

Business and Politics in the Muslim World

Weekly Report on Iran
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M Rashid

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Summary

Ahmadinejad: Era of Materialism Over

The dark era of the materialistic thought is over now and the world is on the verge of great developments, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said in Uganda yesterday. The president made the remarks in a meeting with Iranian businessmen residing in the African state where he arrived on Friday on the second leg of his tour of the continent which has already taken him to Zimbabwe.

3rd Phase of IRGC Drill Ends Successfully

The 3rd stage of the IRGC war game dubbed "Holy Prophet 5" ended successfully in the Persian Gulf region, a military official said yesterday. Spokesman of the Islamic Republic Guards Corps (IRGC) military drill Brigadier General Abdollah Araghi made the remarks while talking to reporters covering the event.

Iran Deports 15 Pakistanis

Iranian authorities deported some 15 illegal Pakistani immigrants on Friday and handed them over to the Taftan administration. A Private TV Channel quoted Taftan

administration officials as saying the deportees belonged to various parts of the country and had entered Iran illegally in search of employment.

U.S. Sees Progress in Iran Sanctions Text

The United States has seen significant progress in negotiations on new sanctions against Iran over its nuclear program, a senior U.S. government official said on Friday. Diplomats from the five permanent Security Council members -- the United States, Britain, France, Russia and China -- and Germany are meeting nearly every day in New York to revise a U.S.-drafted sanctions proposal that Moscow and Beijing would like to see watered down, Western diplomats say.

Iran's War-game in PG "to Send Message of Peace"

The current wargames by the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz conveyed the message of peace and security to the neighboring countries, Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Secretary Saeed Jalili said.

Tehran to Host ICAO Meeting on Aviation

The regional office of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) will hold a meeting in Tehran to study current situation of flights in the Middle East region, Spokesman of the Iranian Civil Aviation Organization, Reza Jafarzadeh announced.

ICRC to Help Iran Find Missing-in-Action

Representative of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Iran Pierre Ryter said the international body is to help Iran find its wartime missing-in-action persons. Ryter told IRNA in a recent interview that the ICRC would help Iranian governmental and non-governmental bodies search and find remains of those killed in battlefields or are still somewhere in Iraq.

VP Stresses Iran's Preparedness to Repel Enemy Attacks

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The massive wargames conducted by the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) in the Persian Gulf showed that any enemy threats against the country will be reciprocated by Iran's powerful response, a senior Iranian official said yesterday.

IRGC Official: Powerful Iran Guarantees Persian Gulf Stability, Security

A senior official of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) has underlined the significance of a strong and powerful Iran for ensuring security and stability in the strategic Persian Gulf.

"Existence of a powerful Islamic Republic (of Iran) along the Persian Gulf and the strategic Strait of Hormuz will definitely guarantee stability and security and removal of the aliens from the warm and blue waters of the Persian Gulf," Supreme Leader's Deputy Representative to the IRGC Mojtaba Zonnour stressed on Saturday.

MP Highlights Iran's Military Might

A member of parliament has underlined the country's high military preparedness, saying Tehran would give a crushing response to any possible U.S. attack on the country. "The United States' baseless and empty threats against Iran are solely made in a show of force, as the U.S. authorities know that any practice of their threats would destroy them," Aziz Akbarian said in an interview with FNA.

IAEA Spokeswoman: Amano, Mottaki to Meet

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Spokeswoman Gill Tudor confirmed that Director General Yukiya Amano and Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki are scheduled to meet today. Mottaki is to head to Vienna today. Tudor told IRNA on Friday afternoon that Mottaki will discuss issues of mutual interest with IAEA director general during his visit here.

Iranian Nuclear Scientist Seeks Asylum in Israel

An Iranian nuclear scientist has asked for asylum in Israel, Deputy Minister Ayoub Kara, of the Druze community, said Saturday. "My office has received a request from an Iranian scientist who is currently staying in a friendly country, by means of an Israeli Jewish woman of Iranian birth," Kara revealed in a interview panel appearance in Ramat Gan. "I am making an effort to assist in this matter because I believe in helping anyone to remove the strategic and nuclear threat upon the enlightened and democratic world."

Iran's President Visits Security Council Member Uganda

Ugandan President, Yoweri Museveni, right, receives Iran President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, at State House in Entebbe Friday, 23 Apr 2010 Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is visiting Uganda, a member of the United Nations Security Council, which may vote on additional sanctions against Iran for its nuclear activities.

Iran allows IAEA to inspect new enrichment site

Tehran - Iran will allow the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to inspect its new enrichment site in Natanz in central Iran, the Iranian envoy to the IAEA said Saturday. Ali-Asqar Soltanieh told ISNA news agency that Iranian and IAEA experts met in Vienna and agreed on inspections of the new site, where Iran is pursuing the 20 per uranium enrichment process.

Israel helped Iran academic to defect: report

Israel helped an Iranian academic with links to the Islamic republic's controversial nuclear programme to defect, army radio reported on Saturday, citing a deputy minister. Ayoub Kara, deputy minister for development in the Negev and Galilee, told a meeting at Ramat Gan near Tel Aviv that a scholar with ties to Iran's nuclear programme recently asked for asylum in Israel after it helped him to defect.

The Gulf, the Arabs and the Iranian Threat

The UAE has territories currently occupied by Iran and is trying to solve the political crisis without escalation or international intervention. This issue might not concern many other Arabs as long as Iran continues to claim that it wants to eliminate Israel and supports Hamas and Hezbollah;

U.S. calls for release of hikers detained in Iran

The United States is "deeply concerned" about the well-being of three American hikers who have been detained in Iran for nearly nine months, the White House said Friday, calling on Tehran "to release them immediately."

Economic Front

Iran Self-Sufficient in Oil Exploration

The Iranian oil minister says Iran is self-sufficient in the oil exploration industry and sanctions have not hindered the country's progress. "Iran has become self-sufficient in oil exploration," Iranian Oil Minister Masoud Mirkazemi told Press TV in an exclusive interview on Friday.

KSSL Bosst Fleet, Keen to Enter Open Water

The maritime fleet of the Khazar Sea Shipping Line (KSSL) has increased to 16 and the company will enhance its activities. Managing director of the KSSL, Mohammad Reza Ghaderi, said in a press conference that the company has increased its vessels to 16 of which four joined last year.

Hengam Joint Oil Field Goes on Stream

An official with Iran's offshore oil company says Hengam joint oil field in southern Iran went on stream with initial output of 4,000 barrels a day. Managing Director of the national Iranian Offshore Oil Company (NIOOC) Mahmoud Zirakchianzade made the remarks yesterday talking to reporters on the sidelines of the 15th International Oil Show in Tehran.

Iran Grants \$105m for Electrification Project in Sri Lanka

Iran has granted a \$ 105 million loan to Sri Lanka for a rural electrification project. The Power and Energy Ministry is to launch the project to supply electricity to about 1,000 villages in the rural areas of the country, a Sri Lankan internet newspaper reported yesterday quoting the Lankan government as saying.

Official Hails Greater Investment Budget in South Pars

Managing Director of Pars Special Economic Energy Zone Moussa Souri says allocation of 40 percent of the Oil Ministry budget to investment in the South Pars gas field is an unprecedented event. Talking to IRNA, he appreciated efforts made by Majlis representatives to allocate such a budget to the South Pars gas field in the current Iranian calendar year

Technical, Engineering Services, Iran's Main Exports to Kazakhstan

Exports of technical and engineering services to Kazakhstan are the most important part of Iran's exports to the country. Iranian experts have constructed several settlement units and roads in Kazakhstan. Construction of a freeway which links Russia to India is the most important project carried out by Iranian companies.

Iran, Uganda Ink 3 Cooperation Deals

Iran and Uganda signed three cooperation deals during President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's visit to the country. The documents pertain to Iran's assistance to the development of Uganda, sanitary, pharmaceutical and medical cooperation as well as a document overseeing the agreements reached between the two countries.

Iran "An Open Market" for International Investments

Manager of a Chinese company, Polymer Cheray, says the Islamic Republic of Iran is an open market for international investments. Speaking to IRNA on the sidelines of the 15th international Oil, Gas, Refining and Petrochemical Exhibition in Tehran April 23-26, he said businessmen and international dealers look for such a lucrative market for investments.

Social Front

Iran's Music House Moves to New Location

Iran's Music House has finally found a new home. Following completion of building renovation, the new location reopened on Wednesday in the presence of tar virtuoso Jalil Shahnaz and other masters of music. Former conductor of Iran's National Orchestra Farhad Fakhreddini, and musicians Mohammadreza Shajarian, Mostafa Kamal Purtorab, Hossein Dehlavi, Davud Ganjeii, and Hushang Zarif were seen among the participants.

10th Int'l Construction Exhibit Planned

The Tenth International Construction Exhibition will open at Permanent International Fairground on August 3 and will continue for three days. Announcing this, deputy secretary of Cooperatives Chamber, Ebrahim Tehrani described the exhibit as one of the most important economic events in the country. As in the past years, its motto is 'Cheap, Rapid and Resistant', Tehrani said.

Jundallah Defectors Granted immunity

Abdulmalek Rigi, the leader of the Jundallah terrorist group, was arrested by Iran in February. Jundallah is responsible for numerous acts of terror in Iran. Iran has granted immunity from prosecution to more than one hundred members of the Jundallah terrorist group, a provincial official says.

Political Front

Ahmadinejad: Era of Materialism Over

The dark era of the materialistic thought is over now and the world is on the verge of great developments, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said in Uganda yesterday. The president made the remarks in a meeting with Iranian businessmen residing in the African state where he arrived on Friday on the second leg of his tour of the continent which has already taken him to Zimbabwe.

Criticizing the expansionist governments for imposing wars and occupations on other nations, President Ahmadinejad said they turned the world into a prison in order to dominate other nations' wealth and natural resources.

“During the past century, bullying powers ruled the world based on an economic system aiming to plunder other nations' wealth. They took Middle East's energy and imposed war and poverty on its nations.

“They looted all mines in Africa and left behind poverty and hatred. Those who claimed to be human rights advocates have produced atomic bomb and threatened other people with it,” President Ahmadinejad stated.

He stressed that all world nations should get united in order to set up a new system of human relations which is formed on a fair basis.

Weekly report on Iran

Earlier in a dinner banquet hosted by Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni, Ahmadinejad said certain powers, with the motto of non-proliferation, want to deprive nations of their right to gain access to nuclear energy.

He said some people are taking nuclear energy equal to nuclear bomb and are trying to prevent use of this clean and inexpensive energy by independent nations.

All nations have the right to use peaceful nuclear energy and nobody has the right to deprive them of such indisputable right, he said.

President Ahmadinejad went on to say that Iran wants all atomic weapons in the world to be eliminated and those countries which have stockpiled thousands of such weapons are in priority.

Ahmadinejad reminded that time for imposing dual standards is over and now it is the era of independent governments and nations.

Comparing fossil fuel with nuclear energy, the president said for producing one thousand mega watts of electricity by fossil fuel in a year, seven million barrels of crude oil is necessary and since the price of each barrel is 80 dollars, it would cost 560 million dollars to produce one thousand mega watts, while in a nuclear power plant, producing this amount of electricity costs only 60 million dollars.

Concerning relations between the two countries, he said that Iran and Uganda have more capacities for development and there is no limit to expanding ties.

He continued that bilateral visits of both countries' officials and businessmen should be expanded and although geographical distance between the two countries is too far, but our hearts are very close.

Ahmadinejad stressed that Iran and Uganda, in international organizations, support each other's rights and try together to create a world order upon justice.

He added that both countries, in their political interactions, are supporting peace, justice and nations' rights.

Iranian president also appreciated President Museveni's transparent and decisive stances concerning Iran.

President Yoweri Museveni in his speech, said that Iran's nuclear activities are acceptable according to international agreements and they are in the fields of medical science and energy.

3rd Phase of IRGC Drill Ends Successfully

The 3rd stage of the IRGC war game dubbed “Holy Prophet 5” ended successfully in the Persian Gulf region, a military official said yesterday. Spokesman of the Islamic Republic Guards Corps (IRGC) military drill Brigadier General Abdollah Araghi made the remarks while talking to reporters covering the event.

The maneuver was a fight against the imaginary enemy, Araghi said, adding that it showed full readiness of the IRGC’s naval forces to strongly react to any likely attacks against the country.

The naval, air and ground forces have been under special training for six months in order to get ready for the military drill, Araghi added.

He said in addition the third phase of the maneuvers was directed and controlled in a war room, in completely real conditions, adding that the IRGC’s ground forces succeeded in achieving all their war game goals.

Iran Deports 15 Pakistanis

Iranian authorities deported some 15 illegal Pakistani immigrants on Friday and handed them over to the Taftan administration. A Private TV Channel quoted Taftan administration officials as saying the deportees belonged to various parts of the country and had entered Iran illegally in search of employment.

Some of them even wanted to proceed to Europe via Turkey and Greece. They have been handed over to Pakistan's Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) for investigation.

U.S. Sees Progress in Iran Sanctions Text

The United States has seen significant progress in negotiations on new sanctions against Iran over its nuclear program, a senior U.S. government official said on Friday. Diplomats from the five permanent Security Council members -- the United States, Britain, France, Russia and China -- and Germany are meeting nearly every day in New York to revise a U.S.-drafted sanctions proposal that Moscow and Beijing would like to see watered down, Western diplomats say.

"If you look at where we were six months or so ago, it was very difficult to point to any common ground amongst all of the permanent members of the Security Council,"

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William Burns, under secretary at the U.S. state department told journalists in Cape Town.

"Now you've seen recent statements not only from Russia but from China as well ... we are making significant progress."

"I believe we will produce significant measures in a resolution," he said.

Burns said the new sanctions text was a unique opportunity for the global community, which has not always spoken with one voice on nuclear disarmament and technology, to signal its unhappiness over Iran's nuclear program.

"In many ways (it is) a unique opportunity to send a unified international message about international concern, in this case about Iran's failure to live up to its obligations," he said, given the complicated process of give-and-take negotiations.

Iran's Wargames in PG "to Send Message of Peace"

The current wargames by the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz conveyed the message of peace and security to the neighboring countries, Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Secretary Saeed Jalili said.

"The message of the Islamic Republic of Iran's might for neighboring countries is the message of security, peace and friendship which is the most important message of the war games," Jalili reiterated.

The military drills, codenamed 'Payambar-e Azam 5' (the Great Messenger 5), demonstrated the Islamic Republic of Iran's potentials to provide security of Persian Gulf and tackle any insecurity there, he told reporters on the sidelines of the war game.

Elsewhere, he referred to the presence of military forces of some Iran's friendly countries in the military drills, and said, "The presence of our friends in some phases of the wargames showed that how Iran can use the potential in favor of regional peace and stability.

Tehran to Host ICAO Meeting on Aviation

The regional office of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) will hold a meeting in Tehran to study current situation of flights in the Middle East region, Spokesman of the Iranian Civil Aviation Organization, Reza Jafarzadeh announced.

Representatives of 12 countries, Egypt, Jordan, Yemen, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Bahrain, Oman, Kuwait, United Arab Emirate and Iraq, as well as head of the regional office and secretary of the ICAO aviation office will take part in the three-day meeting which will kick off on May 3, he added.

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The office has launched a data centre to register airplanes which have capacity to fly at high altitudes to prevent any probable violation or disharmony among the regional countries.

The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), a specialized agency of the United Nations, codifies the principles and techniques of international air navigation and fosters the planning and development of international air transport to ensure safe and orderly growth. Its headquarters are located in the Quartier International of Montreal, Quebec, Canada.

The ICAO Council adopts standards and recommended practices concerning air navigation, its infrastructure, Flight inspection, prevention of unlawful interference, and facilitation of border-crossing procedures for international civil aviation.

In addition, the ICAO defines the protocols for air accident investigation followed by transport safety authorities in countries signatory to the Convention on International Civil Aviation, commonly known as the Chicago Convention

ICRC to Help Iran Find Missing-in-Action

Representative of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Iran Pierre Ryter said the international body is to help Iran find its wartime missing-in-action persons. Ryter told IRNA in a recent interview that the ICRC would help Iranian governmental and non-governmental bodies search and find remains of those killed in battlefields or are still somewhere in Iraq.

Iran fought an eight-year war imposed on the country by Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein during 1980-1988.

The ICRC would provide Iran with its latest facilities including the DNA tests to identify remains of those killed in mine fields or other battlefields, said the official.

Referring to the issue of those missing-in-action during the Iraqi imposed war against Iran as a “very sensitive matter,” Ryter said that the ICRC was discussing the issue with the Iraqi officials.

VP Stresses Iran's Preparedness to Repel Enemy Attacks

The massive wargames conducted by the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) in the Persian Gulf showed that any enemy threats against the country will be reciprocated by Iran's powerful response, a senior Iranian official said yesterday.

"The world received this message from the IRGC's wargames in the Persian Gulf that the Islamic Republic of Iran is always ready to defend the Revolution and is fully prepared to confront enemies in times of attack and aggression against our country," Vice-President for Parliamentary Affairs Hojjatoleslam Seyed Mohammad Reza Mir-Tajjedini said in an interview with FNA.

The official stressed that the recent military drills also showed that any enemy threat against the country will "receive Iran's crushing response."

Mir-Tajjedini further stated that the IRGC exercises also demonstrated Iran's military and defensive might and power.

The IRGC started massive naval exercises, codenamed as Payambar-e Azam (The Great Messenger) 5, in the Persian Gulf and Strait of Hormuz on Thursday.

IRGC Official: Powerful Iran Guarantees Persian Gulf Stability, Security

A senior official of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) has underlined the significance of a strong and powerful Iran for ensuring security and stability in the strategic Persian Gulf.

"Existence of a powerful Islamic Republic (of Iran) along the Persian Gulf and the strategic Strait of Hormuz will definitely guarantee stability and security and removal of the aliens from the warm and blue waters of the Persian Gulf," Supreme Leader's Deputy Representative to the IRGC Mojtaba Zonnour stressed on Saturday.

Meantime, the official called on the enemies to avoid threatening Iran, cautioning them about Iran's crushing response to any potential aggression.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran's strategy wants the existence of a secure Persian Gulf for all the regional countries, but if enemies want to jeopardize the Islamic Republic's interests in the Persian Gulf through threats, this region will no more be safe and our enemies will never see security anymore," Zonnour stated.

The official further pointed to the ongoing military exercises by the IRGC in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz, and emphasized that the wargames should be seen as a message of threat to the regional and neighboring states.

The IRGC started massive naval exercises, codenamed as Payambar-e Azam (The Great Messenger) 5, in the Persian Gulf and Strait of Hormuz on Thursday.

Tens of ground, air and naval units of the IRGC participated in the exercises which are aimed at preserving security in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz, as the key passage for a large proportion of the world's energy supplies.

An estimated 40 percent of the world's oil supply passes through the waterway.

MP Highlights Iran's Military Might

A member of parliament has underlined the country's high military preparedness, saying Tehran would give a crushing response to any possible U.S. attack on the country. "The United States' baseless and empty threats against Iran are solely made in a show of force, as the U.S. authorities know that any practice of their threats would destroy them," Aziz Akbarian said in an interview with FNA.

"Today, Iran's military might is at its highest level and any kind of military attack by the U.S. against the country will be suppressed in the very first minutes," the lawmaker went on saying.

Akbarian further stated that these threats by the enemies are aimed at hindering Iran's progress, and added, "Of course, such threats and sanctions would not make people and authorities distance themselves from their high goals, but would make them stronger and more determined."

The remarks by the Iranian defense minister came after US President Barack Obama, in an interview with The New York Times, threatened Iran and North Korea with nuclear weapons.

The U.S. administration earlier this month released its policy document known as "Nuclear Posture Review", in which the administration called a manifesto "achieving substantial further nuclear force reductions", but meantime posed a nuclear threat against Tehran and Pyongyang.

IAEA Spokeswoman: Amano, Mottaki to Meet

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Spokeswoman Gill Tudor confirmed that Director General Yukiya Amano and Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki are scheduled to meet today. Mottaki is to head to Vienna today. Tudor told IRNA on Friday afternoon that Mottaki will discuss issues of mutual interest with IAEA director general during his visit here.

Iran's Ambassador to Vienna Ebrahim Sheybani told IRNA that Mottaki, in his one-day visit to Vienna, is to meet with Austrian officials, too.

Iranian Nuclear Scientist Seeks Asylum in Israel

An Iranian nuclear scientist has asked for asylum in Israel, Deputy Minister Ayoub Kara, of the Druze community, said Saturday. "My office has received a request from an Iranian scientist who is currently staying in a friendly country, by means of an Israeli Jewish woman of Iranian birth," Kara revealed in a interview panel appearance in Ramat Gan. "I

am making an effort to assist in this matter because I believe in helping anyone to remove the strategic and nuclear threat upon the enlightened and democratic world.”

He said he had received permission from Israeli intelligence officials to reveal the matter publicly, without going into details that could compromise the scientist. The woman who is mediating between the scientist and Israel was in Kara's office on Wednesday, he said.

Kara added that Arab countries are also “not indifferent” to the Iranian nuclear threat. “They are aware of the Iranian ambitions to go back to being the Persian superpower, and they are aware that they are on the Iranian crosshairs no less than Israel.” Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, however, “is lulling them to apathy by focusing his threats upon Israel, but no one has any doubt that the Arab countries will be part of the [targets of] Iranian nuclear attack, if the world continues to sleep and allows this option to materialize, G-d forbid.”

Second defector in a month?
If the information is true, this would appear to be the second case involving an Iranian defector-scientist to be revealed in less than a month. On March 31, an award-winning Iranian nuclear physicist was reported to have defected to the CIA and been resettled in the United States.

ABC news quoted officials who termed the defection of the scientist, Shahram Amiri, "an intelligence coup" in the CIA effort to undermine Iran's nuclear program. Amiri went missing in June 2009 while in Saudi Arabia on a pilgrimage, according to the Iranian government. He had worked at a Tehran university that is closely connected to Revolutionary Guard, according to the Associated Press.

Iran's President Visits Security Council Member Uganda

Ugandan President, Yoweri Museveni, right, receives Iran President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, at State House in Entebbe Friday, 23 Apr 2010 Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is visiting Uganda, a member of the United Nations Security Council, which may vote on additional sanctions against Iran for its nuclear activities.

The Iranian leader is trying to rally support for Iran's nuclear program, which some Western nations say is aimed at building weapons - a charge Iran denies.

Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni Friday defended the right of every country to pursue nuclear technology for peaceful purposes, while calling for all nuclear weapons to be eradicated.

Uganda has not indicated how it would vote if proposed sanctions against Iran are brought to the Security Council.

Mr. Ahmadinejad traveled to Uganda from Zimbabwe where he met with that country's president, Robert Mugabe, who offered support for Iran's nuclear program.

Mr. Mugabe said his country and Iran have been "unjustly vilified" by the West.

Meantime, Zimbabwe's Movement for Democratic Change, which is part of the unity government, denounced the Iranian president as a warmonger.

During his visit to Uganda, Mr. Ahmadinejad will also discuss his country's possible investment in Uganda's newly discovered oil fields.

Developers recently found a deposit containing 700 million barrels of oil in eastern Uganda. They believe the country may have an additional 1.5 billion deposits.

Iran allows IAEA to inspect new enrichment site

Tehran - Iran will allow the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to inspect its new enrichment site in Natanz in central Iran, the Iranian envoy to the IAEA said Saturday. Ali-Asqar Soltanieh told ISNA news agency that Iranian and IAEA experts met in Vienna and agreed on inspections of the new site, where Iran is pursuing the 20 per uranium enrichment process.

The Iranian envoy said that the inspections will take place within the framework of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), indicating that the IAEA would be obliged to coordinate the inspections in advance with Tehran.

Iran withdrew from the IAEA Additional Protocol, under which the IAEA could have made snap inspections, in 2005.

Soltanieh said that any changes in Iran's nuclear projects would be in coordination with the IAEA, adding that he hoped that the United Nations nuclear watchdog would reflect this new instance of cooperation in its next report.

Iran started the 20 per cent uranium enrichment process in Natanz in February after a plan brokered in October by the IAEA - under which Iran would swap its low-enriched uranium (LEU) for fuel made in Russia and France for a medical reactor in Tehran - failed.

Tehran said that it would still be ready to accept the deal but only with the condition that the swap be made inside Iran. The IAEA and world powers have so far rejected the Iranian condition.

Although the uranium exchange deal would not have fully settled the dispute over Iran's controversial nuclear projects, it was regarded by both sides as a first step towards ending the seven-year deadlock.

The US and its allies are pushing towards renewed sanctions against the Islamic state through a new UN Security Council resolution. They accuse Iran of not fully cooperating with the IAEA.

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China and Russia, both strategic partners of Iran, have also reportedly changed their attitude towards new sanctions and may join the West in punitive measures.

Tehran has in response begun what it calls 'active counter- diplomacy' with Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki due to visit Austria - currently a rotating member of the UN Security Council - on Sunday and hold talks with officials in Vienna about the nuclear dispute and probable sanctions.

Mottaki is also scheduled to meet IAEA chief Yukiya Amano over the weekend.

The Iranian chief diplomat is reportedly due to visit other European capitals though no details have yet been disclosed about host countries.

On Friday, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was in Uganda, another current Security Council member. He sought the African country's vote against possible sanctions.

Iran insists that all its nuclear projects are solely for civil and peaceful purposes and has rejected accusations by world powers that it is working on a secret military programme and possible nuclear weapons' research.

Israel helped Iran academic to defect: report

Israel helped an Iranian academic with links to the Islamic republic's controversial nuclear programme to defect, army radio reported on Saturday, citing a deputy minister. Ayoub Kara, deputy minister for development in the Negev and Galilee, told a meeting at Ramat Gan near Tel Aviv that a scholar with ties to Iran's nuclear programme recently asked for asylum in Israel after it helped him to defect.

"It is too soon to provide further details," Kara said, adding only that the unidentified academic was "now in a friendly country."

"Israel will help all those who want to remove the strategic nuclear threat Iran poses not only to our country, but to the entire civilised and democratic world," the radio reported Kara as saying.

Neither Israel nor the United States has ruled out military action to thwart Iran's nuclear ambitions, which Tehran insists are peaceful but which the world powers believe mask a drive to manufacture an atomic weapon.

Israel is widely believed to be the sole nuclear-armed power in the Middle East, albeit undeclared, and pursues a policy of ambiguity over whether it has an atomic arsenal.

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The Jewish state has been linked previously to reports of defections of key personnel believed to have ties with Iran's nuclear ambitions.

In March 2007, an ex-head of Israel's foreign intelligence service Mossad said that a former Iranian general who went missing in Turkey had probably defected.

"Ali Reza Asghari has probably defected to the West," said Danny Yatom, who was head of Mossad from 1996 until 1998.

Mystery surrounded Asghari's disappearance, amid accusations by Tehran that he was snatched by Western spy agencies and suggestions in the Israeli media that Mossad may have been involved.

Asghari, a former deputy defence minister said to have information about Iran's nuclear programme, is believed to have gone missing in Istanbul after checking into a luxury hotel.

In January this year a leading Iranian nuclear scientist was murdered in Tehran in a rare bomb attack that the government quickly blamed on "mercenaries" in the pay of arch-foes the United States and Israel.

Massoud Ali Mohammadi, a particle physics professor at prestigious Tehran University, died when a bomb strapped to a motorcycle was triggered by remote control as he was getting into his car outside his home.

Washington dismissed Iran's allegation of US involvement as "absurd."

And earlier this month, Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki said another Iranian nuclear scientist, Shahram Amiri, who Tehran says was kidnapped by US agents, is currently in the United States.

In March, ABC news reported that Amiri, who disappeared in June 2009 after arriving in Saudi Arabia on a pilgrimage, had defected and was working with the CIA. Iranian officials maintain that Amiri was abducted from Saudi Arabia.

The Gulf, the Arabs and the Iranian Threat

The UAE has territories currently occupied by Iran and is trying to solve the political crisis without escalation or international intervention. This issue might not concern many other Arabs as long as Iran continues to claim that it wants to eliminate Israel and supports Hamas and Hezbollah; why should the Arabs care even if Iran occupied the entire Gulf region? Arab double standards have, unfortunately, become the norm, even though UAE Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah Bin Zayed tried recently to convince his Arab counterparts that the occupation of the UAE islands is no different than Israel's

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occupation of Arab territories and that no Arab land is dearer than another. This is not true, Sheikh Abdullah, and sadly we are all aware of this fact.

The painful blow came in 1990 when several Arab governments and organizations backed Saddam's invasion of Kuwait and the displacement of over a million people as a result. The invasion itself was far less painful as it was just another political crime in a region that is familiar with such practices. But what really hurt the people of the Gulf was the sheer disdain [for them] and delight for the invasion of their country that they witnessed on hostile Arab streets.

To get half of the Arabs to cheer and support him, it would have been enough for Saddam Hussein back then to have said that he wanted to liberate Jerusalem by invading Kuwait and displacing its entire population. Saddam promised to distribute the profits of the Gulf oil revenues to the rest of the Arab states to make Arab governments seize the Kuwaiti airplanes stationed at their airports and to take over Kuwaiti businesses located on their soil in an act of daylight robbery.

This leads to the question that we might be forced to confront one day: what if Iran attacks Bahrain or any of the Gulf States in the future? Which side will the rest of the Arabs take? Would they stand with Hezbollah or with Bahrain? Would they sever diplomatic ties with Iran or call for a conference to be held so that Iran could be granted more time to strike the rest of the Arab facilities in the Gulf? Would the Arab media hail the Iranian statements and promote Western conspiracy theory to justify Iran's occupation of Gulf territories? Would US-Arab organizations endorse the assault just like they did with Saddam's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 despite being sponsored by Gulf States?

Whether or not this disaster takes place, the Arab problem is an ethical one that is not limited to the Gulf region or any other region. The truth must be told; all Arab territories should be treated equally without drawing a distinction between Jerusalem and the island of Abu Musa. Actually, the truth must be told on a much larger scale by condemning any aggressive act regardless of the nationality or ethnicity of the perpetrator. It is not enough to describe a military attack as aggression only if it is committed by Israel. We should not justify crimes committed against other Arabs just because the perpetrator's stances are supportive of Arab rights.

Whether or not the day we fear actually comes, i.e. the day that we find ourselves confronting a country in a state of military and political uproar, the fact remains that the Arabs are still divided over Iran. It seems there are parties that are yet to learn their lesson from the inter-Arab conflict during the nineties, despite all the pain it inflicted and the tragedies it led to.

U.S. calls for release of hikers detained in Iran

The United States is "deeply concerned" about the well-being of three American hikers who have been detained in Iran for nearly nine months, the White House said Friday, calling on Tehran "to release them immediately."

The statement comes a day after the Swiss ambassador to Iran met with the detainees.

Two of the three hikers are in poor health and have discussed staging a hunger strike, their families said Friday.

"We were deeply alarmed to learn from the families today of (the detainees') physical and emotional state of health," White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs said in a statement Friday. "We fear their well-being will suffer even more unless their case is resolved without delay. We strongly believe these urgent developments are additional reasons for the government of Iran to release them immediately."

The three hikers -- Shane Bauer, 27, Sarah Shourd, 31 and Josh Fattal, 27 --were arrested in July for illegally entering the country from Iraq's Kurdistan region, according to Iran's state-run media .They were sent to Evin prison in Tehran, Iran.

The families say that the three friends, who are all graduates of the University of California and seasoned travelers, accidentally strayed across an unmarked border into Iran while on a hiking trip. Iran has said they will be put on trial.

The three hikers have not been formally charged nor been given access to legal representation, Gibbs said.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton issued a separate statement Friday expressing concern for the hikers' health and calling for their release. "These three Americans -- innocent tourists in Iraq's Kurdistan region when they were detained... have been unjustly held for almost nine months," Clinton said.

The United States has asked the Iranian government to grant visas to the detainees' families to allow them to visit, but the Iranians have declined, State Department spokesman Philip J. Crowley said Friday.

"We continue to call for their release and request the families are granted visas to Iran to visit their children soon," Crowley said. "We are aware of the families' concerns about their children's physical and emotional state of health."

Bauer, the families' statement said, has a stomach ailment and Shourd is suffering from a condition that requires specialist care. She is also grappling with depression.

"We understand that they have spoken about starting a hunger strike because they are in such despair at the total lack of movement in their case," the statement said. "We are

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painfully aware of the tensions between the governments of the United States and Iran, but it is wrong to make innocent citizens pay the price."

The three Americans made a brief phone call home on March 9 and have access to a few letters and messages sent by relatives, friends and supporters, their families said. Other than that, they have had little contact with the outside world.

The two men are being held together while Shourd is alone in a cell. They are allowed to meet twice a day for brief periods but are isolated from other prisoners, the families' statement said.

Thursday marked the third Swiss consular visit to the American detainees, Crowley said. The last meeting was on October 29. The United States, which has not had diplomatic relations with Iran since 1979, has relied on Switzerland to appeal directly for the hikers' release.

The Swiss ambassador to Tehran is Livia Leu Agosti, according to Iran's semi-official Fars news agency

Economic Front

Iran Self-Sufficient in Oil Exploration

The Iranian oil minister says Iran is self-sufficient in the oil exploration industry and sanctions have not hindered the country's progress. "Iran has become self-sufficient in oil exploration," Iranian Oil Minister Masoud Mirkazemi told Press TV in an exclusive interview on Friday.

International pressure and sanctions have failed to hinder Iran's progress in this area, he added.

Commenting on the Iran-Pakistan pipeline project, the Iranian oil minister said that the deal is about to be finalized.

Meanwhile, the 15th International Exhibition of Oil, Gas and Petrochemical Industries and Products is currently underway at the Tehran Permanent International Fairgrounds.

Mirkazemi said this year's exhibition has attracted more participants than previous editions of the event.

KSSL Bosst Fleet, Keen to Enter Open Water

The maritime fleet of the Khazar Sea Shipping Line (KSSL) has increased to 16 and the company will enhance its activities. Managing director of the KSSL, Mohammad Reza Ghaderi, said in a press conference that the company has increased its vessels to 16 of which four joined last year.

Ghaderi said by adding these multifunctional ships to the fleet, the company can act more effectively.

He said \$15m has been invested on buying these four ships with a reasonable price.

"In the past we needed to pay around \$34m to buy them."

Ghaderi said the current capacity of the fleet is 75,000 tons and the age of them is less than 12 years.

He added that its company intends to enter marine tourism and to this end, the basics should be provided. "Building passenger terminal and hotels in the province is a must for maritime tourism", he said.

He continued that the KSSL plans to create bases in the Caspian Sea littoral states like Kazakhstan and Russia.

Ghaderi said one of the main goals of the company is to enter the oil shipping market by buying tankers. He said the operation can begin with buying four oil tankers and it can be increased to 20.

He reiterated that in the last Iranian year, the company has transshipped 1,300 million tons of goods of which 1,100 million have been imported and the remaining exported. He predicted the figure would reach 1,500 million tons this year.

Hengam Joint Oil Field Goes on Stream

An official with Iran's offshore oil company says Hengam joint oil field in southern Iran went on stream with initial output of 4,000 barrels a day. Managing Director of the national Iranian Offshore Oil Company (NIOOC) Mahmoud Zirkchianzade made the remarks yesterday talking to reporters on the sidelines of the 15th International Oil Show in Tehran.

Hengam oil field was jointly discovered with Oman in 1979, said the official.

He said some \$300 million have been invested on the implementation of the project and it is to increase up to \$450 million in the future.

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Zirakchianzade added that the Hengam oil field was developed in a short time (26 months) which is an “unprecedented” record for development of an offshore oil field not only in Iran but also in the whole region.

The official noted that the early output of the oil field was some 4,000 barrels per day which is to increase up to 25,000-30,000 BPD until the end of the current Iranian calendar year (Started March 21, 2010).

He went on to say that the production of gas from joint gas fields has increased 20 percent compared to past year.

Zirakchianzadeh said that the amount had also increased 12 percent in 2009 in comparison to 2008.

He added that the increase will be materialized through exploitation of gas from Salman and Bilal gas fields.

Managing Director of Iran's Oil Continental Shelf Company said it needs 2.6 billion dollars to reach such an increase in production

Iran Grants \$105m for Electrification Project in Sri Lanka

Iran has granted a \$ 105 million loan to Sri Lanka for a rural electrification project. The Power and Energy Ministry is to launch the project to supply electricity to about 1,000 villages in the rural areas of the country, a Sri Lankan internet newspaper reported yesterday quoting the Lankan government as saying.

The loan was granted on the request of President Mahinda Rajapaksa to Iranian counterpart, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, ColomboPage, Sri Lanka's internet newspaper reported.

The project, destined to start in May, is to cover the areas in Eastern, Central, South, Sabaragamuwa, Uva and North Central Provinces.

According to the Sri Lankan government, 87 percent of the country was presently provided with electricity and the Ministry expected the figure to rise to 92 percent after implementation of the project.

Official Hails Greater Investment Budget in South Pars

Managing Director of Pars Special Economic Energy Zone Moussa Soury says allocation of 40 percent of the Oil Ministry budget to investment in the South Pars gas field is an unprecedented event. Talking to IRNA, he appreciated efforts made by Majlis representatives to allocate such a budget to the South Pars gas field in the current Iranian calendar year.

He made the remark on the sidelines of the 15th International Oil, Gas, Refining and Petrochemical Exhibition which opened here at the Tehran International Fair Grounds on Thursday.

Emphasizing the importance of the ongoing exhibition, he said the number of foreign and domestic companies participating in the show has witnessed a significant increase compared to the previous years.

Some 400 foreign and over 900 domestic companies are taking part in the five-day event.

He further condemned the hue and cry made by certain foreign countries, and said a large number of foreign companies have expressed their interest to participate in development projects of Iran's oil, gas and petrochemical industries during the ongoing exhibition.

Soury added that special facilities have been prepared for the investors and producers in his zone, thanks to the ratification made by the cabinet ministers last month.

Referring to the recent sanctions imposed on Iran, the official reiterated that such challenges have resulted in significant development and creative works in the country's oil and gas industries.

Some 435 well-reputed foreign and 907 Iranian companies and enterprises active in oil, gas, and petrochemicals industries have showcased their businesses in 27 halls on 73,000 square meters of lands in the exhibition which was opened on the 101st anniversary of oil exploration in Iran.

Technical, Engineering Services, Iran's Main Exports to Kazakhstan

Exports of technical and engineering services to Kazakhstan are the most important part of Iran's exports to the country. Iranian experts have constructed several settlement units and roads in Kazakhstan. Construction of a freeway which links Russia to India is the most important project carried out by Iranian companies.

Iran's Dena-Rahsaz company takes part in construction and repair of the country's roads. After implementing big projects in Kazakhstan, the company was appointed as consultant of Kazakh Ministry of Transportation and Communication.

According to unofficial figures, Iran's exports to Kazakhstan are worth 750 million dollars

Iran, Uganda Ink 3 Cooperation Deals

Iran and Uganda signed three cooperation deals during President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's visit to the country. The documents pertain to Iran's assistance to the development of Uganda, sanitary, pharmaceutical and medical cooperation as well as a document overseeing the agreements reached between the two countries.

Based on the last document, a 7-member committee will be formed to pursue the implementation of the agreements earlier signed by the two countries.

A joint political communiqué was also inked by the presidents of the two states.

Heading a high-ranking politico-economic delegation, the Iranian President arrived in Kampala Friday on the last leg of his two-nation tour which had already taken him to Harare, Zimbabwe.

Iran "An Open Market" for International Investments

Manager of a Chinese company, Polymer Cheray, says the Islamic Republic of Iran is an open market for international investments. Speaking to IRNA on the sidelines of the 15th international Oil, Gas, Refining and Petrochemical Exhibition in Tehran April 23-26, he said businessmen and international dealers look for such a lucrative market for investments.

Iran has good projects for development of its gas and oil fields which are satisfactory for global traders and businessmen, he said.

Politics should be separated from commerce, he said, adding that imposing economic sanctions on countries with a lucrative market such as Iran is not a good policy.

“We are very optimistic about prospects of our investments in Iran,” he underlined.

He said that the Chinese companies are determined to continue cooperation with Iran under any circumstances.

Some 107 Chinese firms have taken part in the international event in Tehran registering the first rank in terms of number of participants.

Social Front

Iran's Music House Moves to New Location

Iran's Music House has finally found a new home. Following completion of building renovation, the new location reopened on Wednesday in the presence of tar virtuoso Jalil Shahnaz and other masters of music. Former conductor of Iran's National Orchestra Farhad Fakhreddini, and musicians Mohammadreza Shajarian, Mostafa Kamal Purtorab, Hossein Dehlavi, Davud Ganjeii, and Hushang Zarif were seen among the participants.

Master Shajarian expressed his pleasure over reopening the house and said, "This is a great honor that we are here along with the great music man of Iran Jalil Shahnaz."

He later handed a plaque of honor prepared by Iran's Music House to the master and laid a kiss on his hands. Shahnaz, touched by all the attention and affection, also expressed his thanks to all the participants and said, "Shajarian is unique for his high morals and courtesy."

Managing Director of Iran's Music House Mohammad Sarir continued next and said, "Today, we believe we have found a home that is so beautiful. Although not too large, it is filled with love and affection. It is truly a house of warm hearts."

He later talked about the building's renovation, saying that the house was previously located on Marjan Street, near Vahdat Hall in Tehran District 6. A deposit was put down on the new house also located in the same district several years ago. Part of the money came from several benefit concerts and additional funds were provided by Tehran's Municipality to complete the purchase of the house.

"The house was gradually renovated and prepared at this time, thanks to all the officials and musicians who helped us in this task."

"Iran's Music House is now the only music foundation and will focus on development of music among the youth more than before. We need to pay more attention to this art form since it is deeply rooted in our culture," he added.

"With the help of officials, we must develop new policies to promote our music so that underground Iranian music groups get a chance to experience the satisfaction of performing onstage and having direct contact with their audiences.

“There must also be greater efforts to provide facilities to help change the taste of audiences. Observing the rights of musicians and composers is also necessary,” he remarked.

Ganjeii was next to speak who expressed his sadness over losing Iranian masters of music one by one. “It is with great pain that this house is losing its beloved members. Hearing of the great loss of Ata Janguk caused us to grieve deeply. But now we are once again filled with joy that the house has reopened,” he remarked.

Iranian tar and setar virtuoso, and music teacher Ata Janguk passed away of heart failure on Wednesday. He was 62 years old.

10th Int’l Construction Exhibit Planned

The Tenth International Construction Exhibition will open at Permanent International Fairground on August 3 and will continue for three days. Announcing this, deputy secretary of Cooperatives Chamber, Ebrahim Tehrani described the exhibit as one of the most important economic events in the country. As in the past years, its motto is ‘Cheap, Rapid and Resistant’, Tehrani said.

He further stated that Iran has made remarkable progress in the field of construction and engineering services.

Some four specialized seminars will be held on the sidelines of the exhibition to introduce the latest achievements in various areas, the official said.

The main objective of the event is to raise export, he said, noting that foreign companies will have an opportunity to get acquainted with the capabilities of Iranian experts in the field of construction and launch cooperation with them.

Target countries for the exhibit are Latin American , Asian and African countries, Iraq, Afghanistan and Azerbaijan Republic

Jundallah Defectors Granted immunity

Abdulmalek Rigi, the leader of the Jundallah terrorist group, was arrested by Iran in February. Jundallah is responsible for numerous acts of terror in Iran. Iran has granted immunity from prosecution to more than one hundred members of the Jundallah terrorist group, a provincial official says.

Speaking on Friday, Governor General of Iran's Sistan-Baluchestan Province Ali Mohammad Azad said Iranian authorities had received three hundred requests from members of the terrorist group calling for immunity after their notorious leader, Abdolmalek Rigi, was arrested in February.

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"The immunity has been granted to 110 of those [who lodged an appeal]," the official said.

He, however, explained that only those defectors who did not have a private plaintiff were given immunity, while others had to stand trial in a court of law.

The Jundallah group has claimed responsibility for numerous terrorist attacks in Iran, targeting both civilians as well as government and military officials.

In their latest attack, which took place in October 2009, more than 40 Iranians — among them 15 members of the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC), including top commanders along with several tribal elders — lost their lives when Jundallah terrorists carried out an operation in the border region of Pishin, located in Iran's southeastern province of Sistan-Baluchestan.