

Business and Politics in the Muslim World

Weekly Report on Iran
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M Rashid

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Summary

IRGC Official Warns West Against Possible Attack on Iran

A senior official of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) warned that any potential attack on Iran by the West will be reciprocated by a crushing response. "If the enemy gives it a try and fires a single missile at Iran, Iranian missiles will hit the heart of Tel Aviv and the cloud of their dust will be seen before the dust created by the explosion of their missiles comes down in Iran," Supreme Leader's Deputy Representative to the IRGC Mojtaba Zonnour said on Monday evening.

Ahmadinejad: Majlis Should Remove Obstacles to Subsidy Bill

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has called on Majlis deputies to spare no efforts to support the government and help remove existing obstacles to implementation of subsidy reform plan. President Ahmadinejad made the remark in a speech to a group of businessmen in Tehran yesterday.

Mottaki Urges Italy to Rapidly Release Iranian Nationals

Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki has called for a rapid release of the two Iranian nationals held by Italy, and asked the Italian official to avoid playing into the hands of the CIA and the Pentagon.

Leader: OIC Must Mobilize Muslims Against Zionists

Islamic Revolution Leader Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei yesterday urged the authorities to prioritize the country's affairs, adding that the officials must focus on the main goals of the system, including serving the people.

Leader Calls for Unity Among Officials for Making Great Decisions

Addressing the officials, The Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei yesterday underlined for unity among the officials of the Islamic system and said, "The three branches of the government should be vigilant and maintain their unity for making great decisions."

Iran says any oil sanctions would hurt West

A senior Iranian energy official dismissed on Monday any move by the Islamic state's Western foes to impose sanctions on its oil sector, suggesting it would only hurt their own economic growth.

"Any disruption in the supply of crude oil ... will lead to the intensification and prolongation of the economic recession (in consumer countries)," said Hojjatollah Ghanimifard.

DM: Israel Too Weak to Attack Iran

Iranian Defense Minister Brigadier General Ahmad Vahidi rejected the speculations that Israel might launch an attack against the country, warning that any aggression by the regime will be reciprocated by a crushing response causing its annihilation.

Ahmadinejad Says Obama Is a Cowboy in Hands of Zionists

Iran yesterday blasted U.S. President Barack Obama's statements on the new U.S. nuclear strategy, calling him an inexperienced newcomer who follows the will of Israel.

"Such remarks were not even made by his predecessor George W. Bush," President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said, addressing thousands in a speech here yesterday.

Brazil: Iran Could Radicalize With UN Sanctions

United Nations sanctions against Iran over its nuclear program could make the Islamic Republic more radical and cause its population to revolt, Brazil's foreign minister said on Tuesday. Brazil has urged continued dialogue with Iran even as Western powers push for a new round of sanctions in the U.N. Security Council over a program they believe is aimed at developing nuclear bombs.

Bolton: New Iran Sanctions Won't Work

Proposed new sanctions against Iran aimed at stopping its nuclear program won't work, former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations John Bolton said. "It is too late," Bolton said today in a speech at the Foreign Correspondents Club in Hong Kong. "We are beyond the point of sanctions working."

Iran's Disarmament Confab Indicates Tehran's Honesty

Senior Iranian diplomat says conducting the upcoming meeting on disarmament in Iran would signify the country's honesty and firm intention for elimination of nuclear weapons.

MP: U.S. Shocked by Iran's N. Progress

A parliament member has underlined the significance of Iran's access to nuclear technology for peaceful means as a major blow to the arrogant powers, saying Iran's power and progress has turned into a nightmare for the western states, the United States' in particular.

New START treaty will boost China support on Iran: Clinton

The new nuclear disarmament treaty between the United States and Russia should help boost China's support for sanctions against Iran over its nuclear program, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said Friday.

Foreign Office voices 'deep concerns' over Iran centrifuges

The Foreign Office said it had "deep concerns" about Iran's nuclear programme after Tehran Friday unveiled new, faster centrifuges for enriching uranium. Atomic chief Ali Akbar Salehi said Iran had successfully tested the new centrifuges, capable of enriching uranium six times faster than its existing ones, at a plant in Natanz.

Mousavi: “Can Repression & Brute Force Solve Iran’s Problems?”

esterday’s meeting between Mir Hossein Mousavi and the reformist Mojahedin of Islamic Revolution party. Khordaad 88 also **has a version:**

Mousavi said that the Islamic Republic is facing problems “far deeper” than the widespread street protests, and cannot simply be resolved by putting an end to the protests.

Rift Reported Between Qom Clerics, Iranian President

A reformist Iranian cleric close to the religious establishment in the holy city of Qom says several of the city's top clerics refused to meet Iranian President Mahmud Ahmadinejad during a recent visit, RFE/RL's Radio Farda reports.

Protest Leader Ends Silence, Defying Tehran With a Meeting

Iran’s opposition leader renewed his campaign for resistance on Thursday in a meeting with sympathetic politicians. It was his first public act of defiance since the Iranian New Year on March 21, when the authorities boasted that they had quelled the protest movement for good.

I am Guardian of Public Assets

Just a day after a Majlis ideologue lawmaker charged that Vice-President Mohammad-Reza Rahimi was the head of an extensive economic corruption gang, the vice-president sent a circular to all government agencies calling on them to fight economic corruption.

In a follow-up interview he called those who had leveled accusations against him to be 'spreaders of slander' who did not deserve a response.

Economic News

Iranian Warships Foil Attempted Hijack of Oil-Tanker

An attempt by Somali pirates in the Gulf of Aden to hijack an Iranian oil tanker was nipped in the bud after an Iranian fleet of warships present in the region rushed to the scene and attacked the buccaneers' vessel.

6.8b Cubic Meters of Gas Exported Last Year

Deputy Oil Minister Javad Oji says Iran exported some 6.8 billion cubic meters of gas during the previous Iranian year (ended March 20, 2010). He added that Turkey, Armenia and Azerbaijan Republic were the countries importing the Iranian gas during the period.

Kuwait Eager to Boost Iran Ties

Kuwait's Deputy Prime Minister Ismail al-Shatti has announced his country's readiness to reach agreements with Iran over different issues. During the meeting of Iranian and Kuwaiti delegations, he said yesterday. "We came to Iran with firm decision to reach agreements over all issues remained unsettled between the two countries."

Iran to Build Cement, Asphalt Plant in Comoros

Iran intends to construct cement and asphalt producing plants in the South African state of Comoros, Iran's Economic Attaché in Comoros Jalil Makinechi announced yesterday. "We are transferring cement and asphalt plants to the country," Makinechi said at a news conference on the expansion of Iran's investments on the Comoros Islands.

Iran to Launch Vaccine-Production Plant in Sudan

Tehran and Khartoum inked a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on production of livestock vaccine by Iran in Sudan, an Iranian official announced yesterday. "Based on a trilateral MoU signed by Razi Vaccine and Serum Production Research Institute of Iran, Sudanese Ministry of Animal and Resources and Sudan's Ministry of Science and Technology, a complex will soon be built in the African country to produce farm animals' vaccines, including ophthous fever," Head of Razi Institute Abdulhossein Dalimi told FNA.

Non-Oil Exports Via Khuzestan Customs Offices Up

Some 9.5 million tons of non-oil commodities, worth 3.711 billion dollars, were exported from Khuzestan province Customs Offices in the past Iranian year ended March 20, 2010. The figure is indicating 76 and 28 percent increase in term of weight and value respectively.

Iran Among Shrimp Exporters to EU

Iran has joined the countries exporting shrimp to the European Union. An official with the Veterinary Organization said Iran's shrimp producers have successfully received the EC code for the health of their products exported to the EU.

Iran to Actively Participate in China Expo 2010

Iran will actively take part in China Expo 2010 scheduled to be held in Shanghai from May 1 to October 31. Announcing this, managing director of Iran's Exhibitions Joint Stock Company, Kazem Akbarpour said that 200 countries including Iran are to attend the event which will cover an area of 400 hectares.

Indian Co. to Reduce Crude Import from Iran

State-run Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals Ltd will reduce term crude imports from Iran by about 8.5 percent to 130,000 barrels per day (bpd) for the 2010/11 fiscal year that began on April 1, a senior company official said on Monday.

Pakistan to Ink Power Supply Deal With Iran

Islamabad is to sign pact with Iran for power supply as Pakistan has to overcome the crisis of electricity shortage. Islamabad is to sign an agreement with Tehran to ensure supply of more 35MW electricity from Iran to Pakistan in areas near the joint border region.

Insurers Test Ban on Iran Investments

Five insurance trade groups have taken legal action to try to stop California's insurance commissioner from implementing regulations that would penalize insurers with ties to companies that conduct business in Iran.

Iran Set to Reduce Heavy-Oil Prices for Asia

National Iranian Oil Co. is set to cut official selling prices for heavier grades of crude supplied to Asian refiners to 15-month lows after reductions by Saudi Arabia. The state oil company will set Iranian Heavy for May shipments at \$1.60 a barrel below the average of Persian Gulf benchmark Oman and Dubai grades, based on a quarterly

formula tied to Saudi Arabian Oil Co. prices, which it has followed in the past. That is 10 cents lower than April, bringing the discount to its widest since February 2009.

Iran says oil sanctions threat "a joke"

The idea of international sanctions on Iranian oil exports is a joke, a senior Iranian official said on Tuesday, adding Iran would not abandon its disputed nuclear work despite mounting international pressure.

Lukoil to Halt Gasoline Sales to Iran

Russian oil major LUKOIL will cease supplying gasoline to Iran, industry sources said yesterday, the latest addition to a list of companies that have halted shipments ahead of any possible international sanctions.

Iran to Export Gas to Kuwait

Iran plans to export 8.5mln c/m of gas from its giant South Pars gas fields to Kuwait, Head of the National Iranian Gas Export Company (NIGEC) Seyed-Reza Kassayeezadeh said yesterday.

Non-Oil Exports Up by %16

Iran's non-oil exports excluding gas condensates stood at \$21.321 billion last year, showing an increase of 15.98 percent compared to the previous year. The exports weighed 46,470,000 tons, up by 39.59 percent compared to the figure for the past corresponding period.

200,000 Square Meters of Hand-Woven Carpets Exported

Iran has exported some 200,000 square meters of hand-woven carpets from the southwestern province of Chahar Malah and Bakhtiari last year. That was according to the Head of Commerce Ministry in carpet affairs of the province who also said the carpets were woven by 50,000 weavers within a year.

Iran's Major Trade Partners in the Last Year

Iraq, China, United Arab Emirates, India and Afghanistan were the major importers of Iranian products in the last Iranian year (ended March 20, 2010), the Customs Administration reported.

1388, Year of Militarization of Economy

March 20, 2010 was the last day of the Iranian calendar year 1388. That year began well, with a surplus of some items such as potatoes which was distributed free by the government. But the distribution was limited to the election season and as the year grew to its end, the distribution ended too. Interestingly enough, at the end of the year the administration pushed a bill through the Majlis to provide the public with water

Social News

Germany to Host Iran's Bismillah Exhibit

Germany's University of Oldenburg is to host a selection of Iranian poster, calligraphy and logotype on the theme of Bismillah this year. The works will be selected from the six previous editions of Bismillah festivals held so far in the country, said director of the upcoming 7th edition of the festival Mohammadreza Kamareii.

Gov't to Facilitate Depopulation of Tehran

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad says his government would facilitate depopulating of the Iranian capital to reduce possible casualties in emergency conditions. "The government will provide necessary facilities for people of Tehran to live in other cities," said the president, speaking on the sidelines of a visit to an emergency shelter center in western Tehran.

Iran-Turkey Dismantle 15 Drug Trafficking Networks

Police Chief for Drug Control Hamid-Reza Hossein-Abadi said Iran and Turkey have dismantled 15 networks of drug trafficking during last Iranian calendar year started on March 20, 2009.

Iran Sets Annual Record in Narcotics Seizure

Iranian police have seized more than 557 tonnes of illicit drugs throughout the country in the past calendar year (ending on March 20), a senior commander says. "Iranian narcotics agents have managed to confiscate 557.622 tonnes of different kinds of narcotics from smugglers across the country," said General Hamid-Reza Hossein-Abadi, the commander of the narcotics squad.

30 Foreign Teams to Attend Iran's Int'l RoboCup Contest

Some 30 robotic teams from nine countries are taking part physically or electronically at Iran's Fifth International RoboCup Competition underway at Tehran International Trade Fair which kicks off today.

Detailed report

Political Front

IRGC Official Warns West Against Possible Attack on Iran

A senior official of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) warned that any potential attack on Iran by the West will be reciprocated by a crushing response. "If the enemy gives it a try and fires a single missile at Iran, Iranian missiles will hit the heart of Tel Aviv and the cloud of their dust will be seen before the dust created by the explosion of their missiles comes down in Iran," Supreme Leader's Deputy Representative to the IRGC Mojtaba Zonnour said on Monday evening.

Reminding Iran's achievement in building Safir satellite carrier, Zonnour said, "They (the West) know that when we built Safir carrier to send the (Iran-made) Omid Satellite into space, it meant that we have turned into a ballistic power."

Iran's first home-made satellite carrier Safir (Ambassador) carried Iran's Omid (Hope) satellite into the orbit last year.

Omid (hope) was Iran's first research satellite that was designed for gathering information and testing equipment. After orbiting for three months, Omid successfully completed its mission without any problems. It completed more than 700 orbits over seven weeks and reentered the earth's atmosphere on April 25, 2009.

The remarks by the IRGC official followed a recent intensification of Israeli and US war rhetoric against Tehran as well as western efforts to levy international support for further sanctions against Iran

Ahmadinejad: Majlis Should Remove Obstacles to Subsidy Bill

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President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has called on Majlis deputies to spare no efforts to support the government and help remove existing obstacles to implementation of subsidy reform plan. President Ahmadinejad made the remark in a speech to a group of businessmen in Tehran yesterday.

The plan, once implemented, will help reduce level of consumption by 20 percent, he said.

Some economists believe that successful implementation of the project will benefit the country, he said.

“We need some big strides to join the club of big countries in the world,” he underlined.

A country which possesses nuclear technology and satellite and have made remarkable progress in various scientific fields thanks to its pious and committed youths can perform big tasks, he said.

The president advised all Iranians to use domestically-made products to strengthen production and which bring the country dignity and pride.

The next target for Iranian producers and businessmen should be global markets, underlined President Ahmadinejad

Mottaki Urges Italy to Rapidly Release Iranian Nationals

Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki has called for a rapid release of the two Iranian nationals held by Italy, and asked the Italian official to avoid playing into the hands of the CIA and the Pentagon.

"We ask the Italian officials to prepare the ground to secure the release of these two men at the earliest, because this is a game planned by the US through the CIA and the Pentagon (US Department of Defense), a game that has already been played in the other countries and parts of the world but has failed (to produce results for the US)," Mottaki said in a meeting with the families of the detained Iranians yesterday.

"Accordingly, we urge the Italian government not to step into the lost game of the CIA and the Pentagon," Mottaki added.

He also stated that such a political move will not yield any result for the Americans.

Iranian correspondent Hamid Masouminejad and Ali Damirchilou are in Italy's custody on allegations of arms trafficking.

Italy is yet to present the two's lawyers with evidence to back the allegations.

Meantime, Iran has called the accusations unacceptable

Leader: OIC Must Mobilize Muslims Against Zionists

Islamic Revolution Leader Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei yesterday urged the authorities to prioritize the country's affairs, adding that the officials must focus on the main goals of the system, including serving the people.

Speaking to a group of scientific and political personalities, Ayatollah Khamenei pointed to massive western efforts to drive religion out of public life and said the efforts have shattered familial structure in the west however people would return to religion once they find the thoughts are baseless.

"The development has started after the Islamic revolution became victorious," Ayatollah Khamenei said, adding that the main motive of west in opposing Islam is the same development. "The western enmity is mainly due to the existence of faith in the country which brings people to the scene and guides the country in dangerous terrains," the IR Leader added.

He then turned to the recent Palestinian developments and the Zionist regime aggressions in Gaza and West Bank. The IR Leader described the Zionist effort in removing Islamic signs of the Qods and expulsion of Muslims from their homes as a perilous plot which is taking place before the eyes of the world with the Islamic world busy with trivial issues.

Ayatollah Khamenei said the Organization of Islamic Countries, "which is principally established for the Palestinian issue, was expected to fulfill its essential duty in defense of Palestine and mobilize the Islamic world against the Zionists' insidious moves."

He said the world of Islam enjoyed high capacities in fighting against the Zionist malice and greed, adding that the capacities are more than the issue of oil and that the largest consuming market and vital corridors of the world are held by Muslims. "The reputation of the west is confined to this region.

Ayatollah Khamenei said the world of Islam can fulfill its rightful demands even without the potentials and only by use of diplomacy and the very will of governments and nations which is a large weight in the world

Leader Calls for Unity Among Officials for Making Great Decisions

Addressing the officials, The Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei yesterday underlined for unity among the officials of the Islamic system and said, "The three branches of the government should be vigilant and maintain their unity for making great decisions."

The first deputies of the president, Majlis speaker and the Judiciary, the secretary of the Expediency Council, secretary of Supreme National Security Council, secretary of High

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Council of Cultural Revolution, secretary and legal experts of the Guardian Council, members of the Judiciary Council, cabinet ministers and heads of parliamentary commissions were present in the meeting.

"We should materialize the goals of the Vision Plan and if we double our efforts we could go beyond the objectives," Ayatollah Khamenei said.

Islamic Revolution leader said serving people is a divine work adding that during early Islamic period some people were lauded not just for their prayers but for their correct political statements, endeavor and struggle and some other people were blamed for their wrong performance not just for their sin.

Ayatollah Khamenei said that the government as the executive body should be supported to do its tasks.

He pointed to the extracted and non-extracted mines in the country and said, "The capacities of the country in the economic field is high and scientific achievements are wonderful."

Ayatollah Khamenei stressed on recognition of capacities towards progress and said, "We will be fail if we don't apply our efforts for using the capacities."

He underlined for necessity of unity and coordination among officials despite of personal differences and said, "Differences of viewpoints should not stop the country's move towards progress."

Ayatollah Khamenei urges for work and effort culture in the society and referred to the Subsidize Plan and said, "I hope for an agreement between the government and the parliament to enforce the Subsidize Plan in order so that people could see the results of such a plan

Iran says any oil sanctions would hurt West

A senior Iranian energy official dismissed on Monday any move by the Islamic state's Western foes to impose sanctions on its oil sector, suggesting it would only hurt their own economic growth. "Any disruption in the supply of crude oil ... will lead to the intensification and prolongation of the economic recession (in consumer countries)," said Hojjatollah Ghanimifard.

Ghanimifard, a deputy director of the National Iranian Oil Company, was quoted by the semi-official Fars News Agency.

The United States is pushing for a fourth round of U.N. sanctions on Tehran over its refusal to halt sensitive atomic work the West suspects is aimed at making nuclear

bombs, a charge Iran denies.

The latest draft proposals agreed by the United States, Britain, France and Germany include restrictions on new Iranian banks established abroad and on insurance of cargo shipments to and from Iran, the world's fifth-largest crude exporter.

They do not include sanctions targeting Iran's oil and gas sectors as the French had originally pushed for.

Energy-hungry Asian countries are the main buyers of Iranian oil, but recent months have seen a drift in Asia away from crude sourced from the Islamic Republic.

Reliance Industries will not renew a contract to import crude oil from Iran for financial year 2010, two sources familiar with the supply deal said on April 1.

Some trading sources said the move could be due to a price disagreement when the refiner has easy access to competing grades, while others said pressure from the United States and its allies may be another reason.

Japan's Iranian crude imports are also seen declining this year, while China's purchases from Iran fell nearly 40 percent in the first two months of the year.

Ghanimifard said any sanctions on Iran's oil sector would not be practical, suggesting the country could always find alternative buyers.

"One of the main reasons for the impracticality of such a sanction stems from the diversity and multiplicity of Iranian crude buyers which are spread all over the world," he said.

DM: Israel Too Weak to Attack Iran

Iranian Defense Minister Brigadier General Ahmad Vahidi rejected the speculations that Israel might launch an attack against the country, warning that any aggression by the regime will be reciprocated by a crushing response causing its annihilation.

"...the Zionist regime is too weak to start a war with Iran," Vahidi told reporters, adding that think tanks and research centers of the regime have advised it not to even think about attacking Iran.

Asked about Iran's response to any possible aggression by Israel, he underlined, "We have given their response before and if something like that happens, nothing will likely be left of the illegitimate Zionist regime."

Vahidi also dismissed the possibility for a US attack against Iran's nuclear installations, and said, "We assume that Americans are wise enough to stay away from such a dangerous move and they themselves have announced this."

Speculation that Israel could bomb Iran mounted since a big Israeli air drill in 2008. In the first week of June, 2008, 100 Israeli F-16 and F-15 fighters reportedly took part in an exercise over the eastern Mediterranean and Greece, which was interpreted as a dress rehearsal for a possible attack on Iran's nuclear installations.

Ahmadinejad Says Obama Is a Cowboy in Hands of Zionists

Iran yesterday blasted U.S. President Barack Obama's statements on the new U.S. nuclear strategy, calling him an inexperienced newcomer who follows the will of Israel.

"Such remarks were not even made by his predecessor George W. Bush," President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said, addressing thousands in a speech here yesterday.

Obama, in an interview with The New York Times, said outright that the loophole would apply to "outliers like Iran and North Korea" that the U.S. believes are developing nuclear weapons.

"The American leaders still act like cowboys and like heroes in Western movies," Ahmadinejad said in his remarks. "Whenever there is a problem, they use their guns."

He said the U.S. seemed to continue the same policies as Bush and "Obama seems to be just a new face but with the same intentions, which is deceiving world nations."

"We advise Mr. Obama to be careful and not follow the path of his predecessor as he would have the same fate as Bush, and we are not interested in this to happen," Ahmadinejad said.

He also added that any new aggression on Gaza will herald fall of Tel Aviv regime.

Ahmadinejad said that the Zionists are reported to be preparing for a new aggression on Gaza.

"I advise the supporters of the Zionist regime that if they back the fabricated regime for another strike on Gaza, Lebanon, Palestine and Syria, they will be black listed by nations in the region which will bring them defame and annihilation," he said.

Brazil: Iran Could Radicalize With UN Sanctions

United Nations sanctions against Iran over its nuclear program could make the Islamic Republic more radical and cause its population to revolt, Brazil's foreign minister said on

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Tuesday. Brazil has urged continued dialogue with Iran even as Western powers push for a new round of sanctions in the U.N. Security Council over a program they believe is aimed at developing nuclear bombs.

"A regime like Iran's, with sanctions, will tend to radicalize, dig in its heels, joining opposition and government in a position of intransigence," Foreign Minister Celso Amorim told Brazil's Senate foreign relations committee.

"The result of growing sanctions is that the country will become more isolated. Sanctions always hit the poorest people ... that will cause the population to revolt," Amorim said.

He denied that Brazil backed Iran, even though President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva welcomed his Iranian counterpart Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to Brazil last year and plans to visit Tehran in May.

"It's not a question of Brazil being for or against Iran. Brazil is in favor of peace and negotiated solutions," Amorim said. "Brazil wants to have relations (with Iran) like it does with other big countries."

Iran should cooperate with international inspectors, Amorim said. But the country could do little to prove it did not have nuclear arms capability.

"It's hard to prove a negative."

Latin America's largest country has a revolving seat on the U.N. Security Council.

Lula has said that he wanted the International Atomic Energy Agency to be more proactive in reviving stalled talks with Iran. He will attend a nuclear security summit in Washington next week.

Bolton: New Iran Sanctions Won't Work

Proposed new sanctions against Iran aimed at stopping its nuclear program won't work, former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations John Bolton said. "It is too late," Bolton said today in a speech at the Foreign Correspondents Club in Hong Kong. "We are beyond the point of sanctions working."

President Barack Obama's administration is pushing for tougher restrictions on Iran for failing to comply with UN resolutions aimed at limiting its nuclear weapons program. Bolton, now a fellow at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington, was the top U.S. envoy to the world body under George W. Bush, and has repeatedly criticized the current administration.

Bolton also said attempts to persuade North Korea to abandon its nuclear weapons program will also fail even if multilateral talks with China, South Korea, Russia, the U.S. and Japan resume.

“They are looking for a way to get six-party talks re- started to get tangible economic assistance,” Bolton said. “But North Korea has made four sets of commitments since 1994, and has never followed through on them.

Iran’s Disarmament Confab Indicates Tehran’s Honesty

Senior Iranian diplomat says conducting the upcoming meeting on disarmament in Iran would signify the country’s honesty and firm intention for elimination of nuclear weapons.

"Iran is determined both in words and action in eliminating of nuclear weapons,”

Iran’s permanent envoy to the United Nations organizations in Vienna, Austria, Ali-Asghar Soltaniyeh told IRNA in an exclusive interview.

The country is to host a nuclear disarmament meeting on April 17-18 which would be held based on the theme of “Nuclear Energy for Everybody, Nuclear Weapon for Nobody.”

Violation of the Non-Proliferation Treaty by nuclear states has concerned international community, Soltaniyeh said.

He added that Iran has been one of the front-runners of nuclear proliferation campaign and disarmament during the past three decades.

The diplomat referred to Tehran’s disarmament meeting as a “historic chance” for all countries which were seeking a halt on arms race and elimination of nuclear weapons.

Soltaniyeh added that a number of the senior officials from the International Atomic Energy Agency and the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) as well as representatives from international organizations based in Vienna are to take part in the upcoming meeting in Iran.

Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ramin Mihman-Parast invited on Tuesday the countries which advocate nuclear disarmament to attend the Tehran’s meeting

MP: U.S. Shocked by Iran's N. Progress

A parliament member has underlined the significance of Iran's access to nuclear technology for peaceful means as a major blow to the arrogant powers, saying Iran's power and progress has turned into a nightmare for the western states, the United States' in particular.

"Iran's acquisition of the peaceful nuclear technology was a major shock to the leaders of arrogant powers with the U.S. at the top of them," Vakil Sepah told FNA two days before Iran's National Day of Nuclear Technology.

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The lawmaker added that the arrogant powers had never even thought that Iran could access such a great technology.

"Iran's access to peaceful nuclear technology and the country's change into a great regional power is an awful nightmare for the West and the arrogance," Sepah went on saying.

Reminding the US-led efforts to deprive Iran of the nuclear technology, the lawmaker stressed that such efforts would yield no fruit for the western states as they have repeatedly failed in their confrontation with Iran.

He also noted that the ongoing sanctions against Iran would prove counter-productive

New START treaty will boost China support on Iran: Clinton

The new nuclear disarmament treaty between the United States and Russia should help boost China's support for sanctions against Iran over its nuclear program, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said Friday.

"I think that cooperation between Russia and the United States has been very beneficial in getting Chinese participation" towards a UN resolution on Iran, Clinton said in response to a question from a student following a speech at the University of Louisville in Kentucky.

Countries such as Iran and North Korea, she added, are "finding it more and more difficult to make the case that they don't have their own responsibilities."

President Barack Obama signed the landmark deal Thursday in Prague with his Russian counterpart Dmitry Medvedev, under which the two countries will slash their stockpiles of nuclear weapons by roughly 30 percent against a previous treaty from 2002.

"Can our efforts to bring the new START Treaty into force help persuade other nations to support serious sanctions against Iran? I believe they could," said Clinton after noting the move to reduce stockpiles was not likely by itself to convince Iran or North Korea to change their behavior.

But Beijing has "become convinced over the last month" of the need for action on Tehran's suspect nuclear program, she added.

China's ambassador to the United Nations on Thursday joined envoys from Britain, France, Russia, the United States and Germany to mull a US draft resolution that would slap sanctions on Iran's powerful Revolutionary Guards, believe to be involved in nuclear proliferation activities.

Beijing confirmed it would meet again with the world powers in New York to discuss the next steps against Iran, although foreign ministry spokeswoman Jiang Yu insisted Beijing "still believes dialogue and consultation are the best way to solve the nuclear issue."

China has until now refused to back Western calls for new sanctions against Tehran, and last week played host to the Islamic republic's chief nuclear negotiator.

Foreign Office voices 'deep concerns' over Iran centrifuges

The Foreign Office said it had "deep concerns" about Iran's nuclear programme after Tehran Friday unveiled new, faster centrifuges for enriching uranium. Atomic chief Ali Akbar Salehi said Iran had successfully tested the new centrifuges, capable of enriching uranium six times faster than its existing ones, at a plant in Natanz.

"We have deep concerns about Iran's nuclear programme and its failure to reassure the international community that the programme is purely for peaceful purposes," said a Foreign Office spokesman.

"The use of this kind of technology is of course prohibited by five UNSCRs (United Nations Security Council Resolutions) which require Iran to suspend its enrichment programme and come clean about its nuclear intentions."

Mousavi: "Can Repression & Brute Force Solve Iran's Problems?"

Yesterday's meeting between Mir Hossein Mousavi and the reformist Mojahedin of Islamic Revolution party. Khordaad 88 also **has a version:**

Mousavi said that the Islamic Republic is facing problems "far deeper" than the widespread street protests, and cannot simply be resolved by putting an end to the protests.

"Our [Islamic] system is facing problems and its manifestation is not limited to the protests on the streets. The issues and problems are far deeper than this. One of them is that the state believes that by ending the street protests the protesters' concerns are [also] resolved."

The Latest from Iran: Dialogue or Conflict? (9 April)

The former prime minister said during the meeting that all the things that give legitimacy to a state are being "destroyed" in Iran. "Regimes normally use brute force (police,

military and security forces) in the end to survive at any cost, but this is happening in our country and this is cause for great thought and attention,

Rift Reported Between Qom Clerics, Iranian President

A reformist Iranian cleric close to the religious establishment in the holy city of Qom says several of the city's top clerics refused to meet Iranian President Mahmud Ahmadinejad during a recent visit, RFE/RL's Radio Farda reports.

Cleric and journalist Mohammad Javad Akbarin spoke on April 8 to Radio Farda about Ahmadinejad's March 18 visit to Qom.

Akbarin said only one top cleric agreed to meet Ahmadinejad. "As I was informed, that top cleric spent most of the meeting criticizing Ahmadinejad," Akbarin said.

Akbarin suggested that the refusal by some ayatollahs to meet Ahmadinejad demonstrates a rift between religious authorities and the government. It may create difficulties for Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who wants to restore good relations between the clerics and the president.

Akbarin believes the clerics are sending a message to Ahmadinejad. "Instead of trying to convince the religious elements in society that the government and grand ayatollahs are on good terms, you must try to solve the grave problems that exist in Iranian politics, the economy, and the culture," he said.

Protest Leader Ends Silence, Defying Tehran With a Meeting

Iran's opposition leader renewed his campaign for resistance on Thursday in a meeting with sympathetic politicians. It was his first public act of defiance since the Iranian New Year on March 21, when the authorities boasted that they had quelled the protest movement for good.

The opposition leader, Mir Hussein Moussavi, told the politicians, a small group of reformists in Parliament, that dissent went beyond street protests and that the Iranian establishment continued to lose legitimacy. The meeting was reported by the opposition Web site Iran Green Voice. No location was given.

"One of the problems is that the government thinks that it has ended the dissent by ending the street protests," Mr. Moussavi said.

He said that people had lost confidence in the establishment because of widespread corruption, incompetence and mismanagement in the 10 months since he lost the presidential election in June to the incumbent, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, in a suspiciously lopsided vote that Mr. Moussavi said had been rigged.

“I would have given into the fraudulent election results if the government had shown signs of competence,” Mr. Moussavi said. “But we did not see that.”

His comments appeared to be an effort to energize the movement and define a new strategy for its survival despite increasing government pressure. He said that the movement needed to expand its influence among certain social groups, like teachers and workers. “Our interests are intertwined with their interests, and we need to defend their rights,” he said.

Protests over the June election outcome morphed into the biggest opposition movement in Iran since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, and the authorities curbed the protests with widespread arrests and intimidation.

They released a group of high-profile detainees before the New Year holiday. Human rights activists say hundreds more, including at least 35 journalists, remain in prison

Prosecutor Lied; Marashi Arrested

While journalists, civil society and political activists in Iran continue to face arrest and harsh convictions, former presidential candidate and vocal regime critic who heads the National Trust party (Etemad Melli) Mehdi Karoubi warned, “Continuing to arrest and imprison political and civil society activists deepens the crisis in the Islamic Republic.” Meanwhile, despite a declaration from Tehran’s prosecutor, former MP and a vice-president Hossein Marashi who is currently the spokesperson for the Kargozaran Sazandegi (Servants of Construction) party was arrested.

According to the website Saham News, the official website of the National Trust party, Karoubi, who was meeting with the family of Emadeddin Baghi - the prominent investigative journalist and human rights activist - demanded the release of all post-election political prisoners, declaring, “The regime must resolve the issue of political prisoners.”

Baghi was scheduled to be released on the eve of the Iranian new year - March 21, 2010 - after posting bail, but the prosecutor halted his release.

Marashi’s Arrest and Prosecutor’s U-Turn

Hossein Marashi was arrested yesterday even though his request for a 24-hour extension of temporary release had been granted.

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According to a Rooz reporter, Hossein Marashi was arrested on March 19, 2010 to serve a one-year prison sentence but was released two days later for the new year's holidays. Mr. Marashi's family told Rooz that Marashi had requested and was granted a one-day extension of his temporary release in order to see his newly-born grandchild.

According to this report, Mr. Marashi received a call from the prosecutor's office two days ago asking him to visit the office for a meeting with the prosecutor. He was arrested at that meeting, even though his extension request had been previously granted.

It is not yet clear where Marashi is being held. He was held in Ward 240 of Evin Prison after his arrest on March 19. Meanwhile, it was announced that the case of Hassan Lahouti Ashkevari (Faezeh Hashemi's son) has been sent to Tehran's revolutionary court for further investigation involving national security charges.

Lawyer Released

Lawyer and Kurdish civil activist Mokhtar Zareie was released yesterday after spending 80 days behind bars. According to Zareie's lawyer, he has been charged with disseminating propaganda against the regime.

Mohammad Nourizad on Trial Today

Writer and filmmaker Mohammad Nourizad, who has been behind bars since December 20, 2009, will face trial today. Nourizad's family members hope to see him after 107 days of incarceration.

Eleven Years for Abolfazl Abedini

Human rights activist Abolfazl Abedini-nasr was sentenced by the Ahwaz revolutionary court to 11 years imprisonment. One piece of evidence included in Abolfazl Abedini's court record is his business card for his position as the "public relations director for the Committee of Human Rights Lawyers in Iran."

Babak Khorramdin Under Pressure

Student and blogger seyed Hassan Ronaghi has been held in inhumane conditions at the Alef Ward of the Revolutionary's Guards detention center since December 13, 2009. He has been allowed to visit his family once since his arrest and he is under heavy physical and psychological pressure to confess on television. The family of this blogger, who blogs under the pen name Babak Khorramdin, is under heavy pressure not to disseminate any information about their son's critical condition

I am Guardian of Public Assets

Just a day after a Majlis ideologue lawmaker charged that Vice-President Mohammad-Reza Rahimi was the head of an extensive economic corruption gang, the vice-president

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sent a circular to all government agencies calling on them to fight economic corruption. In a follow-up interview he called those who had leveled accusations against him to be 'spreaders of slander' who did not deserve a response.

In his circular to government agencies, Rahimi, who is President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's first vice-president, calls on all public and non-government agencies to fight economic corruption and asks them to initiate appropriate measures. Among the twenty identified financial fraud items, Rahimi referred to some of them in his interview which included, misusing a professional position, accepting or paying out bribes, blackmail, misusing legal provisions and covering up violations and preventing justice. In his interview, Rahimi went beyond his own defense and said that he was in fact the "guardian" of public property.

Rahimi is the most senior official in the executive branch second to Ahmadinejad himself. He is not new to controversy and this time it was MP Elias Naderan who launched an expose of the vice-president and said that Rahimi was the ring-leader of the largest economic corruption band in the country. The lawmaker said that almost all members of this gang on Tehran's Fatemi Avenue had been arrested, except "the current vice-president." It should be noted that law enforcement agencies last week arrested a large group of individuals on Fatemi avenue accusing them of economic and financial violations.

MP Naderan was supported by other Majlis deputies Ahmad Tavakoli and Ali-Reza Zakani, both belonging to the ideologue group of MPs known as the Principalists, who have traditionally supported Ahmadinejad.

The pro-reform lawmakers in the Majlis postponed taking sides in the dispute to after a hearing on the subject of corruption. Majid Nassirpour, one such MP told journalists that his faction had invited Elias Naderan to explain his remarks to the group.

In his interview, Rahimi did not name any person by name, but his accusations of slander were directed at the lawmakers who had publicly accused him of being the leader of a gang. By saying that "those who made accusations against him themselves had vested interests, who did not deserve a response", Rahimi got dragged into yet another public controversy. Last June he was summoned by a court in Tehran to respond to charges of financial misconduct. Rahimi denied this news and no follow up reports were published. But the politician continued to face public charges.

What is generally considered to be the largest corruption case involving a government official in the Islamic republic in the last three decades is important to critics and observers because during the last five years not only has Ahmadinejad been portraying himself as leading the battle for 'economic justice', but economic corruption gangs have in effect stalled many of the ninth and current administration's goals.

MP Nassirpour clarified that if Naderian presented evidence for his charges, then the

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Khate Emam faction in the Majlis (viewed as the regime's reform group inside the parliament) will take a position on "Rahimi's work with the government."

Rahimi's history of controversy is long. He is a veteran politician who became a prosecutor in the province of Kurdistan, his birthplace, in the early period of the 1979 revolution. He ran for the Majlis in 1984 and became a two-time MP. In early 90s he left Majlis and joined Hashemi Rafsanjani's administration. By 1997 he is already engulfed in a high-level public scandal, this one over election votes. While predictions at the time were that Mohammad Khatami would overwhelmingly win the presidential vote in Kurdistan, electoral fraud resulted in another presidential hopeful Nategh Nouri getting the majority votes in the province. Nouri had already won in his own state of birth Mazandaran, which launched him as a possible conservative alternative to Khatami. Rahimi at the time was the governor of Kurdistan province and fingers were pointed at him. When Khatami took office, Rahimi lost his governorship.

Rahimi then was appointed advisor to Mohammad Yazdi, the head of the judiciary in Iran and then by presenting forged educational documents (a degree from Oxford University) he was appointed head of the Azad University's law school.

His controversial academic documents were discussed in the Majlis and other government agencies joined in the battle for or against him. Ruhollah Hosseinian, the head of Iran's documentation center, for example, questioned Rahimi's foreign degree. Oxford University in UK reported that it did not have a record for Rahimi's claims.

Another controversy involving Rahimi is when he was head of the government accounting agency, he presented the most bizarre reports in support of his boss president Ahmadinejad in 2006 and had even said that Ahmadinejad was the next messiah, if there was to be a messiah after Mohammad.

During the time Rahimi was the governor of Kurdistan too there is a list of controversy that followed him that ranged from charges of political abuse to threatening national security. These have been listed in Zaban Sabz website.

Economic Front

Iranian Warships Foil Attempted Hijack of Oil-Tanker

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An attempt by Somali pirates in the Gulf of Aden to hijack an Iranian oil tanker was nipped in the bud after an Iranian fleet of warships present in the region rushed to the scene and attacked the buccaneers' vessel.

The Iranian oil tanker named 'Iran Faraz' was attacked by four Somali speed-boats on route to the port city of Izmir in Turkey from Bandar Bushehr in southern Iran.

The Iranian fleet which was patrolling in the area rushed to the scene after it received an SOS message from the Iranian tanker and curtailed the attempted hijack through timely and swift operation.

Iran Faraz is now heading to Turkey without sustaining any damage.

The Iranian Navy has been conducting anti-piracy patrols in the Gulf of Aden since November 2008, when Somali raiders hijacked the Iranian-chartered cargo ship, MV Delight, off the coast of Yemen.

The Iranian Navy has recently dispatched a seventh flotilla of warships to the Gulf of Aden to defend the country's cargo ships and oil tankers against continued attacks by Somali pirates.

6.8b Cubic Meters of Gas Exported Last Year

Deputy Oil Minister Javad Oji says Iran exported some 6.8 billion cubic meters of gas during the previous Iranian year (ended March 20, 2010). He added that Turkey, Armenia and Azerbaijan Republic were the countries importing the Iranian gas during the period.

Meanwhile, he noted that the imported gas last year indicated some 16 percent fall compared to the preceding year.

The country's gas reserves currently stand at 30,000 billion cubic meters, half of which is located in the South Pars fields, he said, adding that Iran produces 630 million cubic meters of sour and sweet gas each day.

Some 540 million cubic meters of gas is also processed on a daily basis in 13 refineries throughout the country, Oji, who is also Managing Director of Iran's National Gas Company added.

Denouncing sanctions imposed on the Islamic Republic of Iran by certain Western countries, he said such moves have created no obstacle on the way of the performance of his company

Kuwait Eager to Boost Iran Ties

Kuwait's Deputy Prime Minister Ismail al-Shatti has announced his country's readiness to reach agreements with Iran over different issues. During the meeting of Iranian and

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Kuwaiti delegations, he said yesterday. "We came to Iran with firm decision to reach agreements over all issues remained unsettled between the two countries."

"Kuwait will offer utmost cooperation with Iran about issues scheduled to be discussed in the next meeting of the two delegations such as exporting water to Kuwait by Iran and the two countries' cooperation in the field of gas and electricity," he added.

"Serious studies have been done in the fields of bilateral media and art cooperation as well as Kuwait's drive to join the north-south corridor," he said, adding talk about the subjects would be continued at the next meeting.

As one of the other topics to be discussed in the meeting, he said, "Kuwaiti Emir has also reiterated the necessity of investment in the field of food industry in Iran's seashores."

He also expressed hope that the two sides would reach agreement on establishment of a cultural center in Iran as well as cooperation in the fields of banking, customs and aviation

Iran to Build Cement, Asphalt Plant in Comoros

Iran intends to construct cement and asphalt producing plants in the South African state of Comoros, Iran's Economic Attaché in Comoros Jalil Makinechi announced yesterday. "We are transferring cement and asphalt plants to the country," Makinechi said at a news conference on the expansion of Iran's investments on the Comoros Islands.

Highlighting capabilities and potentials of the Islands for foreign investment and economic activities, he pointed out that Comoros can serve as a bridge for transporting Iranian goods and products to the other countries by air and sea.

Makinechi further reminded the unique advantages granted to Iran for trade with Comoros, and said the country enjoys "abundant potentials for investment in the fields of fishery, power plant construction, establishment of various plants, agricultural and tourism activities".

He noted that the popularity of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in Comoros has further paved the way for the Iranians to promote investment in the country.

Makinechi also reminded that a number of Arab and European countries are investing in Comoros and Arab states, such as Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE have already guaranteed \$3 bln of investment in the African country

Iran to Launch Vaccine-Production Plant in Sudan

Tehran and Khartoum inked a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on production of livestock vaccine by Iran in Sudan, an Iranian official announced yesterday. "Based on a trilateral MoU signed by Razi Vaccine and Serum Production Research Institute of Iran,

Sudanese Ministry of Animal and Resources and Sudan's Ministry of Science and Technology, a complex will soon be built in the African country to produce farm animals' vaccines, including ophthous fever," Head of Razi Institute Abdulhossein Dalimi told FNA.

Dalimi reiterated that the complex will be built in Suba district in a technology park in southern Sudan on a 60% Iranian and 40% Sudanese investment.

Noting that the technological know-how for synthesizing different kinds of vaccine in Iran has experienced ample progress during recent years, he stressed that the country is considered as one of the important exporters of the know-how and attaches much importance to the transfer of the technological know-how to the Muslim and African states.

Dalimi also announced that Sudanese Minister of Animal and Resources, Mohamed Ahmed al-Tahir Abu Kalabish, is due to travel to Iran in spring to sign the deal for the production of farm animal vaccine in his country.

Non-Oil Exports Via Khuzestan Customs Offices Up

Some 9.5 million tons of non-oil commodities, worth 3.711 billion dollars, were exported from Khuzestan province Customs Offices in the past Iranian year ended March 20, 2010. The figure is indicating 76 and 28 percent increase in term of weight and value respectively.

The countries including South Korea, China, India, European, South East Asian and the Persian Gulf littoral states are considered as the target market for Iranian non-oil commodities via Khuzestan province Customs Offices.

In the meantime, some 17.2 million tons of commodities, worth 9.285 million dollars, were imported via Khuzestan province Customs Offices last year.

Bandar Imam Khomeini, Khorramshahr, Abadan and Ahwaz are the main custom offices of Khuzestan province

Iran Among Shrimp Exporters to EU

Iran has joined the countries exporting shrimp to the European Union. An official with the Veterinary Organization said Iran's shrimp producers have successfully received the EC code for the health of their products exported to the EU.

Hadi Tabraee added that special unities of Iran's Veterinary Organization were in charge of supervising health condition of 110 fishery companies and shrimp farming centers.

Iran to Actively Participate in China Expo 2010

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Iran will actively take part in China Expo 2010 scheduled to be held in Shanghai from May 1 to October 31. Announcing this, managing director of Iran's Exhibitions Joint Stock Company, Kazem Akbarpour said that 200 countries including Iran are to attend the event which will cover an area of 400 hectares.

It is anticipated that some 10 to 12 million people will visit Iran's pavilion at the event, he noted.

Expos are cultural events with a history of 150 years seeking to present the latest scientific, industrial and cultural achievements.

"President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has ordered the relevant ministries to support Iran's programs regarding the expo," he noted.

The theme of the exposition will be "Better City, Better Life", he said, noting that Iran will attend the event with the motto of 'Diversity of Urban Culture'.

Iran's 2,000-square-meter pavilion is located in the Asian section of the expo, he said.

Akbarpour further noted that in addition to presenting urban culture, Iran's pavilion is to display products in the fields of laser and nuclear medicine.

He also called on companies to send their products for display at the event if they are compatible with the subject of the expo

Indian Co. to Reduce Crude Import from Iran

State-run Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals Ltd will reduce term crude imports from Iran by about 8.5 percent to 130,000 barrels per day (bpd) for the 2010/11 fiscal year that began on April 1, a senior company official said on Monday.

"Every year we review our crude basket. It has nothing to do with the prices. Last year we raised term contract with Iran and this year we have reduced it," L.K. Gupta, head of finance at MRPL told Reuters in a telephone interview.

MRPL is India's top importer of Iranian crude and buys Iran Mix and Iran Heavy varieties.

Iran has, however, raised the credit period offered to MRPL for crude oil sales to 90 days from 30 days in the previous fiscal year, Gupta said.

Sources earlier said India's top private firm Reliance Industries, owner of the world's biggest refining complex, has not renewed its term deal with Iran due to differences over pricing of crude.

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Besides Iran, MRPL has term contracts with Abu Dhabi National Oil Co (ADNOC) and Saudi Aramco.

While the proposed term volumes with Saudi Aramco have been maintained at last year's level of 22,000 bpd, MRPL's term deal with ADNOC has also been slashed by 8.7 percent to 27,400 bpd, Gupta said.

The firm buys mainly Murban crude from ADNOC.

MRPL, which runs a 236,400 bpd coastal plant in the Southern Karnataka state, aims to step up purchases from the spot market to over 20,000 bpd in the current fiscal to meet the shortfall

Pakistan to Ink Power Supply Deal With Iran

Islamabad is to sign pact with Iran for power supply as Pakistan has to overcome the crisis of electricity shortage. Islamabad is to sign an agreement with Tehran to ensure supply of more 35MW electricity from Iran to Pakistan in areas near the joint border region.

"We are going to ink an agreement with Iran soon to ensure supply of more 35MW electricity from Tehran to Pakistani areas located near the Pak-Iran border particularly Makran Division," Raja Pervez Ashraf, Pakistan's minister for water and power told reporters on Sunday, a Press TV correspondent reported.

Iran was already providing electricity to Makran division of south western Baluchistan province and other Pakistani areas located near Pak-Iran border, the minister said.

The deal would help Pakistan overcome the crisis of electricity shortages in the country.

Ashraf recalled that in 2002, both Pakistan and Iran had reached an agreement to supply electricity from Iran to Pakistani areas particularly in Makran division.

According to Pakistan Electric Power Company (PEPCO) officials, the power production is 10,150MWs with consumption at 14,950, triggering load shedding-announced and unannounced.

On Saturday, Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani has constituted a 3-member committee to end power load shedding

Insurers Test Ban on Iran Investments

Five insurance trade groups have taken legal action to try to stop California's insurance commissioner from implementing regulations that would penalize insurers with ties to companies that conduct business in Iran.

Meanwhile, war risk underwriters at Lloyd's of London have added Iran to their list of risky areas in response to potential increased sanctions by U.S. governmental agencies.

The five trade groups representing insurers filed a petition last week with the California Office of Administrative Law, alleging that recent requirements imposed by California Insurance Commissioner Steve Poizner are illegal, “underground” regulations—or rules that a government agency attempts to pass or enforce without a public comment period or other requirements under state law.

The American Council of Life Insurers, the American Insurance Assn., the Assn. of California Insurance Cos., the Assn. of California Life & Health Insurance Cos. and the Personal Insurance Federation of California filed the petition seeking to invalidate the regulations until they have gone through a formal rulemaking process.

In February, Mr. Poizner released a list of 50 companies that he said do business in the Iranian oil, natural gas, nuclear and defense sectors. He asked insurers licensed in California to eliminate any investments in those companies and pledge by April 2 to avoid such investments in the future. Mr. Poizner threatened to post a public list of those who did not comply, and said last month that 460 insurers had agreed to the moratorium.

Iran Set to Reduce Heavy-Oil Prices for Asia

National Iranian Oil Co. is set to cut official selling prices for heavier grades of crude supplied to Asian refiners to 15-month lows after reductions by Saudi Arabia. The state oil company will set Iranian Heavy for May shipments at \$1.60 a barrel below the average of Persian Gulf benchmark Oman and Dubai grades, based on a quarterly formula tied to Saudi Arabian Oil Co. prices, which it has followed in the past. That is 10 cents lower than April, bringing the discount to its widest since February 2009.

Saudi Aramco, as state-owned Saudi Arabian Oil is known, yesterday cut its price for Arab Medium crude to Asia by 10 cents a barrel, according to an e-mailed statement from the Dhahran-based company.

“I guess they, Aramco, know actual demand for petroleum products hasn’t been so strong,” said Shohei Setoh, a crude trader with Japan Energy Corp. in Tokyo. “Few people think demand is strong enough to support the physical market.”

National Iranian’s Forozan Blend crude, also linked to Saudi Aramco’s Arab Medium, will probably be lowered for May shipments by 10 cents a barrel to \$1.55 below the Oman-Dubai average, based on the formula. Iranian Light is expected to be raised to a 10-cent premium to the benchmark.

National Iranian will formally announce its prices for the three grades to be supplied to Asia, the Mediterranean, Northwest Europe and South Africa this week, said an official, who asked not to be identified citing company policy. It’s also due to set May prices for Soroush and Norooz grades, which are shipped only to Asia and the Mediterranean.

The following table shows the prices of Iranian crude oil to be supplied to Asia, as a differential to the average of Oman and Dubai grades, and the month-on-month change. Prices are in dollars a barrel

Iran says oil sanctions threat "a joke"

The idea of international sanctions on Iranian oil exports is a joke, a senior Iranian official said on Tuesday, adding Iran would not abandon its disputed nuclear work despite mounting international pressure.

U.S. President Barack Obama is pushing for new U.N. sanctions in the coming weeks to pressure Iran to stop its sensitive nuclear activities, which Washington and its European allies believe is a cover to develop bombs.

Iran's foreign ministry spokesman said restricting Iran's oil and gas exports -- an idea not included in the latest proposals agreed by Western powers -- was "illogical" and that all sanctions would fail.

"Countries need oil to guarantee their economic growth ... talking about imposing sanctions on Iran's oil sector is like a joke," Ramin Mehmanparast told a weekly news conference. "Such a move would hurt other (importer) countries.

"Imposing sanctions on Iran is illogical and a politically-motivated measure ... Iran will never abandon its nuclear activities because of sanctions."

The United States already bans imports of Iranian energy, but the world's fifth biggest oil exporter has willing buyers around the world. Crude hit an 18-month high near \$87 on Monday, reflecting growing confidence of an economic upturn.

A senior executive at the National Iranian Oil Company said on Monday sanctions that disrupted the supply of crude oil would "lead to the intensification and prolongation of the economic recession (in consumer countries)."

The latest draft proposals agreed by the United States, Britain, France and Germany include restrictions on new Iranian banks established abroad and on insurance of cargo shipments to and from Iran.

Commenting on potential restrictions on Iran's petroleum imports, Oil Minister Masoud Mirkazemi said the country had the refining capacity to avoid that being a massive blow.

"Iran has the capability to produce fuel in case of emergency," he was quoted as telling Iranian state radio.

OBAMA WANTS "BITE"

Weekly report on Iran

In an interview in Tuesday's New York Times, Obama said he wanted a U.N. sanctions resolution "that has bite" to pressure Iranians over a nuclear program he said "would provide them with nuclear weapons capabilities."

Announcing new limits on the conditions under which the United States could use nuclear weapons, Obama said it would not apply to "outliers like Iran and North Korea."

Iran denies it is trying to make nuclear weapons and says it is developing purely peaceful nuclear technologies. President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has said he is still open to negotiate with foreign powers, but under strict conditions.

Mehmanparast said he hoped Russia would fulfill an Iranian order for a missile defense system which Israel and the United States do not want it to have.

Analysts say the S-300 could help Iran thwart any attempt by Israel or the United States - - which have refused to rule out military action if diplomacy fails to resolve the atomic row -- to bomb its nuclear facilities.

Mehmanparast accused Washington of kidnapping an Iranian nuclear scientist who, according to U.S. media, chose to defect.

ABC News reported last week that nuclear physicist Shahram Amiri, who disappeared during a pilgrimage to Mecca in June, had defected to the United States and was helping the CIA.

"America's connection with Amiri proves what we said in the past, that American intelligence services were involved in this kidnapping," Mehmanparast said.

Lukoil to Halt Gasoline Sales to Iran

Russian oil major LUKOIL will cease supplying gasoline to Iran, industry sources said yesterday, the latest addition to a list of companies that have halted shipments ahead of any possible international sanctions.

LUKOIL, Russia's No. 2 oil company, has been supplying gasoline to Tehran intermittently, moving between about 250,000 barrels to 500,000 barrels of gasoline every other month, traders said.

"They are not one of the major players in supplying gasoline to Iran, they do it on occasion," a trader said.

"But now they will stop because of pressure coming from their head office in Moscow."

Lukoil moved a 250,000 barrel shipment of gasoline to Iran's Bandar Abbas port between March 10-12, shipbrokers said.

LUKOIL declined to comment.

Sources familiar with the company said that the Russian energy giant had received verbal directions from senior management instructing traders involved in gasoline sales to Iran to cease business activity.

LUKOIL has significant exposure in the United States with about 2,000 retail gasoline stations, the largest presence there among Russian oil firms. ConocoPhillips is a major shareholder in the company.

In March Anglo-Dutch oil firm Shell announced that it had stopped gasoline supplies to the Islamic republic joining two of the world's largest independent trading companies Glencore and Vitol who had taken similar decisions

Iran to Export Gas to Kuwait

Iran plans to export 8.5mln c/m of gas from its giant South Pars gas fields to Kuwait, Head of the National Iranian Gas Export Company (NIGEC) Seyed-Reza Kassayeezadeh said yesterday.

"Kuwaiti officials during the meetings and negotiations have announced their willingness to use Iran's natural gas," Kassayeezadeh reiterated.

Referring to the price of gas supplies to Kuwait, he said that the two sides have presented their proposals, but the final price has not yet been decided.

Kassayeezadeh also announced an agreement between Iran and Kuwait to establish a governmental and a private company to construct a 577 km pipeline to transfer Iran's gas to Kuwait.

He said that the issue has already gone under negotiation in several meetings between the two sides and that some good achievements have been made.

The official also pointed out that talks will continue on the issue.

He further mentioned that 330 km of the pipeline will be constructed on the ground while 240 km more will be built under water in the Persian Gulf.

Iran exported 6.8 billion cubic meters (bcm) of natural gas during the last Iranian year (ended on March 20), Deputy Oil Minister Javad Oji announced earlier this week.

Reminding that the country's gas reserves stand at 30,000 bcm, Oji stated that half of Iran's gas reserves is located in the South Pars fields.

Oji, who is also Managing Director of Iran's National Gas Company, announced that Iran produces 630 million cubic meters of sour and sweet gas per day.

Some 540 million cubic meters of gas is also processed on a daily basis in 13 refineries throughout the country, he added

Non-Oil Exports Up by %16

Iran's non-oil exports excluding gas condensates stood at \$21.321 billion last year, showing an increase of 15.98 percent compared to the previous year. The exports weighed 46,470,000 tons, up by 39.59 percent compared to the figure for the past corresponding period.

Non-oil exports including gas condensates and carry-on-luggage trade reached \$54.596 billion, registering an increase of 10.01 percent compared to the figure for the year earlier.

Last year, oil gases and gas hydrocarbons were the main exports of Iran, accounting for 4.77 percent of total exports.

Liquefied propane worth \$961 million ranked second in export while polyethylene (film grade) and pistachio occupied the third and fourth positions respectively.

Methanol exports worth \$653 million ranked fifth last year.

Iraq was the major importer of the Iranian goods last year while China stood second with the imports of \$3.120 billion.

The UAE, India and Afghanistan were the next main importers of Iranian goods last year.

This is while gasoline was the main imported item of Iran last year, accounting for 8.3 percent of total imports.

The UAE was the major exporter to Iran with China coming next.

Germany, Korea and Switzerland were the third, fourth and fifth exporters to Iran respectively

200,000 Square Meters of Hand-Woven Carpets Exported

Iran has exported some 200,000 square meters of hand-woven carpets from the southwestern province of Chahar Mahal and Bakhtiari last year. That was according to the Head of Commerce Ministry in carpet affairs of the province who also said the carpets were woven by 50,000 weavers within a year.

Jafari added the hand-woven carpets worth 60 million dollars were exported to Europe, Persian Gulf littoral states and Central Asia.

He said there were 100,000 weavers in the province, adding that high quality, standard designs of carpets and using traditional materials in the industry were among the distinctive characteristics of hand-woven carpets of the tourist province of Chahar Mahal and Bakhtiari

Iran's Major Trade Partners in the Last Year

Iraq, China, United Arab Emirates, India and Afghanistan were the major importers of Iranian products in the last Iranian year (ended March 20, 2010), the Customs Administration reported.

The Islamic Republic of Iran's non-oil exports (excluding gas condensates) valued at \$21.321 billion in the last Iranian year (March 20, 2009-March 20, 2010) showing 15.98 percent growth over the previous year, the report said. The exports were also weighted 46.470 million tons showing 39.59 percent increase in terms of volume over the previous year.

Iran's non-oil exports including gas condensates valued at \$25.596 billion, the report added.

Iran has also imported \$55.189 billion of various products in the same year showing 1.52 percent decrease. The imports were weighted 51.851 million tons showing 17.45 percent growth.

Iraq, China, United Arab Emirates, India and Afghanistan were top 5 trade partners of Iran in terms of exports importing \$4.109 billion, \$3.120 billion, 42.875 billion, \$1.263 billion and 41.2 billion of Iranian products, respectively.

United Arab Emirates, China, Germany, South Korea and Switzerland were also top 5 exporters to Iran in the same year, the report concluded.

1388, Year of Militarization of Economy

March 20, 2010 was the last day of the Iranian calendar year 1388. That year began well, with a surplus of some items such as potatoes which was distributed free by the government. But the distribution was limited to the election season and as the year grew to its end, the distribution ended too. Interestingly enough, at the end of the year the administration pushed a bill through the Majlis to provide the public with water, electricity, power, gasoline and natural gas at market prices without the traditional subsidies. Meanwhile, the Iranian economy suffered from severe stagnation and unemployment in 1388 as the country's important and money-making firms were handed over to the Islamic Pasdaran Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC).

Sadra and Telecommunications Handed to IRGC

One of the most important developments of 1388 was the IRGC's greater takeover of the country's economy. Two huge firms, one in gasoline and natural gas industry, named Sadra, and the other a national telecommunications firm were handed over to consortiums controlled by the IRGC.

On 25 April 2009, 51.18% of the naval-industrial giant Sadra was sold to a consortium controlled by IRGC's Khatam al-Anbia force. Exactly five months later, at the height of popular unrest, 50% of Iran Telecommunications Company was sold to the two firms owned by the IRGC in what amounted to the largest stock market transaction in Iran's history,

Non-Existent Growth

When Mahmoud Ahmadinejad announced that the Iranian economy had growth at the rate of 6.9% in 1387, he was not unaware that Iran's Central Bank had released a report announcing that the rate of economic growth was less than 3%!

Widespread stagnation in bazaars across the nation, decreasing trade volumes, an increase in the number of returned checks, and a fall in the national economic output are among the signs pointing to an unprecedented stagnation of the country's economy. Some experienced bazaaris go as far as comparing the present economic conditions to those immediately following the Iran-Iraq War and Iran's acceptance of UN Resolution 598.

Currently, estimates point to a potentially backbreaking inflation rate of 50% in 1389. The country's largest economic bill of the past 30 years, the subsidy reform plan, passed in the final days of the year, though the administration introduced the bill with massive enthusiasm and received it with disappointment from the Majlis. The year 1388 ended while the bill's implementation schedule has not yet been determined and people still do not know how much they will be paying for goods such as water, electricity and gasoline; although it is unlikely for the price increases to take place in the initial 3 months of the year

Social Front

Germany to Host Iran's Bismillah Exhibit

Germany's University of Oldenburg is to host a selection of Iranian poster, calligraphy and logotype on the theme of Bismillah this year. The works will be selected from the six previous editions of Bismillah festivals held so far in the country, said director of the upcoming 7th edition of the festival Mohammadreza Kamareii.

"We intend to export our spiritual art from Iran to other countries. The artworks selected were previously displayed in six countries last year," Kamareii added.

There are also plans to display the selected works in the Organization of Islamic Countries' (OIC) member states as well, he remarked.

Kamareii further noted that the organizers are negotiating with the University of Oxford and hopefully, the works will go on exhibit at the university.

The 7th edition of the event will open this year.

Gov't to Facilitate Depopulation of Tehran

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad says his government would facilitate depopulating of the Iranian capital to reduce possible casualties in emergency conditions. "The government will provide necessary facilities for people of Tehran to live in other cities," said the president, speaking on the sidelines of a visit to an emergency shelter center in western Tehran.

The center is prepared to give shelter to residents of the Iranian capital in critical times.

It is established in the Azadi Stadium in western Tehran and consisted of three camps with the capacity of sheltering 10,000 people in critical conditions.

Lowering the number of population in Tehran would make it easier to provide necessary services for them in emergency conditions, President Ahmadinejad said.

He urged people to "take seriously" the threat of a devastating earthquake which is predicted by experts to occur in Tehran sometime in the future.

The emergency shelter center in the Azadi Stadium is equipped with essential supportive services including tents, logistic equipment and relief storage spaces.

Some 25 emergency camps are presently established in the Iranian capital to give shelter to a total number of one million and 100,000 people.

Iran's Red Crescent Society is in charge of organizing people's sheltering in those centers in emergency conditions.

Some 33 different governmental organizations are said to be responsible to provide services for the centers in critical conditions

Iran-Turkey Dismantle 15 Drug Trafficking Networks

Police Chief for Drug Control Hamid-Reza Hossein-Abadi said Iran and Turkey have dismantled 15 networks of drug trafficking during last Iranian calendar year started on March 20, 2009.

Speaking on the sidelines of the meeting of Iran-Turkey Police Chiefs for Drug Control which focused on the condition of cultivating and smuggling drugs in regional states, he said confrontation against source of drug production in the region (Afghanistan), P.K.K. and PJAK terrorist groups in Iranian western border cooperating with drug networks are on top of the agenda for police of the two countries.

He added police of the two neighboring countries have exchanged 180 messages during their previous meetings on drug smuggling groups in Iran and Turkey.

Also Turkish high commissioner for Department of Anti-Smuggling and Organized Crime Ahmet Pek taking part in the meeting said the number of arrested smugglers and the amount of discovered narcotics have dramatically increased through cooperation of the two sides.

Iran Sets Annual Record in Narcotics Seizure

Iranian police have seized more than 557 tonnes of illicit drugs throughout the country in the past calendar year (ending on March 20), a senior commander says. "Iranian narcotics agents have managed to confiscate 557.622 tonnes of different kinds of narcotics from smugglers across the country," said General Hamid-Reza Hossein-Abadi, the commander of the narcotics squad.

He added that 214 smugglers have been killed and 34 police agents martyred during 1,717 heavy clashes.

The police official noted that 2,264 infamous drug bands were arrested during the same period and added that 214,684 smugglers were handed over to judicial authorities.

He warned that the Iranian police would severely and strongly confront any individual who seeks to damage the security of the Islamic Republic through the smuggling of narcotics.

Hossein-Abadi accused the US and Britain of playing a major role in Afghanistan's lucrative drug trade and said, "We would not face such a critical situation in Afghanistan should the occupying forces play even the least role in the crackdown on drugs."

Hossein-Abadi, who was speaking on the sidelines of the meeting of Iran-Turkey Police Chiefs for Drug Control, said Iran and Turkey have dismantled 15 networks of drug trafficking during last Iranian calendar year started on March 20, 2009.

Weekly report on Iran

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Iranian officials have always criticized Western countries over their policies towards Afghanistan, where poppy cultivation has drastically increased since the US-led military occupation of the country in 2001.

Some 13,000 tonnes of drug catalysts are brought into Afghanistan every year as the war-torn country is the producer of 90 percent of the world's opium.

Iranian police officials maintain that drug production in Afghanistan has had a 40-fold increase since the 2001 US-led invasion

30 Foreign Teams to Attend Iran's Int'l RoboCup Contest

Some 30 robotic teams from nine countries are taking part physically or electronically at Iran's Fifth International RoboCup Competition underway at Tehran International Trade Fair which kicks off today.

Member of Organizing Committee of Iran's Free RoboCup Contests, Asadollah Norouzi said yesterday that participating countries include China, Germany, Holland, Pakistan, India, the Philippines, the U.S., Britain and Brazil.

In addition to 30 foreign teams, 320 Iranian teams will contend at the two-day event, he said.

After Iran, China is the biggest participating country in the event with 17 teams, Norouzi noted.

He further stated that the Second International RoboCup Symposium will also be held concurrently with the competition.

Of 50 articles submitted to the secretariat of the symposium, 18 will be presented during the event