Bayh and Robert Casey; Republicans John McCain and Jon Kyl; and independent Joe Lieberman – said that “it is imperative to put into action your pledge of increased, meaningful pressure against the Iranian regime,” reports AFP.

While they support the White House’s push for new sanctions at the United Nations, the senators urged a second track, noting previous resistance by China to such measures at the UN Security Council.

“We fear that Beijing’s pursuit of its narrow commercial self-interest in Iran is jeopardizing the chances of reaching a diplomatic solution in the nuclear standoff and greatly increases the risk of developments that could profoundly destabilize the Persian Gulf and global energy markets,” they wrote, according to the Washington-based daily, Politico.

They noted that China has become one of Iran’s largest trade partners and a major investor in Tehran’s energy sector.

China’s approach “calls into question whether it is interested in being a responsible stakeholder in the international system and does significant damage to its relationship with the United States,” said the senators.

The lawmakers said that 2010 would be a “pivotal year” in the nuclear standoff and urge Obama to do everything that is necessary to stop Iran from acquiring a nuclear bomb.

While they voiced strong disapproval of military action, the senators said that a nuclear-armed Iran would be “catastrophic” for America’s national security.

They also urged Obama “to increase American support for the human rights and peaceful aspirations of the Iranian people.”

Iran military chief slams remarks by US commanders

The chief of staff of Iran’s armed forces, Major-General Hassan Firouzabadi, said in remarks published on Friday that recent remarks by US military commanders on Tehran’s nuclear program were “irrational”.

“Despite repeatedly saying themselves that military conflict with Iran is extremely dangerous and would destabilize the whole region for the United States, American military commanders in the region continue making irrational remarks about Iran’s peaceful nuclear fuel facilities,” he said, according to the Fars news agency.

“Although some of them [US commanders] try to be cautious in their remarks on this issue, they still lack the necessary insight,” he added.

Firouzabadi's remarks were apparently in response to recent statements by General David Petraeus, head of US Central Command, who said that a series of "contingency plans" had been developed to address Iran's nuclear ambitions, if negotiations fail, according to Iran's state-funded Press TV.

Petraeus did not elaborate on the plans in the interview with CNN earlier this month, but said it could be some time before the U.S. decides whether to execute them and that diplomatic efforts would continue in the meantime.

When asked about the vulnerability of Iran's nuclear facilities, Petraeus said that they had been strengthened, but were still not bomb-proof.

Firouzabadi advised the US commanders to carry out consultations before making comments on such "sensitive" issues.

"It is possible that sometimes statements by politicians do not have significant costs, but military professionals are expected to avoid making emotional and unconsidered remarks," he said.

Iran rejects Saudi claims on Yemen

Iran on Sunday rejected Saudi Arabia's charge over Tehran's role in Yemen and called on Riyadh to change its policies in Yemen.

Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal recently accused Iran of interfering in Yemen's internal affairs and of providing support to Shiite rebels in northern Yemen.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Ramin Mehmanparast, described the statement as "surprising", reports the semi-official ISNA news agency.

"We expected our Saudi brothers to embark on correcting their policies in Yemen instead of accusing others," he told reporters.

Iran believes the situation in Yemen is "a domestic matter" and has always emphasized the necessity of dialogue to resolve the issue peacefully, Mehmanparast said.

He further called on others to avoid "interfering" in Yemen.

Saudi Arabia has been fighting the Shiite rebels in northern Yemen since the insurgents carried out a cross-border raid in November. Yemen has accused Shiite Iran of backing the rebels.

Earlier this month, Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad blasted Saudi Arabia's military involvement in the conflict, accusing Riyadh of using weapons against fellow Muslims in Yemen.

“Iranian Cyber Army” hacks Dutch-based Persian website

The website of the Dutch-based Persian language radio station, Radio Zamaneh, was hacked over the weekend by a group calling themselves the “Iranian Cyber Army”, Reuters reported on Sunday.

The website of the Dutch government-funded station, which reports on human rights in Iran, among other topics, has been hacked since early Saturday.

“Iranian Cyber Army warns all treasonous mercenaries that it will not leave them at peace even in the bosom of their masters,” the group said in a message posted on the website.

The incident comes weeks after the same group hacked the Chinese search engine, Baidu, and the popular blogging site, Twitter.

Launched in 2006, Radio Zamaneh broadcasts news and analysis of topics such as gender issues and religious minorities in Iran, along with music and entertainment.

The station is financed by the Dutch government through subsidies set aside for promoting human rights, reports Reuters.

It was among a list of foreign organizations, including media outlets and human rights groups, which Iran's Intelligence Ministry placed on a blacklist over their alleged role in fomenting the unrest that followed the disputed presidential election last June.

Eyeing Iran, US boosts defenses in Persian Gulf

The United States and its Arab allies in the Persian Gulf have stepped up their military defense in recent months, to counter what is seen as Iran's growing missile threat, US officials said on Sunday.

The officials said that the U.S. was speeding up arms sales to a number of Arab states in the region and that it had also deployed warships in and around the Mediterranean, capable of taking down missiles in flight to the region, reports Fox News.

The deployments, including expanded land-based Patriot defensive missile installations in Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates, are meant to increase protection for US forces and key allies in the Persian Gulf, reports Reuters.

The buildup began under the administration of former President George W. Bush, but has expanded under President Barack Obama, who is pushing for a new round of sanctions against Iran over its nuclear program.

After months of attempting to engage Iran in nuclear diplomacy, the Obama administration has been working in recent weeks to win international support for tougher sanctions against Tehran.

US officials said the willingness of Arab allies in the region to work more closely with Washington on their defenses is a sign of shifting attitudes toward Iran, reports the Wall Street Journal.

US arms sales to those allies have risen sharply in recent years, highlighting concerns about Iran and its nuclear ambitions.

The United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia have purchased more than 25 billion dollars of US arms in the past two years, reports Fox News.

Blair points to growing threat from Iran

Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair on Friday voiced serious concerns about Iran's links with terrorist organizations and said Tehran was partly to blame for instability in the region.

Blair, now a Middle East peace envoy, made the remarks to a public inquiry into the Iraq war in London.

He expressed concern over ties between states that proliferate weapons of mass destruction [WMD] and terrorist groups.

"The reason why I think this is a particular danger today is because there are these states, Iran in particular, that are linked to this extreme and, in my view, misguided view about Islam," he told the inquiry, according to AFP.

"We still face this threat today in my view, very powerfully," he added.

Blair said he feared that states that are "highly repressive" could supply weapons of mass destruction to terrorist groups.

"I hold this fear stronger today than I did back then as a result of what Iran, particularly, today is doing," he said.

Noting Iran's ties with "terror groups", Blair said: "I would say that a large part of the destabilization in the Middle East at the present time comes from Iran," reports the London-based The Independent newspaper.

Iran is a vocal supporter of the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah and the Palestinian militant group Hamas, but denies Western and Israeli accusations that it arms the groups.

OIC approves Iran's proposal for Gaza Day

On Sunday, the PULOIC delegates declared January 18 the official Day of Gaza and Resistance.

The sixth summit of the Parliamentary Union of the OIC was held in Kampala, Uganda to discuss various issues Islamic countries are facing.

The delegates at the summit, which ended on Sunday, described the Palestinian issue as the most serious challenge the Middle East is facing.

The conference condemned the human rights violations committed by the Zionist regime in the Palestinian territories, especially in Gaza, and called on the member states to form a united front to demand the recognition of the Palestinians' legitimate right to establish an independent state.

The final statement of the conference insisted that the Gaza blockade be lifted immediately, called for the reconstruction of the coastal enclave, and condemned the continued construction of settlements in the West Bank.

The conference reaffirmed the legitimate right of all countries to access nuclear technology meant for peaceful purposes and called for international cooperation in facilitating the exchange of nuclear expertise and equipment for civilian applications.

It also denounced certain states' threats to deprive other countries of their right to nuclear technology meant for peaceful purposes.

The countries participating in the conference reaffirmed their commitment to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, voiced concern about the nature of Israel's nuclear program, and stressed the need for a thorough inspection of Israel's nuclear facilities by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

The OIC members also called for the dismantlement of the stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East, calling them a serious threat to peace and stability in the region.

In addition, the final declaration denounced terrorism and underlined the need for a distinction to be drawn between terrorism and resistance.

The conference also condemned the desecration of religious sanctities and called on the United Nations General Assembly to adopt a resolution banning such acts.

The OIC member states also called for efforts to increase cooperation among Islamic states and asked their parliaments to pass laws to facilitate economic transactions between Islamic countries.

Pressuring Judiciary to make political decisions is illegal: Ayatollah Larijani

Despite previous warnings, certain people still expect the Judiciary to show leniency, but the Judiciary acts on all criminal cases in accordance with the law, Ayatollah Larijani told judicial officials at a meeting in Tehran on Sunday.

He also said that the Judiciary will deal decisively with people who are mohareb (enemies of God).

The judicial system will never show any leniency in dealing with groups that are futilely attempting to disrupt national security and destabilize the Islamic Republic of Iran, he noted.

The Judiciary chief also said the two convicts who were executed on Thursday had taken up arms and affiliated with terrorist groups or had been arrested with explosives in their possession.

“The penal code was meticulously applied in all the stages of the legal proceedings” in their cases, he noted.

Ayatollah Larijani also advised all judges to follow the letter of the law and to not allow political disputes to cloud their judgment

Iran left with no choice but to produce 20% enriched fuel: former MP

“To provide the research reactor with fuel, Tehran has no way but to enrich uranium,” Hamidreza Taraqi told the Mehr News Agency on Sunday.

The deadline Iran set for the West to provide it with 20 percent enriched nuclear fuel was an opportunity that Westerners could have utilized to show their goodwill and become Iran’s partners in its peaceful nuclear energy drive, he noted.

The West’s failure to meet the deadline to provide Iran with the nuclear fuel shows that the West lacks goodwill and is seeking to deceive and pressure the Islamic Republic, Taraqi, a senior member of Iran’s Islamic Coalition Party and added.

The former lawmaker predicted that the Western countries will put great pressure on Iran not to enrich uranium to the 20 percent degree needed to operate the Tehran nuclear research reactor but they will eventually have to accept it.

He said the West’s sanctions against the country are no longer effective and the West’s pressure and military threats will not affect Tehran’s decision to produce the nuclear fuel

Case of German Diplomats to Be Reviewed

We are looking into the case and the result will be announced after the investigation is finalized," the source said.

Iran's Intelligence Ministry said Wednesday it had found evidence that the staffers played a role in last month's "counterrevolutionary riots" in Tehran.

"Anti-Islamic Revolution agents, networks backed by Western intelligence services" and those who seek to promote sedition in the country had planned the Ashura riots in advance, the Islamic Student's News Agency quoted a deputy intelligence minister as saying.

The Intelligence Ministry has confirmed the staffers were detained but were released after their identities were confirmed.

U.S. Sanctions to Hit Indian Oil Companies Engaged in Iran

The U.S. Senate approved a legislation that will let U.S. president Barack Obama impose sanctions on non-Iranian companies that are involved in Iran's energy sector. The legislation seeks to sanction companies that help expand Iran's oil refining capacity or help Tehran produce or import products like gasoline.

Only recently Oil and Natural Gas Corporation along with Hinduja Group and Petronet entered into an agreement with Iranian authorities for participation in the development of gas fields and liquification facilities in Iran.

ONGC/OVL is looking at picking up 20% or more stake in the South Pars-12 field development project. This was followed by Indian Oil seeking permission from the government to participate in Iran's oil sector.

But the looming U.S. sanctions could alter the picture for non Iranian companies. However, the extent of the change will only be known after the Senate and House of Representatives versions of the bill are reconciled into one legislation. With both bills having different provisions, there is little clarity at this stage on which aspect of the energy sector will fall under the ambit of the sanctions and whether financial transactions will also be affected.

Those familiar with the Congressional procedure say that the reconciliation of the two bills will take time. Only after a single bill emerges from the process and gets approval will it become a reality.

Indian companies have already been affected by earlier U.S. efforts in this direction. In 2008, U.S. legislators had urged the U.S. Export-Import Bank to suspend financial aid to Reliance unless it agreed to stop the sale of gasoline to Iran.

The U.S. has sought to use different pressure points to push Iran on its nuclear program. U.S. President Barack Obama in his State of the Union address had warned Tehran about “growing consequences” for its nuclear programme.

But even U.S. business groups have warned about the pitfalls of imposing sanctions on non Iranian companies and have warned that U.S. allies and friends could be alienated by this unilateral move.

The Senate version, according to reports in the U.S. media, would stop U.S. government from buying goods from companies that do business in Iran’s energy sector and make it easier for state and local governments and private asset fund managers to divest from energy firms doing business with Iran.

The House of Representatives version of the legislation includes sanctions on firms that aid Iran import gasoline and this would include companies that fund the shipments and shipping firms.

Foreign Trade Boosts Despite Sanctions

Mohammad Nahavandian made the remarks in a meeting with Russian trade officials in Moscow.

He said Iran’s foreign trade has exceeded \$120 billion in 2009, adding that the global financial crisis had the minimum effect on Iranian economy compared to other countries.

Nahavandian said that most countries are against imposing sanctions on Iran and have a cordial economic and commercial relations with Iran.

He added that Iran-Russia economic cooperation has increased in all arenas, calling for expansion of mutual ties with Moscow in the fields of industrial and technical cooperation

4 New Satellites to Be Unveiled

Speaking with reporters after inauguration ceremony of 36 electronic, telecommunication and optic projects, he said new home-built satellites of Toloo (dawn), Mesbah 2 and Herald of Science and Industry as well as Simorgh satellite carrier engine will be unveiled at the presence of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Talking about projects opened today, he said these projects will promote defensive power of the Islamic Republic of Iran against any kind of probable threat.

Iran Rejects Saudi Claim of Meddling in Yemen

The goings-on inside Yemen are its internal affairs and Iran calls on other countries to avoid interfering in the impoverished country, said Foreign Ministry spokesman Ramin Mehman-Parast.

"Tehran has repeatedly called for dialogue and a peaceful solution to the problem," he said.

The spokesman said that Saudi Arabia's claim came as "a surprise" to Iran, adding that, "We expected our Saudi brothers to move toward reforming their policies regarding Yemen, instead of accusing others."

Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal has accused Iran of interfering in Yemen's internal affairs. The accusation comes after Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad denounced the Saudi military intervention in the war against Houthis in northern Yemen.

"My perception was that Saudi Arabia would mediate in Yemen's domestic conflict like a father, or an elder brother, and make peace; not to get involved in the war and use bombs and guns against Muslims," President Ahmadinejad said on January 13.

Tehran to Host Iran-AU Summit in 2010

Mottaki made the remarks on the sidelines of the 14th AU summit in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on Sunday, elaborating on Iran's policy for expanding ties with the African continent.

"In recent years, Iran has pursued a new approach for expanding cooperation with the African continent in such a way that this cooperation is not merely restricted to political grounds," he told reporters.

Noting that Iran has taken good and effective steps in reinvigorating cooperation with Africa, Mottaki said, "Today we have good relations with the African countries from Senegal and Gambia to Ethiopia and from the North to the South of the African continent."

He also declared that the chairman of the AU Commission Jean Ping is scheduled to visit Iran during the first half of the year to discuss issues related to the upcoming summit in the Iranian capital and exchange views over Iran-AU relations.

Mottaki also mentioned that he has already attended a meeting with the AU commission chairman and finalized the main agendas of the Iran-AU summit in Tehran.

The 14th summit of the AU kicked off in Addis Ababa on Sunday with prime Ministers, Presidents and government officials of the 53 AU countries in attendance.

Iran is an observing member of the AU and has shown an active presence in previous AU summit meetings

EU Official Says Iran “Worrying

The European Union's new foreign affairs chief said on Sunday she was disappointed with Iran's failure to engage in talks over its nuclear program and the next step should be to refer it to the UN Security Council.

"We are worried about what's happening in Iran. I'm disappointed at the failure of Iran to accept the dialogue and we now need to look again at what needs to happen there," Catherine Ashton told Sky News in an interview.

"The next step for us is to take our discussions into the Security Council. When I was meeting with (U.S. Secretary of State) Hillary Clinton last week we talked about Iran and we were very clear this is a problem we will have to deal with," she said.

"We need to now look at the most effective way of doing so."

ABB, Other Swiss Firms Halting Iran Business

It's been some time since we've taken any new orders," ABB spokesman Wolfram Eberhard said, adding the company had stopped doing so more than 12 months ago. "We're finishing up old contracts."

He said ABB now employed some 30 people in Iran, down from 100, and that many of its contracts had been for infrastructure projects and had run into financing difficulties. He said he had no exact date for when all business would be finished.

Iran and the United States have no diplomatic relations, and Washington has fined companies for doing business with Iran. Last year banks Credit Suisse and Lloyds TSB were each fined several hundred million dollars.

Cooperation with Africa is Iran’s strategic goal: Ahmadinejad

The Islamic Republic of Iran, as an observer member of the African Union, has always looked to the expansion of cooperation with African states as a strategic goal, Ahmadinejad stated in a message to the 14th AU summit in Addis Ababa.

Enhancing ties with Africa and sharing experiences in different areas are atop Iran’s foreign policy, part of the message read.

Ahmadinejad added that Iran has been enjoying good relationship with Africa for a long time and has taken important steps over the last year to increase cooperation with the members of the African Union.

The president also emphasized that the African Union has played an important role in

global security and praised Africa's active presence at international stage.

The African summit meeting started on Sunday on the theme: "Information and Communication Technologies in Africa: Prospects and Challenges for Development".

Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki has attended the conference at head of delegation.

The AU was established in 2002 and has 53 members. It is a successor to the Organization of African Unity (OAU)

All political groups will hold Ten-Day Dawn ceremonies: Khatami

The Ten-Day Dawn (February 1-11) is a national celebration of the anniversary of the victory of the Islamic Revolution.

Khatami made the remarks in a meeting with the members of the Central Council of Iran's House of Parties.

"Those who seek to set the Imam (Khomeini), the leadership, and the establishment against political groups are enemies of the revolution. Those who have hidden their unreasonable demands behind religious sanctities are enemies of the revolution, not us," he stated.

He pointed to the historic significance of the Islamic Revolution as a unique event in terms of its aims and leadership, adding, "We want Islam and the Constitution" and if a political group aims to undermine the leadership and appropriate the revolution, this is an affront to the revolution and Islam.

"We have always asked people to remain calm," he said.

In this country, everyone who acts within the framework of the Constitution should enjoy civil rights, he noted.

"We don't approve of lawbreaking and violence," he emphasized

President, cabinet renew allegiance to ideals of Imam Khomeini

Later, the president, the ministers, and the vice presidents visited the tombs of martyred president Mohammed Ali Rajaii and prime minister Mohammed Javad Bahonar to pray for their souls.

The president also met with the people at the mausoleum, listened to their grievances, and personally received letters from them.

Imam Khomeini returned to Iran from exile on February 1, 1979.

The next ten days are called the Ten-Day Dawn in Iran because the victory of the Islamic

Revolution occurred on February 11, 1979.

The president and cabinet visit the mausoleum of Imam Khomeini and the tombs of the martyrs every year on this day according to the Iranian calendar. Due to the fact that the leap days of the leap years of the Iranian and Western calendars do not match, the anniversary occurs on February 2 once every four years

Iran Test-Fires Satellite Carrier Into Space

The Kavoshgar 3 (Explorer) rocket, carrying an experimental capsule, transfers telemetric data, live pictures and flight and environmental analysis data.

The Iranian Aerospace Organization (IAO) says live video transmission and the mini-environmental lab will enable further studies on the biological capsule — carrying a rat, two turtles and worms — as it leaves earth's atmosphere and enters space.

In February 2008, Iran became the 11th country to have acquired space-related technology by blasting Kavoshgar 1 into space.

The second Kavoshgar, which carried a space-lab and a restoration system, was launched in November 2008. The Kavoshgar 3 rocket is an updated version of the previous models.

Defense Minister Brigadier General Ahmad Vahidi on Wednesday hailed the successful launch and insisted on the "peaceful" nature of Iran's space program.

"Iran will not tolerate any un-peaceful use [of space] by any country," General Vahid was quoted as saying by the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA).

Vahidi also announced that Iranian scientists have sent a biocapsule of living creatures into the space

"The first biocapsule of living creatures from Iran was sent into the space on the back of Kavoshgar-3 (Explorer-3) carrier," he said in a special ceremony here in Tehran to unveil major space projects.

Iran also unveiled a new generation of home-made satellites and another newly-developed satellite carrier called Simorgh (Phoenix) yesterday.

The milk-bottle shaped rocket, emblazoned in blue with the words "Satellite Carrier Simorgh," is equipped to carry a 100-kilogramme (220-pound) satellite 500 kilometers (310 miles) into orbit.

The 27-meter (90 foot) tall multi-stage rocket weighs 85 tons and its liquid fuel propulsion system has a thrust of up to 100 tons.

Berlusconi: We Cannot Accept a Nuclear Iran

Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi also expressed hope that Israel and the Palestinians would soon resume peace talks.

From the podium of the Knesset, or parliament, Berlusconi called on the international community to pursue stronger sanctions against Tehran, which Italy - like Israel and the West - suspects is developing nuclear weapons.

"We cannot accept the nuclearization of a country whose leaders have explicitly expressed their desire to destroy Israel, have denied the Holocaust and delegitimized the Jewish state," Berlusconi said, in remarks translated into Hebrew simultaneously.

"We cannot make compromises," he said. "The path that must be taken is multilateral oversight, negotiations and sanctions" against Iran."

Russia Positive on Iran Uranium Offer

"If Iran is ready to return to the earlier agreed-on plan, we will only welcome this," Lavrov said at a news conference in Moscow on Wednesday.

Lavrov made his remark after Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad unexpectedly dropped his opposition to sending uranium abroad for enrichment on Wednesday, saying there was "no problem."

"Some people made a fuss about it. But there is no problem. We will seal a contract and we will give you 3.5% uranium to enrich it to 20% in four or five months and return it to us," Ahmadinejad said in an interview aired on state TV.

Ahmadinejad dismissed concerns that the uranium would not be returned. In such a case, Iran would continue enriching uranium by itself, he said.

Under a plan drawn up in October at IAEA talks in Vienna between Iran, the UN, the U.S., Russia and France, the Islamic Republic was supposed to ship out its low-enriched uranium to Russia, where it would be enriched and then sent to France to prepare it for use in an Iranian reactor.

U.S. Urges Iran to Inform IAEA of Nuclear Stance

There is a forum to be able to resolve whether this is a serious offer and that's through the IAEA. If Iran is serious, they can inform the IAEA that they are ready to accept the deal that's on the table," Reuters quoted State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley as saying Tuesday.

On Tuesday, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said that Iran will welcome “honest” nuclear cooperation with other countries, saying that Iran is ready for a nuclear swap.

"We have said that if you (the Western side) act honestly, we will cooperate with you," he said.

He said that if our enriched uranium is not returned based on the agreement with the UN nuclear agency, it will be to the benefit of Iran, giving Tehran a free hand in its enrichment program.

Crowley made the comment in response to President Ahmadinejad's remarks and said, "We are not prepared to change the deal ... We are not interested in renegotiating it."

"If Iran wants to accept it, then they should inform the IAEA," he added.

The State Department spokesman said that Tehran should follow through on the original deal and “give us a definitive answer."

Vahidi: Enemies, Friends Surprised at Iran Space

Brigadier General Ahmad Vahidi made the remarks during the inaugural ceremony of Iran's space achievements in the presence of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Despite propaganda against the Iranian nation, the country has achieved great successes in technologies, space achievements in particular, the minister said.

In addition, he said the achievements have been gained by following the guidelines of the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Later, Vahidi elaborated on the latest developments in space technologies.

EU foreign policy chief cautions against hasty Iran sanctions

The European Union's foreign policy chief on Wednesday cautioned against any hasty move by European nations to impose new sanctions against Iran over its controversial nuclear program.

Speaking to AFP, Catherine Ashton also announced that she is assuming the role of chief international nuclear negotiation with Iran, a post occupied until the end of last year by Javier Solana.

Last month, France urged its fellow EU partners to prepare new sanctions against Iran, saying they were needed due to Tehran's continued defiance of its international obligations on its nuclear program.

But Ashton distanced herself from that position, emphasizing the need for a United Nations Security Council decision.

“We’re not moving quickly on anything,” she said in an interview with AFP. “What we’re doing is we’re saying very clearly that the next step on Iran is through the Security Council. I’m very clear on that.”

Ashton said that she was reviewing the six years of dialogue that major powers and Iran had on the nuclear issue.

“I still want to see dialogue,” she said, without giving a date for any future talks.

Last week, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said that Iran’s intransigence over its nuclear program was leaving the international community with no recourse but to apply “further pressure”, including sanctions.

The United States and its European allies suspect Iran is secretly developing a nuclear weapons capability – a charge Tehran denies.

Biden says Iran leaders “sowing seeds” of own destruction

US Vice President Joe Biden said on Tuesday that Iran’s leaders were “sowing the seeds of their own destruction” through their harsh crackdown on protesters.

“When they acted as they did, when the first protests broke out and people were brutalized, they lost their moral credibility in their own country and around the region,” Biden said in an interview with MSNBC television.

“And I think they’re sowing the seed for their own destruction,” he added.

Asked whether it was time for “regime change” in Iran, Biden told MSNBC: “The people of Iran ... the very people marching, they’re thinking about regime change.”

At the same time, Biden signaled that the Obama administration was sticking to its dual track of diplomacy and pressure in the standoff over Iran’s nuclear program.

The United States and its allies are moving to put sanctions against Iran, Biden noted.

“We’re going to end up much better off than we would have had we tried to go in there and physically tried to change the regime,” the vice president said.

Washington should continue to extend a hand to Tehran “as we move toward serious sanctions against the Iranian government,” he added.

Although Russia is seen as having moved closer toward the US position on Iran, China has been reluctant to go along with any new sanctions.

Israeli president says Ahmadinejad is a “dictator”

Israeli President Shimon Peres on Tuesday criticized Iran’s human rights record, including its crackdown on peaceful protests, and called Iran’s President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad a “dictator”.

Speaking at a conference in the Israeli city of Herzliya, Peres also warned that the Islamic Republic is a threat for all nations, not just Israel.

“The Iranian government is the height of moral corruption in the world,” Peres said, according to the Haaretz newspaper.

Ahmadinejad is “a dictator who wastes his people’s money while Iran suffers from 30 percent unemployment,” he added.

Peres said that the international community must raise its voice against the Iranian government’s human rights violations and the oppression of its population.

The youth in Iran “do not want that regime and they feel that Ahmadinejad has brought international shame upon their country,” he told the conference.

The Israeli president also called for establishing the “widest possible” international coalition to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons.

Tehran insists that its nuclear program is geared only toward civilian purposes.

“Iran is a source of evil,” Peres said, according to the Bloomberg news network. It threatens “not just the security of Israel, but the security of the Arabs, too, and all nations that want peace and freedom.”

Mousavi says “dictatorship” still exists in Iran

Senior Iranian pro-reform leader, Mir Hossein Mousavi, said on Tuesday that he would continue his struggle against the government, despite pressure by authorities to end anti-government protests.

In a statement posted on his website, Kalemeh, Mousavi said that the 1979 Islamic revolution had failed to achieve most of its goals and said politically-motivated arrests of protesters were illegal.

In one of his strongest challenges to the government, the former prime minister said that the “roots of tyranny and dictatorship” that marked the shah’s era still exist.

“Closure of the press, filling the prisons and mercilessly killing people who, through non-violent means, demand their rights in the streets, indicates the roots of tyranny and dictatorship remain from the monarchy system,” Mousavi said.

Mousavi’s comments come at a particularly sensitive time. Iran will mark the 31st anniversary of the Islamic revolution on 11 February.

Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi, another defeated presidential candidate, have urged their supporters to attend rallies on the anniversary.

Since the disputed June election, anti-government demonstrators have used state rallies to revive their protests.

“At no stage will the green movement abandon its peaceful and moral methods in fighting for the nation’s rights,” Mousavi said.

He also said that the hanging of protesters was against the law and that the constitution should be changed to secure people’s rights.

“Peaceful protests are Iranians' right,” he added.

Iranian officials, including supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, have warned that further anti-government protests will not be tolerated.

Tensions in Iran are still high after violent demonstrations during the Shiite holy day of Ashura in December, when eight protesters were killed and hundreds of people were arrested.

Mousavi called on the security forces and the Basij militia to “be kind to the people” and urged his supporters to reduce “their differences with other people”.

Iran denies link to seized North Korean arms

Iran on Tuesday denied claims by Thailand that a shipment of North Korean weapons seized there in December were headed to the Islamic Republic.

“There is no link between this aircraft and Iran and Thai officials also have not mentioned this matter,” Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Ramin Mehmanparast, told reporters.

He asserted that Iran had no need to import such arms due its own advancements in the military field.

Thai officials said on Monday that the aircraft, which was seized on a refueling stop in Bangkok, was headed to Iran, although they did not know the ultimate destination of the 35 tons of weaponry.

The shipment, which violated United Nations sanctions against North Korea, reportedly included rockets, fuses, rocket launchers and grenades, reports Reuters.

There has been speculation that the arms were destined for some of the militant groups in the region supported by Iran, according to the Associated Press.

Iran slams US defense buildup in Persian Gulf

Iran on Tuesday condemned plans by the United States to beef up military defenses in the Persian Gulf against potential Iranian missile threats, including placing anti-missile defense systems in Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates.

Iran's parliament speaker, Ali Larijani, warned countries in the region not to be deceived by Washington's "incorrect policies", insisting that Tehran was no threat to its neighbors.

"Regional countries should know that this puppet show by America for protecting and creating security in the region is nothing but a new political ploy to increase their military presence at the expense of others," he told lawmakers, according to the official IRNA news agency.

Larijani said that America was the "problem" in the region and that the more military equipment the U.S. placed in the region, the more it worried the countries where the equipment was deployed.

"In the last 31 years, which neighboring state or regional country has the Islamic Republic of Iran committed an aggression against?" he asked, adding that the 1980-88 war with Iraq was in defense against Saddam Hussein.

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman, Ramin Mehmanparast, also criticized the increased US presence in the Persian Gulf.

He told reporters that the United States was seeking to create a sense of "Iran phobia" in the region, and asserted that Tehran enjoyed "friendly ties" with neighboring states.

Mehmanparast further said that Iran's missile capabilities were aimed at ensuring peace and security in the region.

Iran has carried out frequent military maneuvers in the Persian Gulf and has threatened to hit Western targets in the region if its nuclear sites come under attack by the United States or Israel.

Ahmadinejad says Iran ready to send uranium abroad

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said on Tuesday that his country was ready to send its low-enriched uranium abroad for further enrichment, under a United Nations-brokered deal to ease concerns about Tehran's nuclear program.

Ahmadinejad told Iranian state television in an interview that Iran would have "no problem" giving the West its uranium and taking it back several months later when it is enriched to 20 percent for use in a medical reactor in Tehran.

The decision could signal a major shift in the Iranian position on the issue.

For months, Iranian officials said they were unwilling to export the uranium without simultaneously receiving the fuel in exchange. They have also called for the exchange to take place on Iranian soil.

But Ahmadinejad dismissed the concerns of his colleagues that the West would not return the uranium, saying Iran would respond by continuing to produce its own enriched uranium.

“We have no problem sending our enriched uranium abroad,” he said. “We will sign a contract to deliver our 3.5 percent enriched uranium and they have four to five months to deliver 20 percent enriched uranium.”

Still, it was unclear how much of a concession his comments represented. Ahmadinejad did not say how much uranium Iran was ready to ship out. Under the draft plan drawn up in October, Iran would ship about 70 percent of its low-enriched uranium abroad.

If Iran were to agree to ship out most of its uranium in one shipment, it would delay its ability to make a nuclear weapon by stripping it of the material it needs to make the fissile core of a warhead.

The United States said that if this was a new offer, it was “prepared to listen”, reports Reuters.

Russia said that Iran’s readiness to accept the “original agreement” would be welcomed, reports AFP.

And Britain said that it would be a “positive sign” by Iran if it was prepared to take up the deal.

Iran president suggests prisoner exchange for US hikers

Iran’s President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad on Tuesday suggested a prisoner exchange of Iranians in the United States with three American hikers arrested six months ago.

The three Americans were detained on 31 July after they strayed into Iran while hiking along the poorly marked border in Iraq’s northern Kurdistan region. Their families insist it was an accident.

Iran has said that the three would be put on trial, without giving a date.

Asked about the fate of the Americans during an interview on state television, Ahmadinejad said that there were Iranians serving time in American prisons for no particular crime.

“We do not like any person to be in jail but they [the three Americans] violated our borders and their crime is evident. But the Iranians that are in American jails ... are not guilty of anything, at least not that they [US authorities] have announced, and they have

been in jail for some years without a trial,” Ahmadinejad said, according to state broadcaster IRIB.

Ahmadinejad said that US authorities had abducted Iranian nationals from abroad and pressured foreign governments in order to arrest some Iranians.

Iranian officials have accused Washington of kidnapping nuclear scientist Shahram Amiri from Saudi Arabia last year.

“These actions are very bad and it ties our hands, both us [the government] and the judiciary, but discussions are going on the possible exchange [of prisoners],” Ahmadinejad said.

“They have given messages and we replied so that eventually a humanitarian action can be taken; we hope that all the prisoners are released,” he added.

The United States has said the case against the hikers is “totally unfounded” and has repeatedly called for their released.

Last year, Ahmadinejad said he would ask Iran’s Judiciary to expedite the process for the three Americans.

“I said I would help and I spoke with the Judiciary, however, the behavior of some American politicians damages this effort,” the president said today.

Australia blocks Iran shipments over weapons fears

Australia has blocked three cargo shipments to Iran over fears that the contents could have been used in Tehran’s nuclear program, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd said on Thursday.

Rudd told public broadcaster ABC that Defense Minister John Faulkner used powers under the Weapons of Mass Destruction Act to block the shipments.

The prime minister declined to say what the shipments contained or over what period they were blocked.

“If you look at the threat to regional and global peace which Iran poses in its current nuclear weapons program, there is no alternative other than robust international action including in areas such as this,” he said.

Rudd said Australia had acted because it “must play the role of a responsible international citizen.”

The Australian newspaper reported that at least one of the banning orders blocked a cargo of pumps that could have been used to cool nuclear power plants.

Iran, Rudd said, does have a “nuclear weapons program”, and its continued defiance of its international obligations requires that the international community “maintain a hard line”.

The United States and its allies suspect Iran is seeking a nuclear weapons capability. Tehran denies the charge, insisting its nuclear activities are entirely peaceful.

Israel warns Iran of force over nuclear defiance

Israeli Vice Prime Minister Moshe Ya’alon on Wednesday called on the international community to make it clear to Iran that military force was not ruled out in efforts to curb its controversial nuclear program.

The United States and Israel, which suspect Iran is seeking nuclear arms, have not ruled out a military strike against the country, if diplomatic measures fail to curb Tehran’s nuclear drive.

Iran, which insists that its nuclear activities are entirely peaceful, has threatened to strike Israeli sites and US warships in the region, if attacked.

Iran’s plan “will likely be halted, be it through a regime change in Iran or through, with no other choice, the application of force in order to deprive Iran of its capability to produce a nuclear weapon,” Ya’alon told a security conference in the Israeli city of Herzliya, according to the YNet news website.

“It is important to continue clarifying to the extremist regime in Iran that as all options remain on the table and that ignoring the demands of the international community will likely end in bitter tears for Iran,” he added.

Ya’alon, a retired chief of Israel’s armed forces, also called for even harsher sanctions against Tehran over its nuclear program.

He further said world powers must make clear to the Iranian leadership that their survival is at stake.

“In essence, the Iranian regime must be given the choice: either a bomb or survival,” he told the conference, according to Reuters.

Ya’alon said that the unrest inside Iran since the disputed presidential election in June had made the government vulnerable.

“I believe that despite the large amount of time that has seemingly been wasted on futile diplomatic efforts, Iran can still be stopped,” he added.

US defense chief says Iran faces tough sanctions

US Defense Secretary Robert Gates told US lawmakers on Wednesday that Iran will be hit with “severe sanctions” from both the United Nations and the United States and its allies over its controversial nuclear program.

Gates made the remarks at the House of Representatives' Armed Service Committee, when asked about President Barack Obama's warning last week that Tehran would suffer "growing consequences" if it continued defying its international obligations.

"I think in the near term it's more likely to be severe sanctions imposed partly by the UN Security Council and partly by the United States and like-minded countries," Gates said when asked about the president's warning, according to AFP.

Gates did not specify what penalties might be imposed on Iran.

The UN Security Council has already imposed three rounds of sanctions against Iran for refusing to suspend its uranium enrichment program.

US lawmakers have called for imposing sanctions that would target Iran's gasoline needs, punishing foreign firms that do business in Iran's energy sector or help the country import gasoline.

However, the Obama administration is considering focused sanctions against members of Iran's government rather than broad-based penalties that it fears could alienate the Iranian public.

Among potential targets is the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, which is playing an increasingly central role in Iran's economy.

Gates was also asked by lawmakers about military contingency plans to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons.

He offered to answer the question in a classified, closed-door hearing, but said: "We are looking at a full range of options."

Turkey calls for diplomatic solution on Iran

Turkey on Wednesday reiterated its call for a diplomatic solution to the standoff between the West and Iran over its controversial nuclear program.

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, who met his Iranian counterpart Manouchehr Mottaki in Ankara, said Tehran has the right to develop nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.

"There is still room for diplomacy. We'll be involved in every effort regarding Iran that expands the sphere of diplomacy," Davutoglu said at a joint press conference with Mottaki, according to Turkey's Hurriyet newspaper.

Turkey, which has expanded its political and economic cooperation with Iran in recent years, has sought to help resolve the nuclear standoff.

The Turkish diplomat further pointed out that Ankara's policy regarding nuclear weapons was clear.

“Turkey attaches importance to purifying our region from nuclear weapons,” he was quoted as saying by Iran’s state-funded Press TV network.

Western powers suspect that Iran’s nuclear program is geared toward acquiring a nuclear weapons capability – a charge Tehran strongly denies.

Mottaki, for his part, said that the two countries have a “common perspective” toward security issues.

“A threat posed to Turkey is a threat posed to Iran,” he said.

White House says Iran rocket launch a “provocative act”

White House deputy spokesperson Bill Burton on Wednesday called Iran’s rocket launch a “provocative act”.

Burton said that the United States was still checking out reports of the launch.

“A launch like that is obviously a provocative act,” he told reporters, according to Reuters.

Iranian state broadcaster IRIB said the rocket, Kavoshgar-3, had an “experimental capsule” that carried a rat, two turtles and worms.

In addition to the launch, Iran today also unveiled three new telecommunications satellites and a new satellite-carrier engine.

Burton said that “it is not too late for Iran to do the right thing – come to the table with the international community and live up to its international obligations.”

Iran’s space program has worried Western powers, who fear the same technology used to launch satellites could also deliver warheads.

US says Iran threat drives missile plan for Europe

The United States said on Thursday that a planned missile defense shield in Europe was aimed at protecting the region against the “emerging threat” from Iran.

Romania announced yesterday that it would participate in the system by hosting medium-range ballistic missile interceptors.

“Our revised approach is ... tailored to address the emerging threat coming to the region from Iran,” Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs Philip Crowley told reporters at a regular briefing.

“We’re going to protect our interests and those of our allies,” he added, confirming that Romania would host missile interceptors as part of the system, which is expected to be operational by 2015.

Last September, the Obama administration shelved a plan to place missile defense facilities in the Czech Republic and Poland, after strong protests from Russia.

The revamped plan includes land- and sea-based missile systems in and around the Persian Gulf to defend against Iranian short- and medium-range missiles.

Pakistan opposes sanctions against Iran

The speaker of Pakistan's National Assembly on Thursday called for a peaceful settlement to the standoff over Iran's nuclear program, and said her country opposed sanctions against Tehran.

During a meeting in Tehran with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Fahmida Mirza also said that Islamabad had refused to agree with resolutions of the International Atomic Energy Agency against Iran.

"Pakistan supports the independence of the Islamic Republic of Iran and its progress in all fields, in particular in utilizing peaceful nuclear energy," Mirza was quoted as saying by the website of the Iranian president.

The Pakistani speaker, who arrived in Tehran on Wednesday, held talks yesterday with her Iranian counterpart, Ali Larijani.

"Pakistan has been opposed to any sanctions against Iran and it believes the Iranian nuclear dispute must be resolved peacefully and through talks," she said during that meeting, according to the Fars news agency.

The United States and its allies suspect Iran's nuclear program has a military aim, and are pushing for a fourth round of United Nations Security Council sanctions against Tehran.

Iran says its nuclear program is solely aimed at civilian purposes, such as generating electricity.

Economic News

Judiciary Chief Stresses Fight Against Economic Corruption

During the meeting Head of the Judiciary urged necessity to ensure security of investors as one of the judiciary's goals and said the issue of economic corruption should be followed carefully.

All executive, legislative and judiciary branches of the country must do their best in fighting against economic corruption far away from political hue and cries, he added.

The efforts would guarantee investment in the country and draw confidence of public opinion and investors, Ayatollah Larijani said.

He also stressed the importance of retaking unpaid bank loans as soon as possible and said after interaction of banking system and prosecutor general, many efforts have been made in this regard.

Citing some examples of violation in offering bank facilities to figures, Ayatollah Larijani said providing some persons with especial bank facilities indicate lack of an effective supervision and investigation.

Appreciating efforts made in fighting against money laundering in the country, he announced the judiciary system's readiness to investigate such cases as priority.

At the beginning of the meeting, Minister of Economic Affairs and Finance and his deputies and director generals expressed their view points and called for more interaction and cooperation between the ministry and judiciary system.

Iran, Turkey to Hold Joint Economic Commission

The 21st Iran-Turkey joint commission meeting on economic cooperation will be held next Wednesday with Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki and Iranian chairman of the commission in attendance," Ahmad Nourani Taqi Dizaj said.

Nourani also announced that an Iranian delegation is slated to travel to Ankara on January 31 to take introductory measures and pave the grounds for the commission meeting.

According to the envoy, Mottaki will leave for the meeting on February 3 at the head of a 14-member delegation comprising representatives and officials from the Iranian industries and mines, commerce, oil and transportation ministries.

Regarding the issues to be discussed in the commission meeting, the diplomat said that the two sides will confer on trade, investment, customs and banking cooperation as well as cooperation between the two sides' chambers of commerce, industries and mines, especially in the construction of a joint industrial town, communications, road, air and rail transportation, preferential trade agreement and agricultural cooperation.

Nourani asserted that the two sides would ink a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) at the end of the meeting

Iran, Belarus Sign Banking Agreement

The Chairman of the Board of the Belarus National Bank, Petr P. Prokopovich, spoke of high level of cooperation between Iran and Belarus and said the agreement allows letters of credit between the two countries.

He added that Iranian banks in Belarus are permitted to use both Iranian and Belarusian ruble in their transactions.

Central Bank of Iran Deputy Chair Sayyid Hamid Pour-Mohammadi asserted that experts are working to make it possible for clients to have access to their accounts through ATMs in Belarus.

Regarding war against money laundering, Pour-Mohammadi said joint efforts have been made by the two countries to that effect.

Non-Oil Exports to Italy Up 27%

The non-oil products exported to Italy during the mentioned period was worth \$343 mln while the number stood at \$270.648 mln in the same period last year," Reza Tofiqi, Caretaker of the Trade Promotion Organization's Department of Marketing and Regulation of Relations, said.

Tofiqi further pointed out that exported commodities to Italy in the first 9 months of the Iranian year (beginning on March 21) included (stuffed) animal skin, textile products, saffron, melamine ware, water heater, Acid Acetic, pistachio, granite, etc.

He also reiterated that Italy is Iran's eighth trade partner in terms of the value of non-oil exports.

Italy was the 15th trade partner of Iran in the same period last year, Tofiqi added.

Iran in December announced that it exported \$13.2 bln of non-oil products during the first half of the current Iranian year, showing a 25% increase compared with the same period last year.

Iran Transportation Projects Over \$27b

Referring to Middle East transportation projects overshadowed by the last year financial crisis, MEED reported that the projects are reviving currently.

In terms of transportation projects, Iran has been ranked 6th among Middle East countries, according to the report.

The value of transportation projects valued at \$1.3 billion in United Arab Emirates, \$63 billion in Saudi Arabia, \$22.38 billion in Algeria, \$10,18 billion in Bahrain, \$8.33 billion in Egypt, \$14.63 billion in Iraq, \$15.18 billion in Jordan, \$35 billion in Kuwait, \$1.41 billion in Lebanon, \$8.18 billion in Libya, \$12.86 billion in Morocco, \$17.88 billion in

Oman, \$43.41 billion in Qatar, \$6 billion in Syria, \$5.3 billion in Tunisia and \$27.93 billion in Yemen

Iran Opens Trade Center in Sulaimaniyah

According to a report by the Public Relations Department of the Chamber, following the establishment of the center, Iran's Central Cooperative Chamber has invited all the businessmen, economic activists, producers, exporters, service suppliers as well as personal and legal entities to register at the center.

Only the applicants which have the ability to compete at the international level can benefit from the center's facilities.

Sulaimaniyah is a city in the east of Iraqi Kurdistan. It is situated in the northeast of Iraq and is the capital of As Sulaymaniyah Governorate.

The modern city of Sulaimaniyah was founded in 1784 by the Kurdish prince Ibrahim Pashay Baban who named it after his father Sulaiman Pasha

Iran to Export Gasoline

Iran's official news agency, IRNA, in a report announced that the production of gasoline by the new refineries will not only meet domestic demand, but could result in sufficient production to turn the country into an exporter of gasoline.

The largest refinery, the "Persian Gulf Star", will be built in the city of Bandar Abbas on the Persian Gulf with an estimated production of 35.6 million liters of gasoline per day.

The "Shahriar" refinery that is to be built in the northwestern city of Tabriz will be able to produce 8.1 million liters of gasoline daily.

Five additional refineries will be built, with a second installation in Bandar Abbas, and Shiraz and Abadan completing the locations in southern Iran, and a production center in the western city of Kermanshah and the northern province of Golestan.

The plan to construct the new refineries comes as the US has already imposed sanctions targeting Iran's gasoline imports as part of Washington's efforts to apply pressure to Tehran over its nuclear program.

Tehran has repeatedly declared that Western sanctions are not able to force it to relinquish the legitimate nuclear rights of the Iranian nation.

UAE Company to Import Iran Gas Soon

After a delay of almost four years, National Iranian Oil Co. has recently introduced hydrocarbons into the completed upstream facilities--within Iran--to progress the

commissioning and testing activities," Dana Gas said in its financial results statement for 2009.

"This potentially allows for contractual gas deliveries to commence," the company added.

Dana Gas was listed on the Abu Dhabi bourse in December 2005 on the basis of the estimated \$1 billion project, under which the Islamic Republic agreed to pipe gas to Sharjah in the U.A.E., where Dana Gas is based.

Crescent Petroleum Company, a private U.A.E. oil and gas firm, which owns 21% in Dana, is set to import the gas from Iran's Salman field via pipeline, while Dana has the contract to sell it locally. The 25-year contract was signed between Crescent and NIOC in 2001.

However, the project has faced delays due to disagreements between the two parties over the gas price and delays on the Iranian side in constructing the project's facilities.

Despite indications that exports may finally commence, "Crescent Petroleum has served NIOC with an arbitration notice several months ago and the legal progress is now under way," Dana Gas said.

The company added that "no impairment provisions are considered necessary at this time" for assets related to the project on its balance sheet as at Dec. 31, 2009 after a review by its auditors.

Dana Gas earlier Monday reported a fourth-quarter net loss of 193 million U.A.E. dirhams (\$52.6 million) due to exploration write-offs and impairment charges on some oil and gas assets.

ENI Still in Talks Over Iran Oilfield

Negotiations continue with Italy's ENI for developing the third phase of Darkhovin," Seifollah Jashnsaz said on the state news agency IRNA. "ENI has not withdrawn from the project."

Italy's Prime Minister Silvo Berlusconi said on Tuesday that ENI had cancelled an unspecified third development phase in Iran.

State-controlled ENI, which has fields at Darkhovin and the South Pars offshore site, declined to comment on Berlusconi's remarks.

An analyst who spoke on condition of anonymity on Tuesday said he believed the field in question was Darkhovin. Eni had upgrading plans to bring on line 14,000 extra barrels of oil per day. The company produced 28,000 barrels of oil per day in Iran in 2008.

A spokesman for ENI SpA in Milan declined to comment.

Azadegan Oil Field Output Stands at 40,000 bpd

The daily output of the Azadegan oil field reached 40,000 barrels following an increase of 13,000 barrels after the completion of seven new wells," Jashnsaz said in an interview with MNA.

After completion of more wells, production would soon reach 50,000 bpd, he added.

Last July, China's National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) signed a memorandum of understanding for development of the south Azadegan field. Under the deal, it would pay 90 percent of the costs of a \$2.5 billion project.

In January 2009, it signed a deal with the NIOC to develop the north Azadegan oilfield. The deal was worth \$2 billion in its first phase.

Chemical Exports Over \$2b

According to the report, Iran has exported \$3.392 billion of various chemical products including medicines, fertilizers, paints and glues during the first 9 months of the current Iranian fiscal year.

The exports were worth \$249.081 million in the last month.

Iran's rubber exports also valued at \$1.552 billion in the mentioned period, the report said adding that metal exports also reached \$1.381 billion.

Non-Oil Exports to Arab, African Countries on Rise

Iran's exports to Morocco, Ivory Coast and Senegal have increased 145 percent, 8 percent and 12 percent, respectively", said Hossein Hosseini, director of TPO's Arab and Africa Bureau.

Urea, ammoniac, pistachio, date, fruits and saffron were among major Iranian products exported to the above mentioned countries in the first 9 months of the current fiscal year (started on March 20, 2009), Hosseini added.

Iran's non-oil exports to Egypt, including pistachio, shrimp, passenger cars, fig and gear, have also increased 50 percent in the mentioned period, he said.

He also said that exports to Syria, including technical and engineering services, pistachio, passenger cars, floor covers, vehicles, carpet, gas stoves and honey have increased 31 percent.

Iran's exports to Iraq also increased 64 percent, he said adding that cement, fruit, pistachio, aluminum artifacts, home appliances and industrial oil were among major Iranian products exported to the neighboring country in the mentioned period, he said.

Iran, Turkey Hold 21st Economic Commission

The meeting is being held with participation of Iran's Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki and Turkish Minister of State Planning Organization Cevdet Yilmaz who are co-chairing the session.

The preliminary meeting of the 21st joint economic commission was held between the two countries on Monday.

The two delegations are due to show a roadmap of how to promote bilateral economic cooperation.

During the economic meeting, the two officials are planned to review ways to foster bilateral relations in trade, banking, investment, transportation and aerial fields.

Later in the day, a protocol is scheduled to be signed by Iran's Mottaki and Turkey's Yilmaz.

The two ministers will hold a joint press conference on elaboration of the outcomes of the meeting as well.

US business groups urge Obama to resist Iran sanctions bill

US business groups, including the US Chamber of Commerce, warned the Obama administration on Tuesday that congressional plans to expand US sanctions against Iran would damage US economic and security interests.

"The proposed sanctions would incite economic, diplomatic, and legal conflicts with U.S. allies and could frustrate joint action against Iran," the groups said in a letter to top White House officials.

A copy of the letter, addressed to national security advisor James Jones and senior economic policy adviser Lawrence Summers, was published by the National Foreign Trade Council.

Earlier on Tuesday, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid said that he hoped the Senate would soon pass legislation that would authorize sanctions on companies that provide gasoline to Iran.

The House of Representatives passed a similar bill in December.

The business groups said that they agreed with the goal of stopping Iran from developing a nuclear bomb, but expressed concern that the sanctions “could prohibit any U.S. company from transacting routine business with critical partners from around the globe, even if these transactions have no bearing on business with Iran.”

“These provisions could encompass a very large portion of the global trade community with consequences that in our view have not been adequately assessed,” the groups said.

The proposed sanctions would “undermine” the goal of presenting a united front in the face of Iran’s nuclear ambitions, they added.

Obama administration officials said last month that they were looking at more targeted sanctions against Iran, rather than broad penalties that they fear could alienate the Iranian people.

Italy says will block new Iran energy deals

Italian Foreign Minister Franco Frattini said on Tuesday that the Italian government had taken a firm stance on blocking new oil and gas investments in Iran, including suspending export credit guarantees for Italian firms investing there.

Frattini spoke to Italian television from Israel, where he is on an official visit with Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi.

“We are absolutely firm about blocking new investments in the oil and gas sector,” Frattini was quoted as saying by Reuters.

Italy is one of Iran’s main trading partners in Europe, although diplomatic pressure over Tehran’s nuclear program has led to a sharp reduction in Italian investments in Iran.

Italian energy giant, Eni, is involved in the development of the Darkhovin oil field in southwestern Iran.

Frattini said that Italy’s trade with Iran fell by more than half from 2001 to 2008 and in the first months of 2009, it fell by 30 percent from 2008.

Meanwhile, Israeli Vice Prime Minister Silvan Shalom said today that he had asked Italy for help in getting the European Union to list Iran’s Islamic Revolution Guards Corps as a terrorist organization, reports AFP.

Shalom told Israeli radio that he made the request during a meeting on Monday with Berlusconi.

The Guards Corps is said to be playing an increasingly central role in both Iran's economy and the crackdown against protesters following last June's disputed presidential election.

Petroleum Revenues Top \$31b

Iran's gas and oil revenues have reached \$31.3 billion during the first half of the current Iranian year (started March 21, 2009). The revenues show a decline of 45.5 percent in the first half of the year compared to the same period of previous year. The decline is due to the fall in oil prices caused by the global crisis of last year, Central Bank of Iran (CBI) reported. CBI also announced that the value of non-oil exports amounted to about \$9.1 billion from March to September 2009, some \$0.7 billion lower than the corresponding period of 2008.

The country also exported petrochemical products worth over \$3.3 billion over the past nine months. "Iran's oil and gas revenues reached \$31.3 billion (in the six months from last) March--some \$26.2 billion lower than the same period of the last Iranian year," read the Central Bank report. Iran is the world's fifth-largest crude exporter and its economy mainly relies on oil and gas exports. The Central Bank also reported a decline in the value of non-oil exports, which amounted to about \$9.1 billion from March to September 2009, some \$0.7 billion lower than in the same period in 2008. President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's adviser in charge of the country's budget, Rahim Mombini, said the national budget income for the next Iranian year had been projected at around \$59.6 billion.

Roadmap for Turkish Trade

The 21st meeting of Iran-Turkey Economic and Trade Commission is expected to upgrade ties between the two countries. Iran's Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki arrived in Ankara to attend the meeting and meet senior Turkish officials. In the preliminary meetings, which started on Monday, experts from ministries and state institutions of the two countries, including commerce, energy, industries and transportation ministers as well as customs administrations, exchanged views. The preliminary commission meetings followed up the outcome of committees dealing with trade, transportation, energy, banking, investments and customs. The joint commission is expected to examine ways of boosting bilateral ties in the fields of commerce, transportation and customs, and remove all barriers to expansion of mutual relations.

At the end of the meeting, the two countries will sign a memorandum of understanding (MoU), which will clarify the roadmap for two-way cooperation. During his short stay in Ankara, Mottaki is scheduled to hold separate meetings with President Abdullah Gul, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu and Deputy Prime Minister Ali Babacan. In the past few days, the atmosphere governing the expert meetings of the 21st joint

commission was quite different from the past and the spirit of friendship and mutual understanding prevailed. This is mainly due to the major agreements reached by the two countries in the new meeting. Since the beginning of the current year, Turkey has received 1.5 billion cubic meters of gas from Iran. This marks a 35-percent growth rate compared with the corresponding period of last year. Dispatching manager of the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC), Hassan Montazer Torbati, said that at present 25 million cubic meters of gas are exported to Turkey every day via the Bazargan checkpoint. This amount can be increased up to the ceiling determined in the contract signed between the two countries which is 30 million cubic meters per day. Torbati's comment reveals that compared to last year, the trend of gas export to Turkey is not facing any particular problems. Iran holds the second biggest gas reserves in the world and is viewed as a reliable source of energy in the long run. It is estimated that Iran's gas reserves will last for 160 years, given the current production level.

2010s Age of Scarcity

The 1990s was "the age of abundance", argued Brink Lindsey in a book of that title. Round the world, incomes were rising, capital markets were processing endless flows of money and investment, and technological gains meant ever more information was available more cheaply. And politics in the age of abundance, Lindsey claimed, was all about values.

In the US, this was the period of the "culture wars" over abortion and gun ownership. Internationally, there was a huge expansion in concern over human rights. According to the Economist, the 2010s, it is sometimes said, will be an age of scarcity. The warning signs of change are said to be the food-price spike of 2007-8, the bid by China and others to grab access to oil, iron ore and farmland, and the global recession. The main problems of scarcity are water and food shortages, demographic change and state failure. How will that change politics?

Shifting

Focus

In the domestic debates of some rich democracies, things are shifting already. In Europe, the talk is of how to distribute the pain of cutting public debts. In the US, the return of mad-as-hell populism looks like a turn away from the politics of abundance. Now, a report for the Brookings Institution, a think-tank in Washington, DC, and the Center on International Cooperation at New York University looks at international politics in an age of want. The sort of problems governments increasingly face, they say, will be much less predictable than those associated with old great-power rivalries. Pressure from demography, climate change and shifts in economic power builds up quietly for a long time--and then triggers abrupt shifts. They claim that the current global system is ill-designed for such a world. It is not just that the foreign policies of big countries are in flux. Rather, the way states deal with new threats is, in the jargon, 'stove-piped'. As a UN panel said in 2004, "finance ministers tend to work only with the international financial institutions, development ministers only with development programs".

The authors say that what is needed is not merely institutional tinkering but a different frame of mind. Governments, they say, should think more in terms of reducing risk and increasing resilience to shocks than about boosting sovereign power. This is because they think power may not be the best way for states to defend themselves against a new kind of threat: the sort that comes not from other states but networks of states and non-state actors or from the unintended consequences of global flows of finance, technology and so on.

Alternatives

What would all that mean in practice? They cite the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization as the sort of institutions they want more of: bodies that use technical expertise--leaving aside the IPCC's mistake over the melting of Himalayan glaciers--to induce countries to recognize their mutual interests. Such agencies can promote foresight, and help governments think harder about the consequences of failure (unlike traditional diplomacy, which likes muddling along). They propose an Intergovernmental Panel on Biological Safety along the lines of IPCC to improve bio-security. They also suggest boosting G20 by giving it a secretariat and getting national security chiefs together. Many of these ideas may go nowhere; national sovereignty is hugely resilient. But to those who call the whole exercise pointless, they cite Milton Friedman, who, when monetarism was being mocked in the 1970s, replied, "Our basic function is to develop alternatives to existing policies, to keep them alive and available until the politically impossible becomes the politically inevitable."

Iran Facilitating Armenia-Turkey Trade

Trade figures between Turkey and Armenia represent an amazing success, said the co-chairman of Turkish-Armenian Business Development Council (TABDC), Kaan Soyak. Soyak made the remark on the eve of an international conference on Armenia trade and investment opportunities scheduled for Wednesday in Tehran. Commenting on a recent statement by the Armenian Chamber of Commerce that trade volume between the two countries reached \$300 million in 2009, Soyak told Anatolia news agency that the Armenian institution's statement came as a surprise as TABDC's own estimates were much more modest, at around \$150 million. The World Bank, on the other hand, calculates trade volume between the two countries to be in the ballpark of \$200 million. Turkey and Armenia do not have direct trade routes with each other due to the closed border because of the severe diplomatic clashes over Armenia's occupation of Azerbaijan's Nagorno-Karabakh region. Trade is carried out via third countries in the region such as Iran and Georgia. Therefore, trade figures are not officially recorded by Armenia and Turkey, but instead by third countries based on the consignment documents of the trucks that transport the export items. "We know that the trust-based system of trade that existed in Anatolia in the past is now conducted between the businessmen of Armenia and Turkey, especially from the eastern and southeastern Anatolian regions," Soyak said.

Speaking about the recently prepared protocols to improve relations between Turkey and Armenia, Soyak argued that every passing day delays the achievement of desired goals. "Indeed, the document was prepared with the great endeavors of numerous institutions after months of devoted work. Deferrals in the signing of these protocols are helping those who are against the protocols to highlight disputed subjects," he said. Disputed subjects, such as the 1915 incidents and Karabakh problems, are being raised by opposition parties in both countries, which are obstructing the normalization of relations between the two countries.

Social News

Education Minister: Changes in Educational System Product of Broad Research

Addressing a gathering of media people yesterday, Haji-Babae highlighted the importance of greater interaction between his Ministry and the people, saying that media play a crucial role to this end.

"Boosted interaction between Education Ministry and media could help acquaint people with the activities of the Education Ministry and lead to improvements in Iranian educational establishment," the minister was quoted by Fars News Agency as saying yesterday.

Haji-Babae added that the new changes in Iran's system of education had been approved and the related rules and regulations would soon be submitted to different Iranian provinces for application.

He added that one of the ratifications in his ministry related to revision of financial affairs of the Education Ministry without receiving any additional budget from the government and stressed that his Ministry would not face any budget deficit in the coming year (to start late March 2010).

"One of those programs carried out to rectify the financial organization of the Education Ministry is a plan to provide the Iranian teachers with a special kind of insurance called Golden Insurance. The rudimentary steps to that effect have been taken and the plan will be fully operational in April," the minister said.

The minister also called for greater research activities to be undertaken in Iranian educational centers and urged support for Iranian schools [by the government].

Official: Iran on Verge of Great Scientific Development

The Islamic Republic of Iran is on the verge of a great scientific development and technological leap, but this needs vast international scientific and technological cooperation," Mehdienejad said in a meeting with Indian Envoy to Tehran Sanji Singh on Sunday.

He also called on the Indian side to help Iran to attain its scientific and technological goals, given the extensive relations between the two countries.

"Given our extensive ties with India, we definitely prioritize cooperation with India," the official said.

"We view cooperation with India through a strategic outlook and we are not thinking of short-term achievements. We believe that we should reach a common point in practice and then develop it," Mehdienejad said.

During the meeting, Singh described the two nations' common understanding as the most important constituent of bilateral relations, and expressed satisfaction over the expanded student-exchange program and the large number of the students exchanged between Iran and India.

He said his country attaches special significance to scientific and technological cooperation with Iran.

"This kind of relations is specially important for us," he added.

Exhibit explores women's role in Iranian revolution

.A total of 85 photos that have not previously been published are currently on display at the gallery.

"The unity among people from different social classes with different attire, the women who wore the Hijab and those who did not, was remarkable during the Islamic Revolution," he said.

He went on to say that he has prepared 120 photos for the exhibition but it was not possible to showcase them all due to the limited space of the gallery.

The cameras were analogue in those years and photographers could only take 36 pictures, so they were always worried about how many photos they had taken and also about losing photos when developing the exposed film, Nazemi told ISNA.

He said that he took over 4000 photos during the Islamic Revolution and shot over 30 hours at a time with the people in the streets.

“My only motivation for making photography my career is to depict honesty,” he mentioned.

He said that having a camera in streets of Iran is just like having a gun, a view that has its origins from the pessimistic view of photography by officials.

“Today even minor activity in Iran is captured by satellites so there is no need to prohibit photography. If we had been allowed to take photos then (during the Islamic Revolution) the political analysts could use them as historical documents,” he added.

Comments like “Women with different covering and ideologies were present”, “Men and Women pursue a single goal beside each other” have been written next to some of the photos.

Born in Tehran, Akbar Nazemi studied at the Vienna Art School and the Düsseldorf Academy of Art from 1974 to 1978.

His artwork has gone on display at over 25 National and International exhibitions. His depictions of “The Iranian Revolution”, “The Iran-Iraq War” and “Architecture in Iran”, have been acclaimed in Iran, Germany, United State of America and Canada.

Photo: Canada-based Iranian photographer and documentarian Akbar Nazemi poses for a photograph in an undated photo. (ISNA/Marzieh Ebrahimi)

Iran may need fatwa to lift ban on “Journey to Hidalou

“‘Journey to Hidalou’ directed by Mr. Mojtaba Raei is a very good film, but the problem is its actress. Maybe we need a fatwa to grant a screening license for the film,” Deputy Culture Minister for Cinematic Affairs Javad Shamaqdari said on the website of the Islamic Artists Club on Saturday.

Raei rejected the Culture Ministry’s proposal that the scenes featuring the actress be reshot using another actress, he stated.

However, Shamaqdari expressed hope that Raei would accept the proposal.

“Journey to Hidalou” was banned in 2006 after copies of libertine video footage of Zahra Amir-Ebrahimi were leaked onto the Internet and also released on CDs in Iran.

The film is about an aging university professor who experiences a spiritual journey in three stages as he confronts problems with his health and marriage.

Culture Ministry officials recently revised their decision on 13 filmmakers’ requests for screening licenses for their films, which had been banned over the past five years.

Eleven films of the 13 were granted screening licenses after their producers and director

agreed to cut scenes but licenses for “Journey to Hidaslou” and “Fire Keeper”, a comedy on vasectomy in Iran by director Mohsen Amiryusefi, were rejected again.

A screenplay must be approved by the Culture Ministry to obtain a production license in Iran. In addition, the film’s producer must apply for a screening license from the ministry for a domestic or foreign premiere.

No film can be produced or premiere in Iran if the Culture Ministry refuses to grant the necessary licenses.

Longest Urban Tunnel Opens in Tehran

The 2,136-meter-long tunnel was constructed by Tehran's Municipality engineers and experts within 32 months.

The project was initially designed to be finished in a record period of just 29 months but it prolonged when the engineers faced two subway crossroads on their way to complete the project.

It is the first north-to-south urban tunnel which links two most traveled expressways of Tehran, the Chamran and Navab Safavi expressways.

One of the particular technical features of the tunnel is its quake-resistance structure as Tehran is prone to strong earthquakes.

February 11 is also the anniversary of the return home in 1979 of the Founder of the Islamic Republic, the Late Imam Khomeini, from his long exile.

First Iranian woman to Take Part in Winter Olympics

Kalhor will compete at the February 12-28 Games after meeting the Olympic norm in the slalom and giant slalom.

Two other Iranian skiers, the brothers Pourya and Hossein Saveh-Shemshaki, will also attend the Vancouver Games, the reports said.

In line with Islamic regulations in Iran, Kalhor will compete in line with the Islamic dress code.

Exhibit Explores Women’s Role in Iranian Revolution

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Iranian journalists call on UNESCO for enlightenment on Isfahani monuments

The letter, signed by over 100 journalists across Iran, was published Monday by the Persian service of CHN.

Iran has missed UNESCO’s World Heritage Committee’s February 1 deadline for modifying the Jahan-Nama Tower, which spoils the horizontal panorama of the Naqsh-e Jahan Square, a complex of monuments registered on UNESCO’s World Heritage List in 1979.

The deadline was extended several times following requests by Iranian cultural officials. However, the modification has not been completed.

UNESCO threatened to place the site on the List of World Heritage in Danger if Iran fails

to fulfill its obligation to modify the tower.

The clash between the modernism and tradition has continued as a tunnel boring project for the Isfahan Metro deviated from its proper route last November and bumped into a ramp and a lower part of the historical bridge of Si-o-Se Pol.

Other metro lines under construction are also threatening monuments located on Chahar-Bagh Street as well as in Naqsh-e Jahan Square.

Journalists believe the reports published by the Isfahani officials on the Naqsh-e Jahan Square and other historical sites are ambivalent.

They asked the office to assign a team to visit the sites and to inform people about true status of the monuments by a press conference.

The Isfahan Municipality began construction of the Jahan-Nama Tower in early 1996.

The municipality flattened a historical caravanserai and a green area to build the 56-meter tower, which covers an area of 16,000 square meters.

Everything went well for the construction of the tower, though it aroused desultory opposition by Iranian cultural heritage enthusiasts and institutions.

However, UNESCO's World Heritage Committee called for the modification of Jahan-Nama during its 28th session on July 1, 2004.

UNESCO determined that the height of the tower on its eastern side should be reduced by 12 meters and the height of its western side by 24.48 meters.

Although modification began in 2005, the Isfahan Municipality has neglected to complete it so far.

Photo: The Jahan-Nama Tower is seen at the right side of the Aali-Qapu Place on the horizon from the Naqsh-e Jahan Square in a photo taken on January 24, 2010. (Mehr/Ehsan Khosravi)

Perspolis Break Tehran Derby Hoodoo

Perspolis put an end to the six-consecutive 1-1 draws and defeated Esteghlal by a late thundering volley from its skipper Karim Bagheri.

Esteghlal scored an early goal from Farhad Majid but Hadi Norouzi scored the equalizer for Perspolis before the break.

Expecting the seventh draw in a row, Bagheri blasted the ball past Esteghlal goalkeeper Vahid Talebloo 35-meters out in the 86th minute.

More than 75,000 spectators watched the match

Iran to hang nine more over post-election unrest

senior Iranian Judiciary official said that nine people arrested during anti-government protests would soon be executed, the Fars news agency reported on Tuesday.

Iran executed two men on Thursday on charges including “moharebeh” [waging war against God] and membership in a banned monarchist group.

“The two people executed and another nine, who will soon be executed if their verdict is finalized, were surely arrested during the recent riots and each was linked to one of the counter-revolution movements,” deputy Judiciary chief Ebrahim Raisi told a meeting in the city of Qom on Monday night.

“They had participated in disturbances with the aim of creating disunity and toppling the system,” he added.

The executions last week were condemned by international human rights groups and the West.

Some Iranian hardliners, including influential cleric Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, have urged the Judiciary to execute more protesters to end the anti-government demonstrations that have continued.

The lawyers for the two men hanged on Thursday said they were not informed of their clients’ executions, as is required by Iranian law.

On Tuesday, Mir Hossein Mousavi, a senior pro-reform leader, said that the continued repression showed that the 1979 Islamic revolution “had not achieved its goals” and that the roots of “tyranny and dictatorship” still exist.