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U.S. Official Wants Russian Missile System in Iran Sanctions

U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk is asking Congress members to sign a petition urging the White House to include a Russian ground-to-air missile system in Iran sanctions. "As you know, Russian transfer of the S-300 to Iran would undermine our national security, change the security dynamic of the region and undermine our diplomatic efforts," says the letter from Kirk (R-Ill.).

Jundallah Terrorist Rigi Executed

Iran has executed convicted terrorist Abdolhamid Rigi -- the brother of the leader of Jundallah terrorist group -- in the southeastern city of Zahedan. Abdolhamid was hanged in a central prison in the capital of Sistan-Baluchestan province, Zahedan, on Monday after he confessed to playing a role in the assassinations of civilians and security forces in the province.

Iran May Lend \$1.5b to Expand Refinery in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka, which imports all its oil, may get a \$1.5 billion loan from Iran to fully fund a project to double capacity at the South Asian island's only refinery, the petroleum minister said. "The earlier understanding was for us to come up with 30 percent, but Iran may come in to completely finance the expansion," Susil Premajayantha said in an interview in the capital Colombo.

Georgia Accused of Secret Arms Sales to Iran

Just as the U.S. and other major powers have agreed on new sanctions against Tehran, Georgian opposition claims President Saakashvili was involved in alleged weapons deals with the Islamic Republic. If the latest accusations from the opposition Labor Party prove to be true, the Georgian leadership would look rather pale, exposing it may be "going East", instead of West.

Iran Expects Vienna Group to Consider Tehran Declaration

Foreign Ministry spokesman Ramin Mehman-Parast says the Islamic Republic of Iran expects the Vienna Group to consider Tehran Declaration with positive approach. Speaking to reporters, he said that the international community expects a positive response from the Vienna Group - the U.S., France and Russia in this respect. He said that the Islamic Republic of Iran is determined to fully implement the Tehran Declaration and strongly opposes any obstacles in process of putting it into practice. "We hope the members of the Vienna Group will seize the opportunity."

Iran Hands Nuclear Fuel Swap Letter to IAEA

Iran's letter on exchange of nuclear fuel was handed over Monday to the head of the UN nuclear watchdog here. The letter was submitted to Director-General of the International

Atomic Energy Agency Yukiya Amano by Iran's mission to the IAEA and in the presence of representatives from Turkey and Brazil.

Shanghai Defence Bloc Not to Accept Iran as Member

A security bloc grouping Russia, China and Central Asia will not accept Iran as a member while there are UN sanctions against it, a Russian diplomatic source said on Saturday. Iran applied in 2008 to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), a security and defence bloc led by Beijing and Moscow and seen as a counterweight to NATO.

Iran Plans More Satellite Launch

Iran announced yesterday that it plans to unveil a set of recently developed satellite models in weeks, and launch two satellites into orbit in less than a year. Head of Iran's Space Agency Moahmmad Ali Forghani said the new domestically designed and built models are mini-satellites and will be displayed to the public by mid this year.

Larijani: West Yet to Understand Islamic Revolution

Speaker of the Iranian Parliament (Majlis) Ali Larijani said Sunday that the U.S. and its allies have failed to find a deep and correct understanding of the Islamic Revolution in Iran. He made the remarks in his address to the Majlis Sunday open session to mark the 28th anniversary of the liberation of Khorramshahr city in Khuzestan province southwest of Iran by the Iranian forces on May 24, 1982.

Supreme Leader Appoints New Deputy Commander of Basij

Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution and Commander-in-Chief of Armed Forces Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei in a decree yesterday appointed Brigadir General Akbar Ebrahim-zadeh as the new deputy head of Basij (voluntary forces). In the decree, the Supreme Leader praised the good record of service of Ebrahim-zadeh in various positions.

Iran Protests U.S. Visa Denial to Diplomat

Tehran has lodged a formal protest against Washington for deliberately preventing a senior Iranian diplomat from attending a key nuclear conference in New York. Deputy Foreign Minister for Legal and International Affairs Mohammad Mehdi Akhoundzadeh missed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference, which kicked off on May 3, after officials in Washington refused to issue him a US entry visa.

Majlis Waiting for Reports on Lowering Britain Ties

The Iranian parliament (Majlis) has received assessments from two ministries on the issue of downgrading Tehran's relations with Britain and is waiting for similar reports

from three more ministries, a senior lawmaker announced yesterday. The intelligence and foreign ministries have already provided their assessments on the issue but we are still waiting for similar reports from three other ministries, Head of the Foreign Relations Committee of the parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Commission Hojjatoleslam Hossein Ebrahimi told FNA.

German Arrests Over Iran Sale Anger Russia

Germany has detained several men suspected of procuring technology for a Russian-built nuclear reactor in Iran, opening the door to a diplomatic feud between the European Union and Russia, Western diplomats said. Diplomats familiar with the case said the arrests had infuriated Russia, which complained to members of the U.N. Security Council's Iran sanctions committee. That panel oversees compliance with the punitive measures imposed on Tehran for refusing to halt its uranium enrichment program.

Russia Can Send Missiles to Iran

A draft U.N. resolution that would impose sanctions on Iran, including limits on global arms transfers, will not block the controversial transfer of Russian S-300 missiles to the Iranian military, according to U.S. and Russian officials. The Obama administration had opposed the S-300 sale because the system is highly effective against aircraft and some missiles. The CIA has said the S-300 missiles, which have been contracted by Tehran but not delivered, will be used to defend Iranian nuclear facilities.

Foreign Investment up 60%

Minister of Economy and Finance said Thursday that despite world economic crisis and the 35 percent foreign investment decrease in Europe and the Western world, Iran experienced a 60% increase in foreign investment last year.

Attending the 6th World Islamic Economic Forum in Kuala Lumpur Shamsaddin Hosseini said more than three hundred companies as well as refineries and power plants are to be privatized in Iran this year.

JANNATI: Tehran Declaration Powerful Response to West

Tehran's Substitute Friday Prayers Leader Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati says the signing of a declaration in Tehran on nuclear fuel swap was a strong response to western countries. The cleric made the remark while addressing worshippers gathered in Tehran University campus for the weekly congregational prayers. He said the declaration which was also signed by Brazil and Turkey put the ball in the West's court.

Economic News

Iran Aims to Become Gasoline Exporter

Iran seeks to become self-sufficient in gasoline in two years' time and then to start exporting the fuel, an official said on Sunday, as some traders and international oil firms cease sales to the Islamic state. "By building new refineries we will become a gasoline exporter," ISNA news agency quoted Ali Reza Zeighami, managing director of the National Iranian Refining and Oil Products Distribution Company, as saying. "The plan is to become self-sufficient in two years' time ... by implementing the scheme to increase gasoline production in refineries," Zeighami said.

Iran Wheat Production Projected at 15m Tons

Iran's wheat production is expected to reach 15 million tons in the Iranian year that began in March, a senior official was quoted as saying yesterday. Mohammad Mehdi Kaboli of the Agriculture Ministry said this would be 11 million tons more than Iranian farmers needed for their own consumption, ISNA news agency reported. He did not give any comparison. Officials said last month Iran would export 2 million tons of wheat to three Arab countries in May after a halt lasting three years.

Iranian Companies Seek JVs in Oil, Gas Exploration

Iranian energy companies are exploring possibilities for joint ventures in oil and gas exploration activities in Pakistan. This was stated by the senior financial analyst of National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) and heads of Iranian Pavilion, Reza Daneshgar while talking to APP at the 8th International Energy Exhibition POGEE 2010 at Karachi Expo Center here Saturday. "This is our first ever visit to Pakistan and we have come here to show our capabilities to Pakistani companies in oil and gas exploration and development," he added.

Iran, Turkey to Increase Economic Exchanges

Iranian and Turkish officials are resolved to increase the level of economic exchanges between the two countries, Iran's chief Consul in Istanbul Mahmoud Heidari announced yesterday. "After the assignment of a strategy to increase the economic exchanges between Iran and Turkey, the level of such exchanges will increase to \$30bln by 2015," Heidari told reporters in Istanbul.

Petrol Reserves Rise by 10%

Managing Director of the National Iranian Central Oil Company (NICOC), Alireza Zeighami said Thursday that petrol reserves rose in Iran by 10 percent. "More than 95 percent reserves of the country were full of petrol," Zeighami added. He said, "We are not

worried because we have enough petrol in the country's reserves." "We import 17.5 million liters of petrol in the first two months of the current Iranian year (1389). The amount was 24 million liters during the mentioned period of the last year," Zeighami said.

China to Go Ahead With Iran Projects

China's biggest oil company says a draft UN Security Council resolution proposed by the US against Iran will not hinder its energy projects in the Islamic Republic. "We will implement our projects in Iran as usual," The Wall Street Journal quoted Jiang Jiemin, president of state-owned China National Petroleum, as saying in a statement on Thursday.

Social news

Iran Seeks to Solve Dust Pollution'

The government is seeking a solution to the country's dust pollution which mostly comes from the southwestern neighbors of Iran. However, the dust issue will not be overcome unless neighboring countries participate in a joint international convention to counter desertification since 95 percent of the country's dust comes from its neighbors, IRIB reported Thursday, quoting the governor of Khuzestan Province Jafar Hejazi.

Iranian Filmmaker Released on Bail

Jafar Panahi, an internationally celebrated Iranian director whose detention in Iran was a focus of discussion at the Cannes Film Festival this month, was released from Tehran's Evin prison on Wednesday after paying nearly \$200,000 in bail. According to a report from the Iranian Students' News Agency, Mr. Panahi, who began a hunger strike to protest his detention last week, was released after he put up bail of close to \$200,000. ISNA reported that the director "has been imprisoned since March 1 because of making a film about Iran's post-election events."

Detailed Report

Political news

Jailed Americans Could Be Freed in Prisoner Swap

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"We expect the Americans, who claim to be advocates of human rights, to also commit humanitarian acts, because only after this can we decide on whether or not to have a swap," Iranian Intelligence Minister Heydar Moslehi said, according to the IRNA news agency.

Speaking on the sidelines of a cabinet meeting, Moslehi said there had been no official talks about a swap, Iranian state television reported.

"It is clear that the three Americans are spies," he said, according to a report on the state TV's website.

Shane Bauer, 27, Sarah Shourd, 31, and Josh Fattal, 27, were detained in July. Their families say the three accidentally strayed across an unmarked border while on a hiking trip in Iraqi Kurdistan.

U.S. Official Wants Russian Missile System in Iran Sanctions

U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk is asking Congress members to sign a petition urging the White House to include a Russian ground-to-air missile system in Iran sanctions.

"As you know, Russian transfer of the S-300 to Iran would undermine our national security, change the security dynamic of the region and undermine our diplomatic efforts," says the letter from Kirk (R-Ill.).

The Washington Times reported last Friday that enhanced sanctions agreed upon by the major world powers, and now under consideration by the United Nations Security Council, include an implied carve-out for ground-to-air missiles -- apparently a concession designed to bring Russia into the sanctions.

"We urge you to demand the inclusion of this system in the list of prohibited transfers to Iran under the UNSC resolution," the letter says.

Iran wants Russia's S-300 system, and intelligence analysts believe it would position the system to protect its suspected nuclear weapons facilities from air attacks. Russia, under Israeli and U.S. pressure, has resisted making such a sale.

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Kirk, who is running for the open U.S. Senate seat in Illinois, told JTA that the sanctions would be ineffective without such follow-up.

"I worry that because they're ineffective, they will skimpily be added to previous sanctions and laws which were either ineffective or not enforced," he said.

Jundallah Terrorist Rigi Executed

Iran has executed convicted terrorist Abdolhamid Rigi -- the brother of the leader of Jundallah terrorist group -- in the southeastern city of Zahedan.

Abdolhamid was hanged in a central prison in the capital of Sistan-Baluchestan province, Zahedan, on Monday after he confessed to playing a role in the assassinations of civilians and security forces in the province.

Abdolhamid had also been charged with carrying out armed robberies, bombing operations and drug trafficking.

Earlier confessions made by Abdolhamid confirmed reports that Washington aided and abetted the armed terrorist group in carrying out its terror activities in Iran.

In a 2009 interview with Press TV, Abdolhamid revealed that since 2005, his brother had repeatedly met with US agents in the Pakistani cities of Islamabad and Karachi and maintained communication with them through a common link.

His brother, Abdolmalek Rigi, the captured ring leader of the Jundallah terrorist group, is also charged with carrying out assassinations and bomb attacks.

Iran May Lend \$1.5b to Expand Refinery in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka, which imports all its oil, may get a \$1.5 billion loan from Iran to fully fund a project to double capacity at the South Asian island's only refinery, the petroleum minister said.

"The earlier understanding was for us to come up with 30 percent, but Iran may come in to completely finance the expansion," Susil Premajyantha said in an interview in the capital Colombo.

Sri Lanka plans to start the two-year construction to increase state-run Ceylon Petroleum Corp. refinery's processing capacity to 100,000 barrels a day by early 2011, Premajyantha said May 21. China Huanqiu Contracting and Engineering Corp. has submitted a proposal to set up a refinery in Sri Lanka's southern Hambantota district that would export products, he said.

The end of Sri Lanka's three-decade civil war last year is attracting overseas aid and investment, stoking an economic recovery. Cairn India Ltd., a unit of U.K. explorer Cairn

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Energy Plc, is investing \$100 million to look for oil in a field off Sri Lanka's northwestern coast that may hold 1 billion barrels of oil.

Preliminary seismic tests indicated "possible deposits of oil or gas" in Sri Lanka's territorial waters within the Cauvery Basin in the Palk Straits and in the island's southeastern waters, Premajyantha said.

Sri Lanka will offer four blocks in those areas after calling for tenders from overseas companies to explore six more blocks in the offshore Mannar basin, the minister said.

"If we strike oil, we could have the refineries already here," Premajyantha said.

Sri Lanka currently imports as much as 60 percent of the island's crude oil requirements from Iran and is holding discussions on purchases from Russian companies, Premajyantha said.

Local petroleum prices are likely to be "stable" in the coming weeks while following global market rates, he said

Georgia Accused of Secret Arms Sales to Iran

Just as the U.S. and other major powers have agreed on new sanctions against Tehran, Georgian opposition claims President Saakashvili was involved in alleged weapons deals with the Islamic Republic.

If the latest accusations from the opposition Labor Party prove to be true, the Georgian leadership would look rather pale, exposing it may be "going East", instead of West.

They claim to have received information from an unnamed source in the Georgian secret services that the country's government has been secretly selling weapons to Iran.

"Saakashvili is mad at President Obama for not meeting with him during his recent visit to America and decided to get back at the United States by becoming friends with Tehran," declared Kakha Dzagania from the Labor Party of Georgia. "He buys missiles in Ukraine and sells them to Iran.

Iran Expects Vienna Group to Consider Tehran Declaration

Foreign Ministry spokesman Ramin Mehman-Parast says the Islamic Republic of Iran expects the Vienna Group to consider Tehran Declaration with positive approach.

Speaking to reporters, he said that the international community expects a positive response from the Vienna Group - the U.S., France and Russia in this respect.

He said that the Islamic Republic of Iran is determined to fully implement the Tehran Declaration and strongly opposes any obstacles in process of putting it into practice.

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“We hope the members of the Vienna Group will seize the opportunity.”

He said that the Tehran Declaration is a significant achievement and proves that the independent states are able to help resolve global problems.

Mehman-Parast said that Iran agreed to fuel swap to win confidence of the international community, but the other party declared that they have deceived Iran aiming to postpone Iranian nuclear activities.

Describing the move as insincere, he said when countries such as Turkey and Brazil voiced readiness to help resolve the issue, “We entered into a tripartite negotiations which produced the Tehran Declaration.”

Iran had already answered to all outstanding questions put forward by IAEA and removed all ambiguities to this end and got clean health bill from the IAEA, he said in reference to Modality Plan Iran signed with the UN nuclear agency to respond to the outstanding issues about Iranian nuclear program and the the agency verified afterwards that there has been no diversion from the civilian path.

"The U.S. constructed Tehran medical research reactor about 50 years ago but is currently creating problems to prevent delivery of fuel to the reactor," he said.

He said that the Non-Proliferation Treaty has failed to materialize its duties, he said adding that it is up to the Non-Aligned Movement member states to help amend it.

"Some countries refuse to honor their commitments consistent with the NPT and Disarmament worldwide."

Independent states along with NAM members seek a world free from nuclear weapons, he said, adding that 40 years after signing the NPT, the U.S. and Russia have stockpiled about 20,000 nuclear weapons which is source of concern for the international community.

World independent states called the US to destroy all its nuclear weapons and stop threatening others, he said.

Some countries refused to destroy their nuclear weapons and deviated from their commitments to the convention on non-proliferation and based on such a philosophy they equipped the Zionist regime with nuclear weapons, he underlined.

Mehman-Parast said that certain countries try to deprive other nations of their legitimate rights to produce nuclear energy and make the other nations dependent on themselves.

Iranian deputy permanent ambassador to United Nations in Vienna handed over formal letter on fuel swap to the head of the UN nuclear watchdog Yukiya Amano in the presence of representatives of Turkey and Brazil yesterday.

Iran Hands Nuclear Fuel Swap Letter to IAEA

Iran's letter on exchange of nuclear fuel was handed over Monday to the head of the UN nuclear watchdog here.

The letter was submitted to Director-General of the International Atomic Energy Agency Yukiay Amano by Iran's mission to the IAEA and in the presence of representatives from Turkey and Brazil.

The letter reads as follows:

“In the Name of God, the most Gracious and the Most Merciful

“Excellency;

“The Islamic Republic of Iran, as an active Member State of the International Atomic Energy Agency, has always been committed to its obligations under the NPT and has had wide-ranging cooperation with the IAEA. Such cooperation and extended interaction with the Agency, is an indication of the importance attached to this international organ and the attention devoted to the significance of the NPT.

Reciprocally, the Islamic Republic of Iran expects that the inalienable rights enshrined in the IAEA Statute and the Article IV of the NPT, as well as the Statutory mandate of the Agency in providing services to the Member States, be recognized and respected, and as a result to benefit from such assistance and services of the Agency without discrimination.

“The supply of the fuel for Tehran Research Reactor is among the issues which certainly fit within the framework of the Agency's statutory function, and the responsibility of the Agency in this respect is crystal clear. Regretfully, despite the elapse of about one year since the submission of request by the Islamic Republic of Iran (2 June 2009) for fuel supply for Tehran Research Reactor, devoted to produce radioisotopes for medical purposes and providing medical services to about one million people, not only the fuel has not been delivered to my country, but the purposed path in this regard has faced stalemate due to unjustified conditions imposed by other parties.

“At this juncture, I seize this opportunity to announce that in the course of the recent trilateral summit meeting held in Tehran with the presence of the Presidents of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Federative Republic of Brazil as well as the Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkey, which the latter two countries, at present happen to be members of the Board of Governors of the IAEA, we had constructive talks with respect to nuclear cooperation leading to the “Joint Declaration by Iran, Turkey and Brazil on 17 May 2010.”

“I, hereby, officially present to Your Excellency a copy of the Joint Declaration. The Islamic Republic of Iran reconfirms its agreement with the content of the Joint

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Declaration and its individual interrelated paragraphs, each bearing a particular importance of its own.

“In order to implement the Joint Declaration, in accordance with its paragraph 6, the Islamic Republic of Iran, hereby, officially declares its agreement with the content of the Declaration, in particular with its first five paragraphs as follows:

1. “We reaffirm our commitment to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and in accordance with the related articles of the NPT, recall the right of all State Parties, including the Islamic Republic of Iran, to develop, research, production and use of nuclear energy (as well as nuclear fuel cycle including enrichment activities) for peaceful purposes without discrimination.
2. “We express our strong conviction that we have the opportunity now to begin a forward looking process that will create a positive, constructive, non-confrontational atmosphere leading to an era of interaction and cooperation.
3. “We believe that the nuclear fuel exchange is instrumental in initiating cooperation in different areas, especially with regard to peaceful nuclear cooperation including nuclear power plant and research reactors construction.
4. “Based on this point the nuclear fuel exchange is a starting point to begin cooperation and a positive constructive move forward among nations. Such a move should lead to positive interaction and cooperation in the field of peaceful nuclear activities replacing and avoiding all kinds of confrontation through refraining from measures, actions and rhetorical statements that would jeopardize Iran’s rights and obligations under the NPT.
5. “Based on the above, in order to facilitate the nuclear cooperation mentioned above, the Islamic Republic of Iran agrees to deposit 1,200kg LEU in Turkey. While in Turkey this LEU will continue to be the property of Iran. Iran and the IAEA may station observers to monitor the safekeeping of the LEU in Turkey.

“In return, we expect the Agency, also in accordance with paragraph 6 of this declaration, to notify the Vienna Group (USA, Russia, France and the IAEA) of its content, and consequently inform us of the group’s positive response.

“Such action, according to this declaration, will pave the way to commence negotiation for elaboration on further details of the exchange leading to conclusion of written agreement and as well as making proper arrangements between Iran and the Vienna Group.

“We look forward to receiving Your Excellency’s response in an expedited way.”

Shanghai Defence Bloc Not to Accept Iran as Member

A security bloc grouping Russia, China and Central Asia will not accept Iran as a member while there are UN sanctions against it, a Russian diplomatic source said on Saturday.

Iran applied in 2008 to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), a security and defence bloc led by Beijing and Moscow and seen as a counterweight to NATO.

Iran Plans More Satellite Launch

Iran announced yesterday that it plans to unveil a set of recently developed satellite models in weeks, and launch two satellites into orbit in less than a year.

Head of Iran's Space Agency Moahmmad Ali Forghani said the new domestically designed and built models are mini-satellites and will be displayed to the public by mid this year.

He also pointed out that the country plans to launch two communications satellite into orbit by next March.

"These two satellites which will be tasked with taking photos and sending them to the earth will be sent to low Erath orbit," he added.

The official further pointed out that the satellites, a joint production of the Space Agency and Iranian universities, will be launched on the back of Iran's home-grown satellite-carriers.

Iranian Telecommunications Minister Reza Taqipour had announced earlier this month that the country was preparing the ground for designing and launching six satellites into space in future.

"We are currently carrying out a project which will see the design, production and launch of 5 to 6 satellites," the Iranian telecommunications minister said. "We hope to send one satellite into space in the first half of the coming (Iranian) year."

"Iran has laid the foundation for the development of its aerospace industry in the past three to four years," Taqipour told FNA, describing the launch of a home-produced satellite, named Omid (Hope), in February 2009 as one such achievement.

Larijani: West Yet to Understand Islamic Revolution

Speaker of the Iranian Parliament (Majlis) Ali Larijani said Sunday that the U.S. and its allies have failed to find a deep and correct understanding of the Islamic Revolution in Iran.

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He made the remarks in his address to the Majlis Sunday open session to mark the 28th anniversary of the liberation of Khorramshahr city in Khuzestan province southwest of Iran by the Iranian forces on May 24, 1982.

The port city had been captured by Iraqis on October 26, 1980.

It was retaken by Iranian forces during an operation called the Operation of Beit ol-Moqaddas.

The successful retaking of the city was perceived as a turning point in the war and is celebrated by Iranians each year.

Lack of a correct understanding from Iran's Islamic Revolution was behind the "confused attitude" of the U.S. and its allies in dealing with Iranians, Larijani said.

He stressed that the reason of Iranians' victory in every war field "is their convergence as well as national and Islamic solidarity."

Urging the need for further development of the cities damaged by the war, the speaker called on the Majlis special commissions to set specific plans for Khorramshahr's development.

On the international development on Iran's nuclear issue, he said the process of nuclear fuel swap would stop if the U.S. indulged in any adventurism action in the United Nations Security Council or the Senate.

He said such moves by the U.S. will destroy the result of all efforts by Brazil and Turkey and halt nuclear fuel swap.

Referring to preparation of a draft resolution by the US against the Iranian nation, he also said the parliament will reconsider ways of Iran's cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Outlining the process of the signing of a declaration in Tehran following mediatory efforts by Brazil and Turkey, Larijani stressed that the Americans themselves had in a written form requested Turkey to act as a mediator with Iran and persuaded Turkey and Brazil to enter the scene to open up a new path for settling the issue.

Noting that Iran accepted the two countries' mediation for the respect Tehran had for them as two friendly countries, the speaker said after the issuing of the declaration the Americans suddenly started moving towards a new statement against Iran.

Supreme Leader Appoints New Deputy Commander of Basij

Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution and Commander-in-Chief of Armed Forces Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei in a decree yesterday appointed Brigadier General Akbar Ebrahim-zadeh as the new deputy head of Basij (voluntary forces).

In the decree, the Supreme Leader praised the good record of service of Ebrahim-zadeh in various positions.

The Supreme Leader also thanked the former deputy commander of Basij Brigadier General Mohammad Bagher Zolghadr for his sincere services in the post

Iran Protests U.S. Visa Denial to Diplomat

Tehran has lodged a formal protest against Washington for deliberately preventing a senior Iranian diplomat from attending a key nuclear conference in New York.

Deputy Foreign Minister for Legal and International Affairs Mohammad Mehdi Akhoundzadeh missed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference, which kicked off on May 3, after officials in Washington refused to issue him a US entry visa.

In a letter addressed to the UN Committee on Relations with the Host Country, Iran's Ambassador to the United Nations Mohammad Khazaei said US officials "took advantage of their position as hosts of the world body when they decided to deny Akhoundzadeh an entry visa."

"By denying Akhoundzadeh a visa to the United States, Washington officials kept a high-ranking Iranian diplomat from participating in a major conference on the review of the 40-year-old NPT," he added in his Friday letter.

Khazaei said Akhoundzadeh's presence in the meeting was crucial, primarily because of "his role as supervisor of Iran's relations with the UN and secondly because of the meeting's sharp focus on Tehran's nuclear issue."

He further added that Washington had defied its statutory obligation to issue visas for envoys of all UN member states, seeking to press forward its political agenda and apply pressure on certain countries.

Majlis Waiting for Reports on Lowering Britain Ties

The Iranian parliament (Majlis) has received assessments from two ministries on the issue of downgrading Tehran's relations with Britain and is waiting for similar reports from three more ministries, a senior lawmaker announced yesterday.

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The intelligence and foreign ministries have already provided their assessments on the issue but we are still waiting for similar reports from three other ministries, Head of the Foreign Relations Committee of the parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Commission Hojjatoleslam Hossein Ebrahimi told FNA.

On April 20, Rapporteur of the Commission Kazzem Jalali told reporters that the commission had sent letters to the ministries of intelligence, foreign affairs, economic affairs and finance, industries and mines, and commerce and asked them to compile a report on Iran's trade and economic interactions with London and submit it to the commission within a month.

Ebrahimi further underlined the resolve of the parliament to downgrade ties with Britain due to London's hostile stances during and after the presidential elections in Iran.

He also confirmed a decision by the foreign ministry to ban Iranian students from studying at British universities.

Earlier in May, member of the parliament Zohreh Elahian told FNA that the parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Commission had set up a special committee to continue assessments and studies on a bill which requires a downgrade of ties with Britain.

"It has been decided during the session that the committee should continue to keep the issue on its agenda and that further studies and discussions should be carried out in a related workgroup," Elahian stated, adding that the final results would be publicized once expert discussions with relevant governmental bodies are complete.

German Arrests Over Iran Sale Anger Russia

Germany has detained several men suspected of procuring technology for a Russian-built nuclear reactor in Iran, opening the door to a diplomatic feud between the European Union and Russia, Western diplomats said.

Diplomats familiar with the case said the arrests had infuriated Russia, which complained to members of the U.N. Security Council's Iran sanctions committee. That panel oversees compliance with the punitive measures imposed on Tehran for refusing to halt its uranium enrichment program.

The dispute highlights the gulf between countries like Russia and China, which have continued to do business with Iran despite three rounds of U.N. sanctions and a possible fourth round in the works, and Western powers, which have been quietly making it increasingly difficult to trade with Tehran.

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One European diplomat, who spoke to Reuters on condition of anonymity, said the businessmen were detained at a German airport by the customs police on suspicion of violating a ban on the export of sensitive "dual-use" technology to Iran.

The arrested men are German nationals working for a German firm. The diplomat declined to name the firm and it was not immediately clear how many men were detained or what items they had purchased for the Bushehr plant.

The diplomats said the detained Germans were acquiring equipment on behalf of Russia and its Bushehr light-water nuclear power reactor in Iran, scheduled to open in August.

But the European Union's own internal directives on implementing U.N. steps against Iran go further than the U.N. sanctions resolutions and do not exempt the Bushehr reactor, which was why Germany arrested the men, diplomats said.

"It may be allowed under Security Council resolutions, but it's not allowed under EU rules," a European diplomat told Reuters. "Perhaps Russia wasn't aware of it."

Nuclear security expert David Albright, a former U.N. weapons inspector and current head of the Institute for Science and International Security think tank, said Germany might be trying to send a message to Russia that it needs to be more aggressive in implementing the U.N. sanctions against Tehran.

"Perhaps Germany is pushing back on Russia's unwillingness to enforce the sanctions on dual-use technology for Iran," Albright said.

A spokeswoman for Germany's U.N. mission said she could neither confirm nor deny the diplomats' assertions.

"The deliberations of the Security Council sanctions committee as well as any potential investigations, including possible arrests, by German law enforcement agencies are strictly confidential," the spokeswoman said.

Russia Can Send Missiles to Iran

A draft U.N. resolution that would impose sanctions on Iran, including limits on global arms transfers, will not block the controversial transfer of Russian S-300 missiles to the Iranian military, according to U.S. and Russian officials.

The Obama administration had opposed the S-300 sale because the system is highly effective against aircraft and some missiles. The CIA has said the S-300 missiles, which have been contracted by Tehran but not delivered, will be used to defend Iranian nuclear facilities.

A key provision in the resolution made public this week states that all U.N. member states will agree to block sales or transfers of weapons. It lists tanks, armored vehicles,

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artillery, combat aircraft, warships and "missiles or missile systems as defined for the purpose of the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms."

A close reading of the missile section of the register defines those included in the ban as missiles and launchers for guided rockets, and ballistic and cruise missiles, and missile-equipped remotely piloted vehicles. However, the register states that the missile system category "does not include ground-to-air missiles," such as anti-aircraft missiles and anti-missile interceptors like the S-300.

According to a CIA report to Congress on arms proliferation made public in April, Iran "continues to seek the advanced long-range S-300 air defense system from Russia."

"We judge likely deployment locations for this system include Iran's nuclear facilities," the report said.

Asked about S-300s, a senior State Department official said the draft "would not impose a legally binding obligation not to transfer S-300 to Iran" since the register does not cover defensive missiles.

However, the official said the draft resolution calls for U.N. members to show "vigilance and restraint" on arms sales, something "Russia has already demonstrated in its failure to deliver the system thus far despite its contractual obligation to do so."

The official noted that the arms embargo Moscow has accepted in the draft would block many other weapons systems that Russia has supplied to Iran and thus curb future transfers.

Foreign Investment up 60%

Minister of Economy and Finance said Thursday that despite world economic crisis and the 35 percent foreign investment decrease in Europe and the Western world, Iran experienced a 60% increase in foreign investment last year.

Attending the 6th World Islamic Economic Forum in Kuala Lumpur Shamsaddin Hosseini said more than three hundred companies as well as refineries and power plants are to be privatized in Iran this year.

Hosseini added that Iran stock exchange index had 58 percent increase with the total value of 74 billion dollars, according to IRIB.

He said the IRI government would support foreign investors, adding that Islamic countries could benefit from a stock exchange founded on Sharia by investing in Iran's stock exchange.

Establishing joint investment funds among Islamic countries and the use of currency of the countries involved was also other issues that Hosseini spoke of.

The minister criticized the international bodies for failing to handle the ongoing economic crises after two years adding that Islamic institutions didn't yield to the crises for they followed Islamic codes and regulations.

JANNATI: Tehran Declaration Powerful Response to West

Tehran's Substitute Friday Prayers Leader Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati says the signing of a declaration in Tehran on nuclear fuel swap was a strong response to western countries.

The cleric made the remark while addressing worshippers gathered in Tehran University campus for the weekly congregational prayers.

He said the declaration which was also signed by Brazil and Turkey put the ball in the West's court.

The Ayatollah further described the declaration as a precise and good document.

He went on to criticize those who criticized Iran's peaceful nuclear program, claiming that it was developed to use enriched uranium for military purposes.

He stressed that signing of Tehran declaration was another move by Iran towards further trust-building.

Tehran's substitute Friday prayers leader further touched upon the issue of hijab and emphasized the need for practical measures to eliminate negligent treatment of the issue by some people in the Islamic society.

Economic News

Iran Aims to Become Gasoline Exporter

Iran seeks to become self-sufficient in gasoline in two years' time and then to start exporting the fuel, an official said on Sunday, as some traders and international oil firms cease sales to the Islamic state.

"By building new refineries we will become a gasoline exporter," ISNA news agency quoted Ali Reza Zeighami, managing director of the National Iranian Refining and Oil Products Distribution Company, as saying.

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"The plan is to become self-sufficient in two years' time ... by implementing the scheme to increase gasoline production in refineries," Zeighami said.

Officials also hope a plan to phase out energy subsidies will slow gasoline demand from Iranians now enjoying some of the world's cheapest fuel, at 1,000 rials (10 U.S. cents) a litre.

In the 2009-10 year, Iran produced 44.6 million litres of gasoline every day but consumed 64.9 million litres, forcing it to import the difference, according to official figures.

Iran Wheat Production Projected at 15m Tons

Iran's wheat production is expected to reach 15 million tons in the Iranian year that began in March, a senior official was quoted as saying yesterday.

Mohammad Mehdi Kaboli of the Agriculture Ministry said this would be 11 million tons more than Iranian farmers needed for their own consumption, ISNA news agency reported. He did not give any comparison.

Officials said last month Iran would export 2 million tons of wheat to three Arab countries in May after a halt lasting three years.

Kaboli said land under wheat cultivation in Iran now stands at 6.8 million acres.

"The production of wheat in the country is projected at some 15 million tones this year of which around 11 million tons will be in excess of the farmers' own consumption needs which will be purchased from them," he said.

In 2004, Iran celebrated self-sufficiency in wheat production but cold winter weather in 2007-08 followed by drought hit agricultural output and forced Iran to resume importing the grain.

Iranian Companies Seek JVs in Oil, Gas Exploration

Iranian energy companies are exploring possibilities for joint ventures in oil and gas exploration activities in Pakistan. This was stated by the senior financial analyst of National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) and heads of Iranian Pavilion, Reza Daneshgar while talking to APP at the 8th International Energy Exhibition POGEE 2010 at Karachi Expo Center here Saturday.

"This is our first ever visit to Pakistan and we have come here to show our capabilities to Pakistani companies in oil and gas exploration and development," he added.

He said that Iran wanted to expand cooperation in energy sector with its eastern friends and Pakistan, China and Malaysia are those countries with whom we want to promote our cooperation.

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Daneshgar pointed out that nine oil and gas companies and three energy companies are here at POGEE. All of these companies are subsidiaries of NIOC which had signed a final agreement with Pakistan in Turkey for the supply of natural gas under Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project, he added.

I am hopeful of the positive outcome of our participation in POGEE 2010. I will prepare and “ submit a report on the participation in POGEE 2010 to Iranian Ministry of Petroleum for future course. We will try to find a good formula for joint venture with Pakistani companies on the basis of this report, he said.

He said that Iran International Exhibition Company (IIEC), Petrol Pars Co., Oil Pension Investment Company (OPIC), Jey Refining Co., Sepahan Oil Company, Oil Exploration Operation CO., Oil Industries Engineering & Construction Co., Iran Offshore Turbo Compressor Naft Co., National Iranian Tanker Co., are the part of Iranian Pavilion.

To a question, he said that 28 phases of development of Pars gas field have been completed while 10 more are to be completed in due course to produce condensate for gas and LPG.

A huge amount of investment would be required for its development to expand its production capacity and despite U.S. pressure we are progressing ahead and float tenders this year. Daneshgar said that Iran would exercise ‘buy back scheme’ if it could not get foreign funding for this project.

Responding to a question about Pak-Iran gas pipeline, he said that Iran is approaching China to motivate this super power to take part in this gas pipeline which would require an estimated investment of \$ 5 billion.

Iran, Turkey to Increase Economic Exchanges

Iranian and Turkish officials are resolved to increase the level of economic exchanges between the two countries, Iran's chief Consul in Istanbul Mahmoud Heidari announced yesterday.

"After the assignment of a strategy to increase the economic exchanges between Iran and Turkey, the level of such exchanges will increase to \$30bln by 2015," Heidari told reporters in Istanbul.

He further cited a trouble-free foreign policy, relations with all countries of the world and expansion of ties with neighbors among the major parameters in the Turkish government's foreign policy which have caused a remarkable growth in Tehran-Ankara relations.

The diplomat pointed out that relative stability in relations between Iran and Turkey has removed misunderstandings and paved the way for increased confidence between the two

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countries and as a result boosted Tehran-Ankara mutual cooperation in political, security, economic and cultural fields.

Long-term future cooperation in security, campaign against terrorism and construction of a pipeline for transferring Iran's natural gas to Turkey are the plans considered by the two sides, he added.

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

Petrol Reserves Rise by 10%

Managing Director of the National Iranian Central Oil Company (NICOC), Alireza Zeighami said Thursday that petrol reserves rose in Iran by 10 percent.

"More than 95 percent reserves of the country were full of petrol," Zeighami added.

He said, " We are not worried because we have enough petrol in the country's reserves."

"We import 17.5 million liters of petrol in the first two months of the current Iranian year (1389). The amount was 24 million liters during the mentioned period of the last year," Zeighami said.

China to Go Ahead With Iran Projects

China's biggest oil company says a draft UN Security Council resolution proposed by the US against Iran will not hinder its energy projects in the Islamic Republic.

"We will implement our projects in Iran as usual," The Wall Street Journal quoted Jiang Jiemin, president of state-owned China National Petroleum, as saying in a statement on Thursday.

The statement comes only two days after the U.S. proposed a draft resolution which targets Iran's military, financial, and shipping activities.

China National Petroleum is in various phases of developing three fields in Iran, including work on one of the world's biggest natural-gas fields, and an Iranian oil field.

Jiang said he expected production from the oil field to hit around 20,000 barrels a day later this year.

Iran was China's third-biggest supplier of oil last year after Saudi Arabia and Angola.

Social news

Iran Seeks to Solve Dust Pollution'

The government is seeking a solution to the country's dust pollution which mostly comes from the southwestern neighbors of Iran.

However, the dust issue will not be overcome unless neighboring countries participate in a joint international convention to counter desertification since 95 percent of the country's dust comes from its neighbors, IRIB reported Thursday, quoting the governor of Khuzestan Province Jafar Hejazi.

He said that a number of experts from neighboring countries have visited Iran and received training on mulch-spreading and other counter-desertification techniques.

He also expressed hope that the Iraqi government would increase efforts to help cut the amount of dust through the implementation of agreements.

Hejazi said that Iran will provide Iraq with the technical assistance it needs to help reduce desertification and land degradation problems in the country.

The amounts of dust and particles coming from Iraqi deserts have elevated Tehran's pollution warning to an 'emergency' state.

During the past couple of years, the dust pollution has hit Iranian cities just ahead of the summer.

Iranian Filmmaker Released on Bail

Jafar Panahi, an internationally celebrated Iranian director whose detention in Iran was a focus of discussion at the Cannes Film Festival this month, was released from Tehran's Evin prison on Wednesday after paying nearly \$200,000 in bail.

According to a report from the Iranian Students' News Agency, Mr. Panahi, who began a hunger strike to protest his detention last week, was released after he put up bail of close to \$200,000. ISNA reported that the director "has been imprisoned since March 1 because of making a film about Iran's post-election events."

Mr. Panahi has supported the country's opposition protesters, but his family has denied charges that he was engaged in the production of what a conservative Tehran newspaper called "an anti-state film" at the time of his arrest.

The news agency added that Mr. Panahi's case "will be sent to [the] Islamic Revolutionary Court after [the] investigation is completed."

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Gooya News, an opposition Web site, reported that Mr. Panahi “was taken directly to the hospital alongside his family members after being freed from Evin prison.” The Web site added: “Though his psychological state is very good, because of spasms in his rib cage, spinal disc problems, and breathing problems, he needs medical care.”

About a week after Mr. Panahi’s arrest, Abbas Kiarostami, Iran’s most famous filmmaker, sent *The Lede* an open letter calling for the release of his friend and colleague. In April, a group of leading American filmmakers — including Steven Spielberg, Martin Scorsese and Francis Ford Coppola — signed a petition asking Iran’s government to free Mr. Panahi.