

Weekly report on Iran

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### Summary

#### Political News

##### Talks With Gazprom in Final Stages

Iran's negotiations to finalize an oil-fields deal with Russia's OAO Gazprom Neft are in final stages, a top Iran government official said Friday.

Russia has come into trouble with Iran after agreeing to support U.S. efforts to get new sanctions from the UN Security Council. But speaking to Dow Jones Newswires, Hojatollah Ghanimifard, vice president in charge of investment affairs at the National Iranian Oil Co., said: "We hope to have a final decision soon" on the Gazprom Neft deal.

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##### CIA: Iran Has Enough Uranium for "Two Weapons"

CIA chief Leon Panetta said Sunday he thinks Iran has enough low-enriched uranium to make two weapons, and that it would take at least two years to prepare the bombs and a delivery system.

"We think they have enough low-enriched uranium for two weapons," Panetta told the ABC network's "This Week" program, but added that Tehran would need a year to enrich it fully to produce a bomb.

It would take "another year to develop the kind of weapon delivery system in order to make that viable," he said.

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### **West to Blame for Rights Violations**

Iran's deputy judiciary chief has hit out at the West for capitalizing on the issue of human rights to achieve its political aims.

"Today, the issue of human rights is used as a political lever against independent and third-world nations", Ebrahim Raisi told reporters yesterday. The major violators of human rights are Western states. If the true face of Western countries which claim to be custodians of human rights is shown, you will see that people's rights are violated most severely in Europe, the US and Israel", the top official added. Raisi underscored Western media have been banned from covering security crackdowns on protesters in the West.

### **Door Still Open to Shell; Repsol Out**

Iran is leaving the door open to Royal Dutch Shell PLC to join a giant gas project but Repsol YPF has completely pulled out, a top government official said.

The statement comes after state-owned Pars Oil and Gas Co. awarded contracts to develop phases 13 and 14 of the South Pars field to domestic companies after talks with Shell and Repsol came to no avail.

Speaking to Dow Jones Newswires, Hojatollah Ghanimifard, vice president in charge of investment affairs at the National Iranian Oil Co., said the Anglo-Dutch company has been told to contact POGC so "they will be introduced to contractors" with whom they could work. Shell declined to comment.

But Ghanimifard said Repsol has "apologized" as "they cannot be in Persian LNG," the liquefied-natural-

### **Egypt Barring Iranian Gaza-Bound Ship From Canal**

The Iranian Red Crescent said yesterday that in addition to restrictions imposed by Israel, Egypt had barred a Gaza-bound aid ship from entering the Suez Canal, leading to the trip being postponed.

"The ship's departure has been postponed because of more restrictions imposed by the Zionist Qods occupying regime on the movement of aid to Gaza and prevention of the ship from using the Suez Canal, despite coordination with international bodies," the Red Crescent said in a statement.

### **G8 Calls on Iran to Hold "Transparent" Talks**

G8 leaders Saturday urged Iran to hold a "transparent dialogue" over its suspect nuclear program, as Iranian leader Mahmoud Ahmadinejad prepares to unveil his conditions for talks.

We are profoundly concerned by Iran's continued lack of transparency regarding its nuclear activities and its stated intention to continue and expand enriching uranium, including to nearly 20 percent," G8 leaders said in a communique. Our goal is to persuade Iran's leaders to engage in a transparent dialogue about its nuclear activities and to meet Iran's international obligations," the leaders of the Group of Eight richest nations said. They welcomed all efforts to rein in the Islamic Republic's uranium enrichment program, making special note of efforts to broker a deal by Brazil and Turkey.

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### **Envoy Urges Further Cultural Ties Between Iran, Australia**

Australian Ambassador to Iran Marc Innes-Brown called for the expansion of cultural ties between Tehran and Canberra.

The envoy, heading a cultural delegation, visited Iran's Institute for Islamic Culture and Thought (IICT) and discussed ways to expand cultural ties between the two nations. Innes-Brown stressed that his visit to the institute was aimed at promoting cultural relations in line with the close ties existing between the two nations.

### **MP: Unilateral Sanctions Seek Psychological War**

Parliament National Security and Foreign Policy Commission Kazem Jalali yesterday said unilateral sanctions against Iran seek psychological war.

"Carrot and stick policy is an out-dated approach," he told ISNA adding, "while raising the subject of talks, they are issuing resolution against Iran in the UN Security Council and imposing unilateral sanctions. It seems that the West does not follow a specified strategy."

### **Boroujerdi: Downgrading Ties With Moscow Not on Agenda**

Head of Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Commission Ala'eddin Boroujerdi said on Sunday that downgrading ties with Russia is not on his Commission's agenda.

Boroujerdi dismissed claims that Majlis mulls cutting ties with Russia over its recent stances towards Iran and stressed that no such topic is on his commission's agenda, though there have been complaints about the Russian government's recent move against Iran. Boroujerdi said, "It seems that not enough attention has been paid to transferring facts raised at the Majlis Commission to newspapers." Some papers have in their Sunday edition quoted deputy head of the Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Commission as saying that downgrading relations with Russia had been one of the main topics under discussion in recent meeting of the Commission with certain officials.

### **Official Blames U.S. for Increased Drug Production in Afghanistan**

An Iranian provincial security official took the U.S. responsible for increased drug production and trafficking in Afghanistan, saying the Afghan drug problem has seriously deteriorated since the U.S. invasion of the country.

### **Iran Will React to Ship Inspection**

Chairman of the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines (IRISL) said yesterday if Iran's merchant ships are inspected, the Iranian government will strongly react to this illegal action.

"According to the international law, any country is entitled to guard its territorial waters," Mohamad-Hossein Dajmar said adding that, Iran can inspect any suspected ship in its waters in a bid to react to their action. The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has recently imposed new sanctions on Iran in favor of which some certain states have voted. Dajmar underlined Iran would not let any inspections of its ships sailing under the flag of the Islamic Republic of Iran. He underlined that Iran's acts will be within the framework of related international laws.

### **MP: German Envoy Should Apologize for Assault on Iranian National**

Head of Iran's Parliament national Security and Foreign Policy Commission Alaeddin Boroujerdi said yesterday that German ambassador to Iran should apologize for assault on Iranian woman at the embassy.

"What happened at German embassy is in contradiction with Islamic and human rights codes and cannot be justified at all," he told ISNA. The measure is an insult to Iranian nation and should be condemned. "German ambassador should apologize for what happened to the Iranian national and prevent such actions reoccur in future," Boroujerdi noted. We hope that German embassy in Tehran

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have justifiable explanation for Iranian nation about the issue."

### **Sending Aid Ship to Gaza Still on the Agenda**

Deputy Foreign Minister in Arab Affairs Mohammad Reza Sheybani said that the plan to send a relief aid ship to Gaza Strip by governmental or non-governmental organizations is still on the agenda.

Sheybani, reacting to reports of certain news agencies which have said Iran has dispensed with sending aid ships to Gaza due to Israeli threats, said that 'the plan is still on our agenda'. He said that time of dispatching the ship would be coordinated with those who want to dispatch other ships from different parts of the world.

### **Mottaki: Bullying Powers No Longer Efficient**

Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki said here on Friday that opposition of majority of states to the United Nations Security Council's anti-Iran resolution reveals the fact that the bullying powers are no longer efficient.

Addressing a ceremony commemorating birth anniversary of Imam Ali (AS), first Imam of Prophet Mohammad's (PBUH) Household, he added that the resolutions, thus far issued against Iran, have not faced any opposition but the one, passed against the country recently, was rejected by a group of states. On Iran's stance vis-à-vis the countries favoring anti-Iran sanctions, Mottaki said, "We have sent protest letters to these countries and challenged their votes by setting forth logical evidence." Referring to the efforts of the arrogant powers' to disappoint the Iranian community, he noted that they want to leave psychological impact by issuing such resolutions.

### **Iran to Set Conditions for Talks With West**

- President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said on Thursday that the Islamic Republic of Iran will set conditions for future talks with the European states on national nuclear program next week.

President Ahmadinejad made the remarks in a meeting with clerics and servants of the mosques. Iran will usher in fresh methodology for future talks with the European states in reaction to their hostile approach crystallized in passing resolution with the United Nations Security Council, something which will bring them shame, he said. The president's remarks was in reference to a request made by the European Union foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton to resume talks with the Islamic Republic of Iran. President Ahmadinejad downgraded the U.N. sanctions against Iran in addition to the illegal process of passing the resolution on the basis of unfounded allegations about Iranian nuclear program.

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### **Pakistan Examining U.S. Sanctions Against Iran**

Pakistan on Friday said it is examining the tough sanctions approved by the US Senate against Iran, with special focus on the proposed Pak-Iran gas pipeline project.

We are examining the tough US sanctions against Iran and will issue our policy in this regard soon," Foreign Office spokesman Abdul Basit told Daily Times. Talking to journalists in Karachi, Iranian Ambassador Mashallah Shakeri said the sanctions placed on Iran by the US would not affect the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project, which was signed much before the fresh restrictions. Ruling out the pipeline being affected by the sanctions, he said other countries such as China, Turkey and the EU have

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signed several accords with Iran in the energy sector.

### **Clinton Welcomes Iran Sanctions Proposed by Congress**

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on Friday hailed the U.S. Congress for endorsing a sweeping package of tough new energy and financial sanctions on Iran over its nuclear program.

Clinton issued a statement saying she and President Barack Obama welcomed the passage of legislation Thursday to "strengthen sanctions against Iran," adding the pair support the "broad aims" of the Congressional action. The new Congressional measures aimed to choke off Iran's access to imports of refined petroleum products like gasoline and jet fuel and curb its access to the international banking system.

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### **UNESCO Awards President for Revival of Shushtar Aqueduct System**

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization representative to Iran has awarded a plaque of honor to President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad for revival of Shushtar aqueduct System.

The award was conferred on the president after a ceremony held in Shushtar to mark the first anniversary of registration of Shushtar aqueduct system with UNESCO in presence of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. UNESCO registered Shushtar Historical Aqueduct System last year as the 10th cultural heritage of Iran. Shushtar, Historical Aqueduct System, inscribed as a masterpiece of creative genius, can be traced back to Darius the Great in the 5th century B.C.

### **IRGC to Counter Threats to Iran Vessels**

Senior Islamic Revolution Guards Corps commander Brigadier General Ali Fadavi says that the IRGC is capable of countering any threat against Iranian vessels.

Speaking at the inauguration ceremony for Brig. Gen. Ali-Reza Tangsiri as the new IRGC Navy commander in the southern port of Bandar Abbas on Wednesday Brig. Gen. Fadavi said that the U.S. and its allies would not dare to threaten Iranian vessels.

### **MP: U.S. Sanctions Will Make Iranians Firmer**

A member of Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Commission said here on Friday that U.S. sanctions against Iran will make Iranians firmer.

### **Cleric Condemns UNSC Resolution Against Iran**

Substitute Friday prayers leader of Tehran Hojjatoleslam Kazem Sedighi here on Friday condemned the UN Security Council's anti-Iran resolution and sanctions and said the gesture showed that the UN does not exist and its Security Council is an Anti-Security Council.

Delivering his second Friday prayers sermon here at Tehran University campus, Hojjatoleslam Sedighi said the sanctions would rather make Iranian nation further united. The nation, that relies on God Almighty and has a revolution whose aim is to revive religious ideology, will not only resist such sanctions but will also get more united and resistant," said the Hojjatoleslam. Sanctions are not something new," said Hojjatoleslam Sedighi, addressing the West, "Perhaps you have not well identified Iranian nation yet because it did not pay the least attention neither to the East or West, especially when our military forces and culture were under your control. Despite that, this nation, led by the late Imam (Khomeini), pushed you out of the country and founded a religious establishment instead."

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### **Bushehr Plant to Start Operation in 2 Months**

A senior Russian diplomat announced that Iran's first nuclear power plant in the southern city of Bushehr will start operation within the next two months.

It will take two month or even less than that for the completion of the Bushehr nuclear plant," Russian Consul General Ali Mitkhadovich Mustafabeyli told reporters in Isfahan. He added that this is not merely the opinion of Russian officials as Iranian officials have also estimated that the plant will become operational within the same timeframe. The Russian official further stressed that the Russian government is not facing any problems for completing the Bushehr plant.

## Economic News

### **Iran-ASEAN Trade Center Opens in Malaysia**

The Iran-ASEAN trade center was established in Malaysia on the aim of expanding bilateral commercial ties between the Islamic Republic and Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

The Kuala Lumpur-based center is aimed at further expansion of the ASEAN market for Iranian goods and products as well as expansion of joint ventures between the two sides. The two sides' representatives signed the agreement on the establishment of the center yesterday in Iran's embassy in Kuala Lumpur.

### **Sanctions Not to Affect Iran Imports and Exports**

Head of Iran's Customs Administration Ardeshir Mohammadi said sanctions will not affect the volume of Iran's import and export activities.

He said given Iran's outstanding position in transit of goods, the country will not be harmed by the West's sanctions. He noted that since changing transit routes will not be economically justified for other countries, the sanctions are not likely to affect Iran's imports and exports. According to the customs official, the volume of Iran's transited goods stood at 7 million tons with a value of \$24 billion during the past Iranian year (ended March 20, 2010) while the figure is expected to rise to 8 million tons valuing \$30 billion this year.

### **Tehran to Host Iran-Bahrain Economic Commission Meeting**

The Iran-Bahrain three-day joint economic commission meeting opened here yesterday at the experts level.

he meeting opened as experts from the two countries discussed ways for joint cooperation as well as implementation of previous agreements. Bahraini Foreign Minister Sheikh Khaled bin Ahmed al-Khalifa arrives here today for the meeting. Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki chairs the Iranian side and Sheikh Khaled bin Ahmed al-Khalifa leads the Bahraini one.

### **Iran Moves Ahead in Building Cereal Storage Silos**

The Islamic Republic of Iran be among advanced countries in cereal storage, Mahmoud Dibaei, a commerce ministry official said yesterday.

74 silos are under construction in the country's governmental and private sectors," he said adding after completion of the projects, capacity of the country's standard silos will increase to 9,5 million tons which is sufficient for storing necessary cereal of the country for ten months. It is also forecast that the capacity of the country's silos would reach to 11.5 million tons by the end of the fifth development plan (2010-15), he said, adding given Iran's strategic situation in the region, the silos could be used for expansion of trade in cereal.

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### **Iran Exports "on Rise" Despite Sanctions**

In the wake of Western-imposed sanctions targeting the Iranian energy and financial sectors, Iran says the value of its exports has exceeded 78.5 billion dollars with a 12.7 increase in non-oil exports.

According to statistics provided by Iran's Fars news agency, the value of the country's oil and non-oil exports reached more than 78.5 billion dollars during the first 11 months of the last Persian calendar year (March 2009-February 2010). Iran exported 59.55 billion dollars of oil, oil products, natural gas and gas condensate in 11 months, undergoing a drop of 24.3 percent in comparison with the same period in the previous year.

### **Iran to Become Gasoline Exporter**

New unilateral U.S. sanctions targeting Iran's energy imports will put no pressure on the Islamic Republic of Iran, because the country can meet its energy needs, a senior official said.

Despite sanctions, Iran will be self-sufficient in gasoline production within two years and after that we can begin exporting gasoline," Deputy Oil Minister Ali-Reza Zeighami said. He said that Iran imports 18 to 20 million liters of gasoline per day, while it produces 43 million liters. Zeighami noted that Iran is implementing five projects at its refineries to increase gasoline production.

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### **Police Stop Smuggling of \$500m of Fuel in Northwestern Border**

The Iranian security forces managed to prevent the smuggling of fuel worth of \$500m through the northwestern borders of the country, Police Chief Esmail Ahmadi-Moqaddam announced.

Speaking to reporters in Iran's northwestern city of Orumiyeh, the top commander urged more investment in the construction of roads and accompanying checkpoints around border regions in order to boost security. Ahmadi-Moqaddam went on to announce a plan by the country's police forces to increase border patrol units, while equipping them with state-of-the-art gear in line with efforts for achieving complete border security by 2015. He also said that the force was scheduled to rid the country's western borderlines of mines and other explosive devices by the year's end.

### **Telecom Cooperation With Pakistan Underlined**

Pakistan's Adviser to the Prime Minister on Information Technology, Sardar Muhammad Latif Khan Khosa, said Tehran and Islamabad cooperation in telecom sector can lead to economic development.

Terrestrial fiber optic connectivity between Iran and Pakistan will be economically beneficial for the two nations and subsequently will promote peace in the region. The Advisor made the abovementioned remarks in a meeting with Iranian Ambassador to Pakistan Mashallah Shakeri. They exchanged views on matters of bilateral interest with particular reference to promoting cooperation in information technology sector and telecommunication between both nations. The Advisor said Pakistan and Iran, the two Islamic countries, have excellent historical commonalities and have enjoyed close relations which would be strengthened in the near future.

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### **Iran Pursues WTO Accession Seriously**

Iran's membership in the World Trade Organization (WTO) is seriously pursued at three levels locally including council of ministers, coordinating committee of deputy ministers, as well as a working group of experts, Deputy Commerce Minister Massoud Movahedi said.

Attending a meeting of deputy ministers' committee with public and private organizations, Movahedi said, "As the accession process has sped up, the meetings should be held more frequently and in a new format." About 700 questions had been put forward by WTO members," he said, adding, "All the questions were submitted to ministries and affiliated organizations which require their immediate and precise answers to speed up the process."

### **Tehran, Baku Call For Expansion of Ties**

Iranian Minister of Economic Affairs and Finance Shamseddin Hosseini on Friday held talks with Azerbaijan's Minister of Economic Development Shahin Mustafayev to discuss issues of mutual interest as well as bilateral cooperation.

### **Iran, Turkey Sign Agreement on Labor, Social Affairs**

The Islamic Republic of Iran and Turkey signed a cooperation agreement on labor and social affairs on Thursday.

In a ceremony to sign the agreement which is unique as being the first agreement between Iran's Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and the Turkish counterpart, the Iranian Minister Abdulreza Sheikholeslami described Iran and Turkey as being like brothers having a lot of issues in common. Iranian officials are keen to develop relations with Turkey in all aspects," Sheikholeslami said, adding that "there is no limitation whatsoever to foster ties with Turkey especially in labor and social affairs." He went on to say that such interactions would provide the two sides with various opportunities. Turkish Minister of Labor and Social Security Omer Dinçer, for his part, noted that Turkey as being faced with unemployment and lack of job security, like the rest of the world, had adapted new strategies to tackle the problems.

### **Singapore Keen on Invest in Iran's Tourism Sector**

Singaporean economic activists and investors announced their interests in making investment in Iran's tourism sector including hotel construction.

On the sidelines of a meeting held in Tehran between Iran and Singapore's foreign trade officials, the economic activists of Singapore discussed trade opportunities with the representatives of Iran's private sector and requested to invest in hotel constructions and tourism infrastructure in Iran, said the Deputy Head of Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPO), Mohammad Mehdi Nahavandi. The Singaporean companies own remarkable capitals, technologies and a major share in the global markets. If their cooperation is achieved by Iranian companies, there is an opportunity for evolution in both countries' trade capacity," Nahavandi said.

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Social News

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### **Tehran Gallery Hangs Paintings by Slovak Ambassador, Behzadi, Jafarinejad**

TEHRAN (MNA) -- Paintings by Slovakian Ambassador Anton Hajduk are currently on display in a joint exhibit with works of two Iranian women painters at the Shirin Gallery.

A total of 20 paintings by the Slovakian ambassador to Tehran, Shah-Pari Behzadi, and Puneh Jafarinejad are on display at the gallery. "Most Slovaks are innate painters. I have painted for many years, but this is my first exhibit in Iran," Hajduk said in a press release issued by the Shirin Gallery. He added that painting is his hobby and personal interest, and he is an expert in politics. He said the exhibit would help boost cultural ties between Iran and Slovakia, adding that painting is a medium which "has no limits in communication and does not need any translation."

### **Tehran, Ankara Keen to Boost Ties in Healthcare**

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad called for the expansion of cooperation between Tehran and Ankara in medical fields and health-related issues.

"Iran and Turkey should expand their cooperation in all fields, specially in healthcare and render service to all nations, Islamic and poor countries in particular," President Ahmadinejad said in a meeting with visiting Turkish Health Minister Recep Akdag here on Saturday. He also lauded the advancements made by Iran and Turkey in their healthcare systems, production of medicines and development of the medical techniques applied in the two countries. Iran and Turkey can work out new health and treatment models and ties outside the control of the Zionists (who dominate and control major drug production centers) and present them to the world," Ahmadinejad stressed.

### **Iran Busts Over 2,000 Drug Trafficking Bands**

Tehran Police Chief Brigadier Hossein Sajedinia yesterday said 51 percent of foreign nationals who were transiting and distributing drugs and narcotics were detained in Tehran.

Attending a ceremony to destroy 4 tons of seized drugs, Sajedinia said, "More than 2 thousands bands of drug traffickers were busted during the past Iranian year (ending March 20).

### **Handicrafts Exports Hit \$22m**

Iran exported more than 22 million dollars worth of handicrafts in the first two months of the current Iranian year (started March 21), said deputy head of Iran Cultural Heritage, Handicraft and Tourism Organization (ICHTO).

Khatam, Kilims, ziloo, traditional jewelry, wood products and Iranian furniture were main products that exported over the same period, Tahmineh Daniali was quoted by CHTN as saying. According to Customs Administration statistics, some 159.2 ton of this kind of products were exported during the mentioned time, she added.

### **Tehran to Host Holy Quran Competitions**

The International Holy Quran Competitions will be held in Tehran from July 9-14.

The ceremony will be attended by world's top Quran reciters and memorizers. The 27th edition includes

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a story writing section. It will be held in three categories, namely Quran and Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) household, Quran and insight and humanities.

### Political News

#### Talks With Gazprom in Final Stages

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Russia has come into trouble with Iran after agreeing to support U.S. efforts to get new sanctions from the UN Security Council. But speaking to Dow Jones Newswires, Hojatollah Ghanimifard, vice president in charge of investment affairs at the National Iranian Oil Co., said: "We hope to have a final decision soon" on the Gazprom Neft deal.

"We are in the last stage" of negotiations and are hoping for "a good conclusion," he said.

In November last year, Gazprom Neft, the oil arm of Russia's OAO Gazprom, signed a preliminary agreement with NIOC to help develop the Azar and Shangule oil fields. Gazprom Neft officials didn't return a request for comment.

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"We think they have enough low-enriched uranium for two weapons," Panetta told the ABC network's "This Week" program, but added that Tehran would need a year to enrich it fully to produce a bomb.

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severely in Europe, the US and Israel", the top official added.

Raisi underscored Western media have been banned from covering security crackdowns on protesters in the West.

He then touched upon the situation of human rights in Iran.

He said Iran has committed itself to protecting people's rights as it firmly believes in religious and Islamic principles.

The deputy judiciary chief pinpointed that Western countries are the prime suspects given their repeated violations of human rights.

### **Door Still Open to Shell; Repsol Out**

Iran is leaving the door open to Royal Dutch Shell PLC to join a giant gas project but Repsol YPF has completely pulled out, a top government official said.

The statement comes after state-owned Pars Oil and Gas Co. awarded contracts to develop phases 13 and 14 of the South Pars field to domestic companies after talks with Shell and Repsol came to no avail.

Speaking to Dow Jones Newswires, Hojatollah Ghanimifard, vice president in charge of investment affairs at the National Iranian Oil Co., said the Anglo-Dutch company has been told to contact POGC so "they will be introduced to contractors" with whom they could work. Shell declined to comment.

But Ghanimifard said Repsol has "apologized" as "they cannot be in Persian LNG," the liquefied-natural-gas project tied to the phases.

A spokeswoman for Repsol said it "has formally informed the National [Iranian] Oil Company (NIOC) of its decision to discontinue its participation."

Ghanimifard said Shell and Repsol's decisions had nothing to do with sanctions. He said Repsol's pullout was tied to the financial crisis in Spain. It's "because of problems the country [Spain] cannot sort out," the official said.

He also pointed out that Shell previously signed and completed oil-field deals after the Clinton administration tightened sanctions on Iran in 1996.

### **Egypt Barring Iranian Gaza-Bound Ship From Canal**

The Iranian Red Crescent said yesterday that in addition to restrictions imposed by Israel, Egypt had barred a Gaza-bound aid ship from entering the Suez Canal, leading to the trip being postponed.

"The ship's departure has been postponed because of more restrictions imposed by the Zionist Oods occupying regime on the movement of aid to Gaza and prevention of the ship from using the Suez Canal, despite coordination with international bodies," the Red Crescent said in a statement.

The statement said the voyage to the blockaded Gaza Strip had been put off despite the vessel being ready to set sail from the southern port of Bandar Abbas for the Palestinian

territory.

But in Egypt, the Suez Canal Authority said it would allow the ship through.

"Under an international treaty, the canal is obligated to let any ship through, whether it is Iranian or not," a canal official told AFP.

"We have not received any instructions to ban the Iranian aid ships from using the Suez Canal," the official said.

An Iranian official had announced on Thursday that sending the aid ship had been cancelled because of restrictions imposed by Israel.

#### **G8 Calls on Iran to Hold "Transparent" Talks**

G8 leaders Saturday urged Iran to hold a "transparent dialogue" over its suspect nuclear program, as Iranian leader Mahmoud Ahmadinejad prepares to unveil his conditions for talks.

"We are profoundly concerned by Iran's continued lack of transparency regarding its nuclear activities and its stated intention to continue and expand enriching uranium, including to nearly 20 percent," G8 leaders said in a communique.

"Our goal is to persuade Iran's leaders to engage in a transparent dialogue about its nuclear activities and to meet Iran's international obligations," the leaders of the Group of Eight richest nations said.

They welcomed all efforts to rein in the Islamic Republic's uranium enrichment program, making special note of efforts to broker a deal by Brazil and Turkey.

The final statement after two days of talks in Canada urged Tehran "to implement relevant resolutions to restore international confidence in the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program."

The UN Security Council this month slapped a fourth set of sanctions on Iran for its refusal to rein in its uranium enrichment program.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said on Thursday that Iran will next week lay down its conditions for talks with the world powers.

Soon after the UN sanctions resolution was passed, the world powers and the European Union called for talks with Tehran to resolve the issue, indicating a dual-track policy of both sanctions and dialogue.

Ahmadinejad said the offer of talks showed the world powers "themselves are more afraid because soon after the resolution they said they want talks with Iran."

#### **Envoy Urges Further Cultural Ties Between Iran, Australia**

Australian Ambassador to Iran Marc Innes-Brown called for the expansion of cultural ties between Tehran and Canberra.

The envoy, heading a cultural delegation, visited Iran's Institute for Islamic Culture and Thought (IICT)

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and discussed ways to expand cultural ties between the two nations.

Innes-Brown stressed that his visit to the institute was aimed at promoting cultural relations in line with the close ties existing between the two nations.

During the meeting, the Australian delegation voiced its willingness to cooperate with the Iranian institute in areas of philosophy of religion as well as Islamic economy and banking.

Based on an agreement signed by the two sides at the meeting, a delegation from the Institute for Islamic Culture and Thought would pay a visit to Melbourne in the near future to take part in an international conference on 'philosophy of religion'.

### **MP: Unilateral Sanctions Seek Psychological War**

Parliament National Security and Foreign Policy Commission Kazem Jalali yesterday said unilateral sanctions against Iran seek psychological war.

"Carrot and stick policy is an out-dated approach," he told ISNA adding, "while raising the subject of talks, they are issuing resolution against Iran in the UN Security Council and imposing unilateral sanctions. It seems that the West does not follow a specified strategy."

He added, "endorsing sanction and bullying approach against Iran are useless."

The U.S. and European countries had had a great chance of utilizing Tehran declaration, since we believe issues can be settled under the framework of the declaration not pressure."

Also regarding Iran's agreement with P5+1 talks and its new conditions, he said, "the West has specified no certain framework for dialogue, they are just speaking of negotiations, but then implement their own policies. I believe that they use the issue of talks to mislead world's public opinion."

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has recently declared that he would unveil Iran's conditions for talks with P5+1 over nuclear issue.

As to the U.S. Congress measure that approved energy and banking sanctions against Iran, Jalali said, Iran has rationed gas and it has put building gas refineries on its agenda."

The U.S. Congress on Thursday approved new unilateral sanctions seeking pressures on Iran's energy and banking sectors.

### **Boroujerdi: Downgrading Ties With Moscow Not on Agenda**

Head of Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Commission Ala'eddin Boroujerdi said on Sunday that downgrading ties with Russia is not on his Commission's agenda.

Boroujerdi dismissed claims that Majlis mulls cutting ties with Russia over its recent stances towards Iran and stressed that no such topic is on his commission's agenda, though there have been complaints about the Russian government's recent move against Iran.

Boroujerdi said, "It seems that not enough attention has been paid to transferring facts raised at the Majlis Commission to newspapers."

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Some papers have in their Sunday edition quoted deputy head of the Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Commission as saying that downgrading relations with Russia had been one of the main topics under discussion in recent meeting of the Commission with certain officials.

### **Official Blames U.S. for Increased Drug Production in Afghanistan**

An Iranian provincial security official took the U.S. responsible for increased drug production and trafficking in Afghanistan, saying the Afghan drug problem has seriously deteriorated since the U.S. invasion of the country.

"Since the deployment of the U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan, the country has witnessed a multifold increase in drug production and a change from conventional to industrial drugs, in addition to the massacre of the people and occupation of the country," Deputy Governor-General of Iran's southeastern province of Kerman for Political and Security Affairs Javal Kamali said yesterday.

Kamali further reminded the human and financial losses incurred by drug addiction on the countries' economy and social status, and called on the world states to show stronger determination to fight illicit drugs.

He further warned about the dangerous consequences of the recent change in addiction behaviors, and said that addicts' changed tendency for drugs is the result of the devilish plots hatched by the enemies.

Recent studies display that addicts' demand for conventional drugs, such as opium, heroin and hashish, has decreased while their tendency for those narcotics mostly prevalent in the West, like cocaine, crack, crystal and LSD, has increased in Iran.

### **Iran Will React to Ship Inspection**

Chairman of the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines (IRISL) said yesterday if Iran's merchant ships are inspected, the Iranian government will strongly react to this illegal action.

"According to the international law, any country is entitled to guard its territorial waters," Mohamad-Hossein Dajmar said adding that, Iran can inspect any suspected ship in its waters in a bid to react to their action.

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has recently imposed new sanctions on Iran in favor of which some certain states have voted.

Dajmar underlined Iran would not let any inspections of its ships sailing under the flag of the Islamic Republic of Iran. He underlined that Iran's acts will be within the framework of related international laws.

### **MP: German Envoy Should Apologize for Assault on Iranian National**

Head of Iran's Parliament national Security and Foreign Policy Commission Alaeddin Boroujerdi said yesterday that German ambassador to Iran should apologize for assault on Iranian woman at the embassy.

"What happened at German embassy is in contradiction with Islamic and human rights codes and cannot be justified at all," he told ISNA.

"The measure is an insult to Iranian nation and should be condemned."

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"German ambassador should apologize for what happened to the Iranian national and prevent such actions reoccur in future," Boroujerdi noted.

"We hope that German embassy in Tehran have justifiable explanation for Iranian nation about the issue."

Also German embassy declared that it would examine the case and issue a statement if necessary.

The lawyer of the Iranian woman said Saturday that a case is filed in a court to pursue her issue.

"My client was in a very bad mental condition and she has been hit physically, a case is filed and we pursue it until the final results," Feizollah Beigi told ISNA.

He added the complaint focuses on German ambassador to Iran as well as Iranian and German staff of the embassy.

### **Sending Aid Ship to Gaza Still on the Agenda**

Deputy Foreign Minister in Arab Affairs Mohammad Reza Sheybani said that the plan to send a relief aid ship to Gaza Strip by governmental or non-governmental organizations is still on the agenda.

Sheybani, reacting to reports of certain news agencies which have said Iran has dispensed with sending aid ships to Gaza due to Israeli threats, said that 'the plan is still on our agenda'.

He said that time of dispatching the ship would be coordinated with those who want to dispatch other ships from different parts of the world.

He added that sending aid by plane or through Egyptian borders to Gaza is still on the agenda.

He said that the issue has been proposed to Egyptian officials and 'we are waiting for their answer'.

Sheybani also discussed nature and aim of the Zionist regime military forces in confronting with recent humanitarian move by people and added that the Zionist regime is trying to cover its own problems by turning the issue to a political-security affair.

The senior diplomat underlined necessity of continuation of dispatching aid for Gaza residents and increasing public opinion pressure on the Zionist regime.

### **Mottaki: Bullying Powers No Longer Efficient**

Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki said here on Friday that opposition of majority of states to the United Nations Security Council's anti-Iran resolution reveals the fact that the bullying powers are no longer efficient.

Addressing a ceremony commemorating birth anniversary of Imam Ali (AS), first Imam of Prophet Mohammad's (PBUH) Household, he added that the resolutions, thus far issued against Iran, have not faced any opposition but the one, passed against the country recently, was rejected by a group of states.

On Iran's stance vis-à-vis the countries favoring anti-Iran sanctions, Mottaki said, "We have sent protest letters to these countries and challenged their votes by setting forth logical evidence."

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Referring to the efforts of the arrogant powers' to disappoint the Iranian community, he noted that they want to leave psychological impact by issuing such resolutions.

The country's economic prosperity in the past years shows that such moves are ineffective, he said.

"In the past no country dared to say `No' to the bullying powers but thanks to emergence of new diplomacy and Iran's righteous stance, the countries do not bow to force any longer," the minister said.

Mottaki further said that former U.S. President Jimmy Carter's National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Kazimierz Brzezinski's statement that 'no one counts on our words any more' reveals that Iran's correct logic has gained a firm footing in the world.

### Iran to Set Conditions for Talks With West

- President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said on Thursday that the Islamic Republic of Iran will set conditions for future talks with the European states on national nuclear program next week.

President Ahmadinejad made the remarks in a meeting with clerics and servants of the mosques.

Iran will usher in fresh methodology for future talks with the European states in reaction to their hostile approach crystalized in passing resolution with the United Nations Security Council, something which will bring them shame, he said.

The president's remarks was in reference to a request made by the European Union foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton to resume talks with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

President Ahmadinejad downgraded the U.N. sanctions against Iran in addition to the illegal process of passing the resolution on the basis of unfounded allegations about Iranian nuclear program.

"Some assumed that passing illegal resolutions at the Security Council against Iran will deal a blow to Iranian national economy. Instead, they should know that these resolutions have boosted national resolve to strengthen national economy."

He reaffirmed Iranian commitment to Non-Proliferation Treaty and Disarmament and said that Iran has proved commitment to NPT and the Disarmament in the Conference on 'Revision of NPT and Disarmament' in New York by adding 22 clauses to the Convention.

Elaborating on the current challenge in the international community vis-a-vis the greed of the veto-wielding powers at the Security Council, President Ahmadinejad said that the world has been divided into two halves -- materialistic world led by the US and justice-seeking world led by the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The message of the Islamic Republic of Iran to world nations is resistance to the global arrogance, he underlined.

The era of global arrogance has been over and a new enlightening is emerging, he pointed out.

The U.S. hegemony, which is against divine preaching of holy prophets and has stockpiles of

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conventional and non-conventional weapons and never hesitates to carnage scores of innocent people, can do nothing against the Islamic Republic of Iran, the president said.

### **Pakistan Examining U.S. Sanctions Against Iran**

Pakistan on Friday said it is examining the tough sanctions approved by the US Senate against Iran, with special focus on the proposed Pak-Iran gas pipeline project.

"We are examining the tough US sanctions against Iran and will issue our policy in this regard soon," Foreign Office spokesman Abdul Basit told Daily Times.

Talking to journalists in Karachi, Iranian Ambassador Mashallah Shakeri said the sanctions placed on Iran by the US would not affect the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project, which was signed much before the fresh restrictions. Ruling out the pipeline being affected by the sanctions, he said other countries such as China, Turkey and the EU have signed several accords with Iran in the energy sector.

### **Clinton Welcomes Iran Sanctions Proposed by Congress**

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on Friday hailed the U.S. Congress for endorsing a sweeping package of tough new energy and financial sanctions on Iran over its nuclear program.

Clinton issued a statement saying she and President Barack Obama welcomed the passage of legislation Thursday to "strengthen sanctions against Iran," adding the pair support the "broad aims" of the Congressional action.

The new Congressional measures aimed to choke off Iran's access to imports of refined petroleum products like gasoline and jet fuel and curb its access to the international banking system.

"We are committed to fully implementing this legislation in a manner that advances our multilateral dual-track strategy of engagement and pressure," Clinton said.

"These new measures... build on United Nations Security Council Resolution 1929 and underscore the resolve of the international community to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons," she said.

On June 10, the UN Security Council adopted resolution 1929, which imposed military and financial sanctions on Iran aiming to rein in its suspect nuclear program.

"The United States will work with our partners to maximize the impact of these efforts and to continue pursuing a diplomatic resolution to the international community's concerns regarding Iran's nuclear program," she said.

"In addition to increasing pressure on Iran's nuclear activities, this legislation also addressed the Iranian government's continued violation of the fundamental rights of its citizens," Clinton said.

"We support the Congress' efforts to call attention to these violations, and the United States will continue to hold Iran accountable for its obligations to respect the rights of its own people," Clinton said.

### **UNESCO Awards President for Revival of Shushtar Aqueduct System**

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization representative to Iran has awarded a plaque of honor to President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad for revival of Shushtar aqueduct System.

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The award was conferred on the president after a ceremony held in Shushtar to mark the first anniversary of registration of Shushtar aqueduct system with UNESCO in presence of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

UNESCO registered Shushtar Historical Aqueduct System last year as the 10th cultural heritage of Iran.

Shushtar, Historical Aqueduct System, inscribed as a masterpiece of creative genius, can be traced back to Darius the Great in the 5th century B.C.

It involved the creation of two main diversion canals on the river Kârun one of which, Gargar canal, is still in use providing water to the city of Shushtar via a series of tunnels that supply water to mills.

It forms a spectacular cliff from which water cascades into a downstream basin. It then enters the plain situated south of the city where it has enabled the planting of orchards and farming over an area of 40,000 ha. known as Mianâb (Paradise).

The property has an ensemble of remarkable sites including the Salâsel Castel, the operation centre of the entire aqueduct system, the tower where the water level is measured, dams, bridges, basins and mills.

It bears witness to the know-how of the Elamites and Mesopotamians as well as more recent Nabatean expertise and Roman building influence.

### **IRGC to Counter Threats to Iran Vessels**

Senior Islamic Revolution Guards Corps commander Brigadier General Ali Fadavi says that the IRGC is capable of countering any threat against Iranian vessels.

Speaking at the inauguration ceremony for Brig. Gen. Ali-Reza Tangsiri as the new IRGC Navy commander in the southern port of Bandar Abbas on Wednesday Brig. Gen. Fadavi said that the U.S. and its allies would not dare to threaten Iranian vessels.

"The Persian Gulf is the center of and most sensitive location in the world and the Americans cannot survive without it. We can close off this water way at any time," he added.

General Fadavi said that the IRGC naval forces would have a special and suitable response to the inspection of Iranian vessels.

"If they commit such a foolish act based on their illegal and illegitimate anti-Iran resolution, we will respond to them in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz ... with our improved capabilities," he added.

He pointed out that Iran's military capabilities have considerably improved since the eight-year Iraqi-imposed war in the 1980s.

### **MP: U.S. Sanctions Will Make Iranians Firmer**

A member of Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Commission said here on Friday that U.S. sanctions against Iran will make Iranians firmer.

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U.S. House of Representatives and Congress approved on June 24 unilateral sanctions against Iran in a bid to exert further pressure on the country's energy and banking sectors.

Hossein Sobhani-Nia said that the US did its utmost in the past months to make Iran give up its indisputable rights regarding peaceful nuclear energy but it has failed.

"The U.S. has stuck in a quagmire that it wants to exit by intensifying the sanctions," he said.

Sobhani-Nia further noted that this is while the Iranian nation has experienced such moves and have done away with them successfully.

The country has gained all its great scientific achievements in the wake of the sanctions and this time it will also turn the banking- and energy-related sanctions into an opportunity, he said.

### **Cleric Condemns UNSC Resolution Against Iran**

Substitute Friday prayers leader of Tehran Hojjatoleslam Kazem Sediqi here on Friday condemned the UN Security Council's anti-Iran resolution and sanctions and said the gesture showed that the UN does not exist and its Security Council is an Anti-Security Council.

Delivering his second Friday prayers sermon here at Tehran University campus, Hojjatoleslam Sediqi said the sanctions would rather make Iranian nation further united.

"The nation, that relies on God Almighty and has a revolution whose aim is to revive religious ideology, will not only resist such sanctions but will also get more united and resistant," said the Hojjatoleslam.

"Sanctions are not something new," said Hojjatoleslam Sediqi, addressing the West, "Perhaps you have not well identified Iranian nation yet because it did not pay the least attention neither to the East or West, especially when our military forces and culture were under your control. Despite that, this nation, led by the late Imam (Khomeini), pushed you out of the country and founded a religious establishment instead."

He also recalled harsh conditions and sanctions that the Iranian nation tolerated in the post-Islamic Revolution era and said those times, Iranian nation did not fear the least from the eight years of Iraqi imposed war (1980-88) and chemical attacks and brutal invasions as a result. "The fresh sanctions will not be effective then."

### **Bushehr Plant to Start Operation in 2 Months**

A senior Russian diplomat announced that Iran's first nuclear power plant in the southern city of Bushehr will start operation within the next two months.

"It will take two month or even less than that for the completion of the Bushehr nuclear plant," Russian Consul General Ali Mitkhadovich Mustafabeyli told reporters in Isfahan.

He added that this is not merely the opinion of Russian officials as Iranian officials have also estimated that the plant will become operational within the same timeframe.

The Russian official further stressed that the Russian government is not facing any problems for

completing the Bushehr plant.

Earlier in May, member of the parliament's (city and village) Councils and Home Security Commission Seyed Mohammad Javad Abtahi announced that the county plans to load real fuel into its first nuclear power plant in the southern city of Bushehr in July.

## Economic News

### Iran-ASEAN Trade Center Opens in Malaysia

The Iran-ASEAN trade center was established in Malaysia on the aim of expanding bilateral commercial ties between the Islamic Republic and Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

The Kuala Lumpur-based center is aimed at further expansion of the ASEAN market for Iranian goods and products as well as expansion of joint ventures between the two sides.

The two sides' representatives signed the agreement on the establishment of the center yesterday in Iran's embassy in Kuala Lumpur.

### Sanctions Not to Affect Iran Imports and Exports

Head of Iran's Customs Administration Ardeshir Mohammadi said sanctions will not affect the volume of Iran's import and export activities.

He said given Iran's outstanding position in transit of goods, the country will not be harmed by the West's sanctions.

He noted that since changing transit routes will not be economically justified for other countries, the sanctions are not likely to affect Iran's imports and exports.

According to the customs official, the volume of Iran's transited goods stood at 7 million tons with a value of \$24 billion during the past Iranian year (ended March 20, 2010) while the figure is expected to rise to 8 million tons valuing \$30 billion this year.

### Tehran to Host Iran-Bahrain Economic Commission Meeting

The Iran-Bahrain three-day joint economic commission meeting opened here yesterday at the experts level.

The meeting opened as experts from the two countries discussed ways for joint cooperation as well as implementation of previous agreements.

Bahraini Foreign Minister Sheikh Khaled bin Ahmed al-Khalifa arrives here today for the meeting.

Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki chairs the Iranian side and Sheikh Khaled bin Ahmed al-Khalifa leads the Bahraini one.

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The meetings are held once a year in capitals of the two countries. Manama hosted the last session.

Iran-Bahrain joint economic committee was boosted to joint high economic commission in 2006.

### **Iran Moves Ahead in Building Cereal Storage Silos**

The Islamic Republic of Iran be among advanced countries in cereal storage, Mahmoud Dibaei, a commerce ministry official said yesterday.

"74 silos are under construction in the country's governmental and private sectors," he said adding after completion of the projects, capacity of the country's standard silos will increase to 9,5 million tons which is sufficient for storing necessary cereal of the country for ten months.

It is also forecast that the capacity of the country's silos would reach to 11.5 million tons by the end of the fifth development plan (2010-15), he said, adding given Iran's strategic situation in the region, the silos could be used for expansion of trade in cereal.

### **Iran Exports "on Rise" Despite Sanctions**

In the wake of Western-imposed sanctions targeting the Iranian energy and financial sectors, Iran says the value of its exports has exceeded 78.5 billion dollars with a 12.7 increase in non-oil exports.

According to statistics provided by Iran's Fars news agency, the value of the country's oil and non-oil exports reached more than 78.5 billion dollars during the first 11 months of the last Persian calendar year (March 2009-February 2010).

Iran exported 59.55 billion dollars of oil, oil products, natural gas and gas condensate in 11 months, undergoing a drop of 24.3 percent in comparison with the same period in the previous year.

This is while, Iran's non-oil exports reached some 19 billion dollars, indicating a 12.7 percent increase compared with last year's figures.

The figures were released weeks after the majority of the 15-member UN Security Council (UNSC) voted in favor of a U.S.-drafted fourth round of sanctions which broadened previous financial and military restrictions against Iran.

The U.S. spearheaded efforts for the imposition of sanctions on Iran over its nuclear program despite the fact that it possesses and has used nuclear weapons in the past.

### **Iran to Become Gasoline Exporter**

New unilateral U.S. sanctions targeting Iran's energy imports will put no pressure on the Islamic Republic of Iran, because the country can meet its energy needs, a senior official said.

"Despite sanctions, Iran will be self-sufficient in gasoline production within two years and after that we can begin exporting gasoline," Deputy Oil Minister Ali-Reza Zeighami said.

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He said that Iran imports 18 to 20 million liters of gasoline per day, while it produces 43 million liters.

Zeighami noted that Iran is implementing five projects at its refineries to increase gasoline production.

"After completion of these projects, Iran's gasoline production will hit 130 million liters per day," Fars news agency quoted the deputy minister as saying.

On Thursday, the U.S. Congress voted in favor of new unilateral sanctions on Iran's energy and banking sectors.

While the U.S. possesses and has used nuclear weapons in the past, Washington, in a politically-motivated move, is imposing unilateral sanctions against Iran, which does not possess nuclear weapons nor does it seek to develop such weapons.

### **Police Stop Smuggling of \$500m of Fuel in Northwestern Border**

The Iranian security forces managed to prevent the smuggling of fuel worth of \$500m through the northwestern borders of the country, Police Chief Esmail Ahmadi-Moqaddam announced.

Speaking to reporters in Iran's northwestern city of Orumiyeh, the top commander urged more investment in the construction of roads and accompanying checkpoints around border regions in order to boost security.

Ahmadi-Moqaddam went on to announce a plan by the country's police forces to increase border patrol units, while equipping them with state-of-the-art gear in line with efforts for achieving complete border security by 2015.

He also said that the force was scheduled to rid the country's western borderlines of mines and other explosive devices by the year's end.

The measures adopted for increased border security, he said, have also helped reduce drug-trafficking.

He urged more investment in the construction of roads and accompanying checkpoints around border regions in order to boost security.

The Iranian official's remarks come as earlier this month, the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) hailed "the comprehensive efforts" carried out by Iran to combat drug trafficking.

### **Telecom Cooperation With Pakistan Underlined**

Pakistan's Adviser to the Prime Minister on Information Technology, Sardar Muhammad Latif Khan Khosa, said Tehran and Islamabad cooperation in telecom sector can lead to economic development.

Terrestrial fiber optic connectivity between Iran and Pakistan will be economically beneficial for the two nations and subsequently will promote peace in the region.

The Advisor made the abovementioned remarks in a meeting with Iranian Ambassador to Pakistan Mashallah Shakeri.

They exchanged views on matters of bilateral interest with particular reference to promoting

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cooperation in information technology sector and telecommunication between both nations.

The Advisor said Pakistan and Iran, the two Islamic countries, have excellent historical commonalities and have enjoyed close relations which would be strengthened in the near future.

"The fiber line can be laid along with the gas pipeline to save time and expenditures," he added.

He mentioned the great potential of bilateral cooperation in the fields of information technology, natural resources and energy and called for the closer interaction between the private sectors of the two countries to utilize great trade and business to further increase trade volume.

The Advisor described Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project as a milestone and a major step forward to enhance economic cooperation, which would play a significant role in accelerating the process of economic development in the region.

### **Iran Pursues WTO Accession Seriously**

Iran's membership in the World Trade Organization (WTO) is seriously pursued at three levels locally including council of ministers, coordinating committee of deputy ministers, as well as a working group of experts, Deputy Commerce Minister Massoud Movahedi said.

Attending a meeting of deputy ministers' committee with public and private organizations, Movahedi said, "As the accession process has sped up, the meetings should be held more frequently and in a new format."

"About 700 questions had been put forward by WTO members," he said, adding, "All the questions were submitted to ministries and affiliated organizations which require their immediate and precise answers to speed up the process."

### **Tehran, Baku Call For Expansion of Ties**

Iranian Minister of Economic Affairs and Finance Shamseddin Hosseini on Friday held talks with Azerbaijan's Minister of Economic Development Shahin Mustafayev to discuss issues of mutual interest as well as bilateral cooperation.

The two ministers met on the sidelines of the General Assembly meeting of the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) in Azerbaijan's capital city of Baku.

Praising the Azeri government for hosting the meeting, Hosseini called for fostering cooperation in all areas, economy in particular.

Referring to the ancient historical and cultural commonalities, Azeri minister called for boosting all-out bilateral relations.

Meanwhile, Hosseini and his Azeri counterpart Samir Sharifov on Wednesday conferred on issue of mutual interests.

The two ministers reviewed ways of fostering the two-way banking and insurance cooperation.

Azerbaijan and Iran have had good relations in the past few years. Their bilateral trade reached 70 million dollars in 2008, and increased to 70.4 million dollars in the first half of 2009. This value

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increased further in September 2009 when Azerbaijan agreed to export 5 billion cubic meters of gas to Iran each year.

### **Iran, Turkey Sign Agreement on Labor, Social Affairs**

The Islamic Republic of Iran and Turkey signed a cooperation agreement on labor and social affairs on Thursday.

In a ceremony to sign the agreement which is unique as being the first agreement between Iran's Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and the Turkish counterpart, the Iranian Minister Abdulreza Sheikholeslami described Iran and Turkey as being like brothers having a lot of issues in common.

"Iranian officials are keen to develop relations with Turkey in all aspects," Sheikholeslami said, adding that "there is no limitation whatsoever to foster ties with Turkey especially in labor and social affairs."

He went on to say that such interactions would provide the two sides with various opportunities.

Turkish Minister of Labor and Social Security Omer Dinçer, for his part, noted that Turkey as being faced with unemployment and lack of job security, like the rest of the world, had adapted new strategies to tackle the problems.

Remarkable changes in social welfare and national insurance was what Dinçer referred to as part of the present government's reform.

Dinçer also expressed Turkey's readiness to exchange experience with the Islamic Republic of Iran in creating jobs, increasing job security and safety, social welfare and health, as well as related strategies.

### *Joint Investment*

In another advancement, head of Chamber of Commerce, Industries and Mines in Iran's northwestern province of West Azarbaijan said on Wednesday evening that Iran and Turkey enjoy appropriate grounds for making joint investments.

Hassan Entezar made the remarks in a meeting with his visiting counterpart from Turkish city of Trabzon Ali Osman Ulusoy.

Trabzon is a city on the Black Sea coast of north-eastern Turkey and the capital of Trabzon province.

Entezar said Orumiyeh and Trabzon have allocated some 30 billion dollars for bilateral trade and economic cooperation.

Ulusoy, for his part, said promotion of bilateral tourism relations would pave the way for fostering trade cooperation between the two cities.

Meanwhile, Mayor of Trabzon Orhan Feniz Gumrukcuoglu, also present in the meeting, called for declaring Orumiyeh and Trabzon as sister cities.

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### Singapore Keen on Invest in Iran's Tourism Sector

Singaporean economic activists and investors announced their interests in making investment in Iran's tourism sector including hotel construction.

On the sidelines of a meeting held in Tehran between Iran and Singapore's foreign trade officials, the economic activists of Singapore discussed trade opportunities with the representatives of Iran's private sector and requested to invest in hotel constructions and tourism infrastructure in Iran, said the Deputy Head of Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPO), Mohammad Mehdi Nahavandi.

"The Singaporean companies own remarkable capitals, technologies and a major share in the global markets. If their cooperation is achieved by Iranian companies, there is an opportunity for evolution in both countries' trade capacity," Nahavandi said.

"Taking advantage of the production and joint export of Iran's food and agriculture products such as date and saffron and processing industry are among the other topics discussed by both sides."

Iranian Minister of Commerce Mehdi Ghazanfari, also present at the meeting, asked the Singaporean companies not to be affected by the false propaganda of some western media against Iran, and take time to travel to Iran to discover the good economic atmosphere that exists in the country.

It was agreed that several special delegations of Singaporean businessmen travel to attend Iran's international exhibitions with the cooperation of TPO and special arrangements will be provided to Iranian companies to attend International exhibitions held in Singapore.

## Social News

### Tehran Gallery Hangs Paintings by Slovak Ambassador, Behzadi, Jafarinejad

TEHRAN (MNA) -- Paintings by Slovakian Ambassador Anton Hajduk are currently on display in a joint exhibit with works of two Iranian women painters at the Shirin Gallery.

A total of 20 paintings by the Slovakian ambassador to Tehran, Shah-Pari Behzadi, and Puneh Jafarinejad are on display at the gallery.

"Most Slovaks are innate painters. I have painted for many years, but this is my first exhibit in Iran," Hajduk said in a press release issued by the Shirin Gallery.

He added that painting is his hobby and personal interest, and he is an expert in politics.

He said the exhibit would help boost cultural ties between Iran and Slovakia, adding that painting is a medium which "has no limits in communication and does not need any translation."

Behzadi said that she and Puneh Jafarinejad have attended several painting symposia in Slovakia since 2000, and at one of them Hajduk told them that he would like to display his works in Iran one day.

The exhibit will run until June 30 at the gallery located at 145 North Salimi St., off Andarzgu Blvd. in the Farmanieh neighborhood.

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### **Tehran, Ankara Keen to Boost Ties in Healthcare**

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad called for the expansion of cooperation between Tehran and Ankara in medical fields and health-related issues.

"Iran and Turkey should expand their cooperation in all fields, specially in healthcare and render service to all nations, Islamic and poor countries in particular," President Ahmadinejad said in a meeting with visiting Turkish Health Minister Recep Akdag here on Saturday.

He also lauded the advancements made by Iran and Turkey in their healthcare systems, production of medicines and development of the medical techniques applied in the two countries.

"Iran and Turkey can work out new health and treatment models and ties outside the control of the Zionists (who dominate and control major drug production centers) and present them to the world," Ahmadinejad stressed.

The Iranian president further pointed to Iran and Turkey's regional and international influence, and stated, "The two countries enjoy historical and cultural commonalities and shared interests and they have joint missions today. We should both build our countries and provide help and assistance for the nations in regional and international levels."

The Turkish minister, for his part, pointed to his visit to Iran's medical and scientific centers, and described Iran's progress in medical and health fields as "advanced and desirable".

"Turkey is after the expansion of cooperation and exchange of medical experiences with the Islamic Republic of Iran, and believes that it will serve the interests of the two nations and the regional nations," the Turkish minister added.

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

### **Iran Busts Over 2,000 Drug Trafficking Bands**

Tehran Police Chief Brigadier Hossein Sajedinia yesterday said 51 percent of foreign nationals who were transiting and distributing drugs and narcotics were detained in Tehran.

Attending a ceremony to destroy 4 tons of seized drugs, Sajedinia said, "More than 2 thousands bands of drug traffickers were busted during the past Iranian year (ending March 20).

He said that in 1717 missions against traffickers, some 214 drug traffickers were killed and 38 others were wounded.

"34 police officers and 4 Basiji forces were also martyred and 49 police forces were wounded in the related clashes," Brigadier Sajedinia added.

### **Handicrafts Exports Hit \$22m**

Iran exported more than 22 million dollars worth of handicrafts in the first two months of the current Iranian year (started March 21), said deputy head of Iran Cultural Heritage, Handicraft and Tourism Organization (ICHTO).

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Khatam, Kilims, ziloo, traditional jewelry, wood products and Iranian furniture were main products that exported over the same period, Tahmineh Daniali was quoted by CHTN as saying.

According to Customs Administration statistics, some 159.2 ton of this kind of products were exported during the mentioned time, she added.

She went on to say that traditional jewelry accounts for over 18 million dollars of exported handicrafts weighing more than 32 tons.

"The country has exported some 96 tons of furniture and wooden objects during the period," she noted.

### Tehran to Host Holy Quran Competitions

The International Holy Quran Competitions will be held in Tehran from July 9-14.

The ceremony will be attended by world's top Quran reciters and memorizers.

The 27th edition includes a story writing section.

It will be held in three categories, namely Quran and Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) household, Quran and insight and humanities.

Authors and researchers can also participate in a research section which covers a wide range of topics such as the semantics of insight in Quran and Quranic teachings.

Muslims regard the Holy Quran as the main miracle of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), as proof of his prophethood, and as the culmination of divine messages.

The Quran is a book of guidance, offering detailed accounts of specific historical events, and often emphasizing the moral significance of an event over its narrative sequence.