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Weekly report on Iran

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Muhammad Rasheed

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Summary of Report

Politico-Strategic Front:

Larijani Slams U.S. Call for Iran Talks Majlis Speaker blasted a recent U.S. call for talks with Iran on Afghanistan as "unacceptable" and deceitful. Speaking at the first public session of the Majlis after a two-week summer break, Ali Larijani insisted that the fake U.S. claim of interest in talks with Iran, following their tireless efforts to push through an anti-Iran sanctions resolution at the UN, amounts to yet another scandal for the Americans.

Pakistan Envoy: Sanctions Have No Effect on Peace Pipeline Pakistani ambassador to Tehran Mohammad Bakhsh Abbasi believes sanctions have not affected process of Peace Pipeline

construction. Speaking to reporters after the Independence Day ceremony at the Pakistan School in Tehran, the ambassador said, "Sanctions have no influence on the project and that Iranian and Pakistani engineers are working on the venture."

Iran to Unveil New Drone Aircraft on "Defense Industry Day" Iran passes into service new unmanned long-range drones, says Defence Minister Ahmad Vahidi said yesterday. The new flying vehicle called Karrar is due to be displayed to the general public on Sunday, on the Day of Iran's Defence Industry.

(Cyber Space) Gov't Launches Time-Saving ICT Bureaus The government has established Information and Communications Technology (ICT) bureaus across the country in a bid to facilitate electronic affairs like credit card and insurance renewal and footing the bills, a government official says.

Tehran, Ankara for More Consultations on Regional, Int'l Issues President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and his Turkish counterpart Abdullah Gul in a phone conversation stressed the two countries' resolve to continue their talks and consultations on regional issues and international developments.

India Seeks Talks With Iran over Gas Pipeline Project The government of India asked for meeting between Iranian and Indian working groups on the imports of natural gas from Iran under the multi-billion-dollar pipeline project for the export of Iran's gas to Pakistan.

Cambodia Criticizes Anti-Iran Sanctions Cambodia's top diplomatic chief said yesterday that sanctions imposed on Iran is not a good solution, but negotiations and engagement are better ways out. Speaking to reporters on Monday at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Hor Namhong, deputy prime minister and minister of foreign affairs said "to impose sanctions against Iran is not a solution" and that he suggested " negotiations and engagement" should be better ways out.

Iran says will not talk with US in current climate Iran's supreme leader said on Wednesday the Islamic Republic would not conduct talks with the United States about its nuclear programme unless sanctions and military threats are lifted.

Mullen: Iran Attack "Destabilizing" U.S. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff has warned against a military strike against Iran over its nuclear program, saying it would be "incredibly destabilizing."

In appeal to UN, Iran cites US 'threat' Envoy objects to Mullen remark; Iran took its case against the United States to the United Nations yesterday and strongly condemned the top US military chief for saying military action remains a possibility if the country develops nuclear weapons.

'Iran favors Russia for nuclear projects' "Considering Russia's expertise in constructing the Bushehr nuclear plant, the country will be given priority for future nuclear cooperation with Iran," Iran's ambassador to Russia, Seyyed Mahmoud-Reza Sajjadi, told the Mehr news agency on Wednesday. Iran's long-delayed nuclear power plant is scheduled to come on stream in the southern city of Bushehr when the fuel is loaded into the reactor on Saturday.

Iran Says Nuclear Power Plant's Opening Shows Resistance to Pressure The Aug. 21 opening of Iran's first nuclear power plant will show the country's resistance to "extraordinary pressure and sanctions," said Ali Akbar Salehi, head of the Iranian Atomic Energy Organization.

'Israel's Existence Is in Danger' If It Attacks Nuclear Plant, Iran Says Iran will respond if Israel attacks its first nuclear power plant, which will begin loading fuel Aug. 21, according to the Persian Gulf country's defense minister.

Iran condemns possible US military action Iran took its case against the United States to the United Nations on Wednesday and strongly condemned the top US military chief for saying military action remains a possibility if the country develops nuclear weapons.

U.S. assures Israel nuclear Iran not imminent: report The Obama administration has assured Israel that Iran's process of converting nuclear material into a working weapon would take at least a year, The New York Times reported on Thursday. The newspaper cited White House officials saying they believed the assessment had dimmed prospects of a pre-emptive Israeli strike against Iran's nuclear facilities within the next year.

Iran starts to fuel up first nuclear power plant Iran began fuelling its first nuclear power plant on Saturday, a potent symbol of its growing regional sway and rejection of international sanctions designed to prevent it building a nuclear bomb.

Economic Front:

Turkmenistan, Pakistan to Boost Gas Trade With Iran Turkmenistan is willing to ink a new contract to increase gas export to Iran to 20 billion cubic meters per annum while Pakistan is interested to receive more gas from Iran, deputy managing director of the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) announced on Sunday.

Iran Imports 23 Tons of Gold in 4 Months, 22 Tons in the Previous Year Iran imported 23 tons of gold in the four months ending July 22, the state-run Fars news agency reported. Imports of the precious metal totaled \$855 million and came from Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, Russia and Switzerland, Fars said. The Persian Gulf country imported 22 tons of gold in the year ending March 20, the agency said.

Iran gas ambition requires China to crack LNG secret Iran is unlikely to become a big exporter of natural gas unless China -- a crucial partner as international sanctions scare others off -- can develop tricky technology to liquefy the country's massive gas reserves.

U.S. urges vigilance in sanctions on Iran shipping All governments should step up their vigilance against dealings with Iran's shipping sector, a senior U.S. official said Monday, describing it as a "critical lifeline for Iran's proliferation and evasion." Writing in the Financial Times, Treasury Undersecretary Stuart Levey said Iranian tactics to evade sanctions included repainting or renaming ships, falsifying shipping documents and assigning vessel ownership to front companies outside Iran.

Brazil's Caixa to Finance \$1.3 Billion in Beef Exports to Iran, Valor Says Brazil's state-controlled Caixa Economica Federal will finance up to 1 billion euros (\$1.3 billion) in beef shipments to Iran after private banks refused to extend credit to exporters, fearing retaliation from the U.S. and European Union, Valor Economico said.

U.S. Sanctions on Iran Target Banking Sector New penalties kicked in Friday against foreign banks doing business with institutions that Washington has designated as supporting Iran's nuclear program or terrorist activities. The penalties are part of the stepped-up U.S. sanctions against Iran signed into law last month by President Obama.

Tehran, Damascus to Sign Free Trade Agreement Iran and Syria are to sign a free trade agreement, Iranian Commerce Minister said yesterday. Syria and Turkey signed the free trade agreement and we hope that our negotiations with Syrian side leads to signing the related contract, Mehdi Ghazanfari told IRIB on the sidelines of his meeting with the head of Syrian Prime Minister's office.

Tehran, New Delhi Call for More Investment Iran and India called for boosting joint ventures by the two countries and increasing investments in Iranian refineries and power plants by a number of Indian companies. India and Iran expressed desire to sign the Bilateral Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement (BIPA) after completion of legal formalities.

IRICO to Export Wagon Parts to S. Korea Managing director of Iran Khodro Rail Transport Industries Company (IRICO) said yesterday that the company will export wagon parts to South Korea. Iran and South Korea have inked a 14-million-euro agreement on the issue, Naser Soufi told IRNA. Soufi said the IRICO products are produced according to the latest European standards.

U.A.E. Says It's Checking to Be Sure Its Trade With Iran Complies With UN The United Arab Emirates' ambassador to the U.S. said his country is checking its trade connections with Iran to be sure they don't violate United Nations sanctions over the Iranian nuclear program.

Social Front:

Tehran Museum Loans Van Dongen Painting to Dutch Show The Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art (TMCA) has agreed to loan a painting by Dutch artist Kees van Dongen (1877-1968) to the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam. The exhibit will open on September 18 and will run for four months until January 23, 2011.

Prominent Iranian Artist Taraghijah Dies at 67 Renowned Iranian painter Mohhamd-Ali Taraghijah died of a heart attack Thursday night in Tehran. According to Mehr News Agency, Taraghijah's funeral was held on Saturday in Tehran's southern suburb of Rey and his body laid to rest in the courtyard of the shrine of Hazrat Abdolazim (AS).

Car bomb aimed at Iranian pilgrims kills 5 in Iraq A car bomb exploded Monday in a town northeast of the Iraqi capital while a bus full of Iranian Shi'ite pilgrims was passing, killing five people and wounding nine, security officials said.

Detailed News:

Politico-strategic Front:

Larijani Slams U.S. Call for Iran Talks

TEHRAN – Majlis Speaker blasted a recent U.S. call for talks with Iran on Afghanistan as "unacceptable" and deceitful.

Speaking at the first public session of the Majlis after a two-week summer break, Ali Larijani insisted that the fake U.S. claim of interest in talks with Iran, following their tireless efforts to push through an anti-Iran sanctions resolution at the UN, amounts to yet another scandal for the Americans.

"You have committed crimes in Afghanistan," said Larijani of the U.S., expressing fierce opposition to what he described as "U.S. and NATO aggression in Afghanistan, oppressing the Afghan people."

"We don't share a common path to negotiate with you," he emphasized.

The Speaker went on to commend a recent initiative by Iran's Majlis to pass a bill requiring the government to adopt retaliatory measures against countries participating in the U.S.-backed sanctions against Iran.

The U.S. should know, he said, that the Majlis will closely monitor their behavior, so they should not assume that by using a different tone they can "fade the extent of their betrayal against the Iranian nation."

Pakistan Envoy: Sanctions Have No Effect on Peace Pipeline

TEHRAN - Pakistani ambassador to Tehran Mohammad Bakhsh Abbasi believes sanctions have not affected process of Peace Pipeline construction.

Speaking to reporters after the Independence Day ceremony at the Pakistan School in Tehran, the ambassador said, "Sanctions have no influence on the project and that Iranian and Pakistani engineers are working on the venture."

"Iran and Pakistan continue to keep close cooperation," he added.

The ambassador also said Pakistan is committed infighting with terrorism and extremism and will continue it.

Referring to recent flood disaster in Pakistan, he said, "Iran's relief aid has reached Pakistan but Pakistan expects more from its neighbor and we hope that flood victims situation improve."

He added Iran's Red Crescent Society has cooperated well on the issue.

The ambassador admitted that the situation is critical as the UN has called recent flood disaster the worst after 2004 tsunami.

Earlier in the Independence Day ceremony, the messages of Pakistan's president and prime ministers were read by Pakistan Embassy secretary Soheil Siddiqi and the Ambassador Abbasi.

The ceremony continued by hoisting the flag of Pakistan and some patriotic songs from students.

Meanwhile during the ceremony, Ambassador M.B. Abbasi unveiled the magazine "Payam-e Pakistan" (Message of Pakistan) which is printed by the embassy in Persian. Several Iranian intellectuals have fed the magazine by their articles. In the unveiled issue, the articles are dealing with cultural ties between Iran and Pakistan

Pakistani nationals yesterday gathered at Pakistan International School to mark the 64th Independence anniversary. Some journalists, diplomats and member of the ECO were also among the participants.

Iran to Unveil New Drone Aircraft on "Defense Industry Day"

TEHRAN - Iran passes into service new unmanned long-range drones, says Defence Minister Ahmad Vahidi said yesterday.

The new flying vehicle called Karrar is due to be displayed to the general public on Sunday, on the Day of Iran's Defence Industry.

Speaking in a press conference, Brigadier General Vahidi said that Iran is set to inaugurate the production line of a long-range air-defense missile system on August 22 to counter any likely air attack on the country.

He described the production of the missile system as yet another achievement by Iranian defense experts, saying "the Karrar anti-aircraft defense system will be inaugurated on August 22."

Vahidi went on to say that a high-speed bladerunner named as Seraj and the new generation of Zolfaghar missile-launcher bladerunner have also been produced domestically and will be launched in the "Government Week" 24-31 August.

Tehran launched an arms development program during the 1980-88 Iraqi imposed war on Iran in an attempt to counter a U.S. weapons embargo on the country after the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

The Islamic Republic has managed to produce home-made missiles, fighter jets and other defensive weapons.

Vahidi also said that Iran is still waiting for Russia's official response to its previously signed contract on the delivery of S-300 anti-aircraft missile to the Islamic Republic.

"After the endorsement of the recent U.S.- backed sanctions resolution against Iran, many individuals in Russia made various comments, but Russian officials have not clarified their position on the air defense missiles yet," he said.

"The Russians announced that they are still waiting for their president's decision on 1929 resolution and we are also pursuing the case," he went on to say.

In 2007, Russia signed a contract with Iran to sell the country S-300 surface-to-air missiles. The defense system, which would boost Iran's air defense power has not been delivered to the country as of yet.

The S-300 is capable of shooting down aircraft, cruise missiles and ballistic missile warheads at ranges of over 144 kilometers and at altitudes of about 90,000 feet (27,432 meters).

(Cyber Space) Gov't Launches Time-Saving ICT Bureaus

TEHRAN – The government has established Information and Communications Technology (ICT) bureaus across the country in a bid to facilitate electronic affairs like credit card and insurance renewal and footing the bills, a government official says.

"All electronic services are provided in ICT bureaus across the country," Ali Fallah-Haqiqi, head of the State Center for ICT Bureaus, told IRAN NEWS in an interview.

He said Iranians can even register their clapped out cars to be phased out and buy bus tickets by referring to a single bureau.

"We plan 10,000 ICT bureaus for villages and 6,000 for cities. A total of 4,600 of them are already operational and 2,000 more are to be activated soon to offer insurance services and emergency calls to police," he said.

Fallah-Haqiqi said Iranians from any spot in the country will have equal access to government services. "These bureaus are part of the Islamic Republic's objectives for establishment of social justice," he added, noting that the ICT bureaus would save time and costs.

"We are still in a state of transition. We have to set up such offices accessible to people in view of establishing an electronic government in the country," the official said.

Fallah-Haqiqi said negotiations have begun with the Customs Administration in the light of reaching agreement for offering commercial and customs services in these bureaus.

"We have set a timeframe for our projects and we have to push ahead with our plans otherwise we will fail," he added.

Meanwhile he added all services related to civil registration are provided in ICT Bureaus in order to ease Iranian's access to related affairs.

Fallah-Haqiqi said according to the regulation approved in the ICT Bureaus Committee's meeting in the Transportation and Fuel Management headquarters, the civil registration services will be offered on a pilot basis in the private sector's registration offices.

He went on to say that National Organization for Civil Registration and ICT bureaus agreed to assign the twelve services provided in registration offices such as issuing national identity card and changing names to the private sector.

Referring to the regulation of ICT bureaus approved by the government, he said at present all state organizations have relevant service offices and there are ambitious plans to integrate these offices so that Iranians can refer to one office and apply for different services such as getting ID card, educational degree and passport.

Phone Number 1868 for ICT

Fallah-Haqiqi added "In order to use the ICT services people can contact 1868" and added "at the moment this number is working in Tehran and it will operational across the country as early as possible".

He also said, “When one dials the number, the closest ICT bureau will be introduced to them”.

“ICT is trying to increase the answering desks from 200 to 1200 in the near future” he added.

Quality Service, Top Priority

Pointing to the priority of the ICT in offering the highest possible quality service Haqiqi said “ICT is highly capable of giving quality services even to the remotest areas of the country”.

“In addition to make its offices self-sufficient, which means they have to earn the revenue they need, ICT has prioritized necessary diversity and quality too,” Haqiqi added.

Objectives and Achievements of the ICT Conference

Elaborating the aims and achievements of the first ICT conference Haqiqi said “Promoting the popular knowledge regarding the socio-economic advantages of the ICT, introducing the governmental services that can be offered by ICT, introducing the technological and legal infrastructure required by ICT are the major objectives of the Conference”.

Tehran, Ankara for More Consultations on Regional, Int'l Issues

TEHRAN (FNA) - President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and his Turkish counterpart Abdullah Gul in a phone conversation stressed the two countries' resolve to continue their talks and consultations on regional issues and international developments.

During the phone talk, Ahmadinejad extended his congratulations to the Turkish government and people on the beginning of the holy month of Ramadan, and expressed the hope that all the world Muslims would enjoy God's mercy and grace in this month.

On Iran-Turkey's relations, he viewed the two countries' ties as brotherly and expanding, and underscored the necessity for continued talks and consultations between Tehran and Ankara on regional and global issues.

Gul, for his part, felicitated the Iranian nation on the start of the holy month of Ramadan, and underlined expansion of relations between the two countries.

"Further reinvigoration of bilateral ties and promotion of the level of relations between Tehran and Ankara as well as exchange of views between the two countries' officials on important regional issues are of paramount importance and also fruitful," he added.

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

India Seeks Talks With Iran over Gas Pipeline Project

TEHRAN (FNA) - The government of India asked for meeting between Iranian and Indian working groups on the imports of natural gas from Iran under the multi-billion-dollar pipeline project for the export of Iran's gas to Pakistan.

"India has proposed holding meetings of Indo-Iran Joint Working Group on oil and gas and Indo-Iran special joint working group on the project," PTI quoted Indian Minister of State for Petroleum and Natural Gas Jitin Prasada as saying.

"This is in order to enhance the energy security of the country," the minister added.

"We are making all efforts. The project is not sidelined. Three nations are involved and many technical aspects are being discussed. Till we are not assured about issues like pricing of gas, delivery point of gas, project structure, payment of transportation tariff and transit fees for passage of natural gas through Pakistan, talks will continue," he said.

Meantime, the Indian minister stated that New Delhi is speaking to other nations also as demand for gas has gone up, and added, "We are not relying on Iran alone and are talking to other nations also. We have an agreement for 25 years with Qatar."

Earlier in August, Tehran announced that India can still join the project.

"There is an article in the gas transfer deal between Iran and Pakistan, predicting the extension of the pipeline to India should the country be ready to join the project," Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Mohammad Ali Fathollahi said in a press conference in Delhi.

Cambodia Criticizes Anti-Iran Sanctions

PHNOM PENH (Xinhua) - Cambodia's top diplomatic chief said yesterday that sanctions imposed on Iran is not a good solution, but negotiations and engagement are better ways out.

Speaking to reporters on Monday at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Hor Namhong, deputy prime minister and minister of foreign affairs said "to impose sanctions against Iran is not a solution" and that he suggested " negotiations and engagement" should be better ways out.

The minister was attributing his remarks to the experience Cambodia learned after the Khmer Rouge regime was toppled in 1979, during which Cambodia was imposed with serious and critical sanctions, but he said Cambodia has still survived and developed until today.

Hor Namhong made a visit to Iran last week and he had signed a petroleum deal there.

Iran is known as the second largest oil exporter to the world markets.

Since June, Iran has been imposed with new sanctions by the United States, European Union and the United Nations in a way to stop its sensitive uranium-enrichment program which they fear of nuclear weapons production.

But Iran government had denied the charge saying the program was only for a peaceful purpose.

Iran says will not talk with US in current climate

TEHRAN Aug 18 (Reuters) - Iran's supreme leader said on Wednesday the Islamic Republic would not conduct talks with the United States about its nuclear programme unless sanctions and military threats are lifted.

"What they say, our president and others are saying, that we will negotiate -- yes we will, but not with America because America is not negotiating honestly and like a normal negotiator," Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said in a televised speech to senior officials.

"Put away the threats and put away the sanctions," he added.

Mullen: Iran Attack “Destabilizing”

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) – U.S. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff has warned against a military strike against Iran over its nuclear program, saying it would be "incredibly destabilizing."

Speaking at the Aspen Security Forum, Admiral Mike Mullen said he believes that America's main ally Israel understands that a military attack on Iran would be "incredibly destabilizing" to the region.

Iran has repeatedly downplayed US threats of launching an attack on Iran, saying its armed forces are fully ready to counter any military actions against the country.

Iran's Joint Armed Forces Chief of Staff Major General Hassan Firouzabadi said on Thursday that the country seeks no war but is ready to fight any aggression waged by the new "super capitalism."

"The Islamic Republic has remained vigilant over the past ten years and is all set to ward off attacks," he said.

Mullen went on to accuse Iran of developing nuclear weapons and said he believes Tehran will go ahead with its nuclear weapons programs, even if more sanctions are imposed against the country.

He said it would be "incredibly dangerous" for Iran to achieve nuclear weapons, adding that there is "no reason to trust" Iran's promises that it is pursuing nuclear energy for peaceful applications.

In appeal to UN, Iran cites US ‘threat’

Envoy objects to Mullen remark

UNITED NATIONS — Iran took its case against the United States to the United Nations yesterday and strongly condemned the top US military chief for saying military action remains a possibility if the country develops nuclear weapons.

Iran’s acting UN ambassador, Eshagh Alehabib, said in letters circulated to the secretary general and presidents of the Security Council and General Assembly that Admiral Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and other US officials and lawmakers threatened to use military action under the “totally false” pretense that Iran is developing nuclear weapons.

Mullen said earlier this month that the US military has a plan to attack Iran, although he thinks a military strike is probably a bad idea. Still, he said the risk of Iran developing a nuclear weapon is unacceptable and he reiterated that “the military option” remains on the table.

Iran’s supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, warned yesterday that Iran’s response to an attack would not be limited to the region, suggesting Iran would target US interests beyond the Persian Gulf.

“It’s unlikely that they [the United States] will make such a stupidity [to attack Iran], but all must know that if this threat is carried out, the field of the Iranian nation’s confrontation will not be only our region,” Khamenei told state television. “The area of confrontation will be much wider.”

He also said there will be no talks with the United States under the shadow of threats.

Khamenei, who has the final say on all state matters in Iran, apparently was referring to recent calls by the United States and other key powers for Iran to resume talks on its nuclear program following the UN Security Council’s recent vote imposing a fourth set of sanctions against the country for refusing to halt uranium enrichment.

The United States and some of its allies accuse Iran of using its civilian nuclear program as a cover to build nuclear weapons. Iran has denied the allegations, saying its nuclear program is geared merely toward generating electricity, not bombs.

Alehabib said the United States was using threatening language that violates international law and the UN Charter and goes against “global efforts to strengthen regional and international

peace and security.’’ He reiterated that Iran ‘‘would not hesitate to act in self-defense to respond to any attack.’’

Khamenei said negotiations would be possible if the United States stops making threats against Iran, and he set conditions for it.

‘‘If the US puts aside threats, sanctions, and its superpower display and refuses to set goals for the talks, then there will be a possibility of talks. But under the present conditions and given the threats and pressures, no talks will be held at all,’’ Khamenei was quoted as saying.

Khamenei also said Iran will not give up its nuclear activities.

‘‘The US and some Western countries have no logic in this issue and the Islamic Republic of Iran will never give up the cycle of nuclear fuel,’’ state television quoted him as saying.

The United States and five key powers — Russia, China, Britain, France, and Germany — have been trying to revive talks with Iran on its nuclear program and have offered a package of incentives if Tehran freezes uranium enrichment and resumes negotiations.

In late July, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran said nuclear talks with the six powers would start in early September, regardless of conditions he set in June, but Khamenei’s comments raise questions about the timetable. Iran has also said it wants to revive separate talks involving Tehran, Washington, Paris, and Moscow on a fuel swap for Tehran’s research nuclear reactor.

'Iran favors Russia for nuclear projects'

Thursday, 19 August 2010

Tehran, August 19: "Considering Russia's expertise in constructing the Bushehr nuclear plant, the country will be given priority for future nuclear cooperation with Iran," Iran's ambassador to Russia, Seyyed Mahmoud-Reza Sajjadi, told the Mehr news agency on Wednesday.

Iran's long-delayed nuclear power plant is scheduled to come on stream in the southern city of Bushehr when the fuel is loaded into the reactor on Saturday.

Sajjadi noted that the inauguration of the plant will clear up "misunderstandings that Russia has been using the Bushehr nuclear plant as a [political] card."

The Iranian envoy stated that the launch of the nuclear plant will open a new chapter in relations between the two countries.

Western corporations began the construction of the Bushehr facility in the 1970s. However, following the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, the Western companies reneged on their commitments and pulled out of the project due to political pressure imposed by Washington.

Iran then turned to Russia to complete the project. In 1992, Tehran and Moscow signed a deal to complete the construction of the nuclear power plant.

The Bushehr plant was originally scheduled to be completed in 1999, but its start-up has been repeatedly delayed.

Iran Says Nuclear Power Plant's Opening Shows Resistance to Pressure

By Ladane Nasserli - Wed Aug 18 11:21:15 GMT 2010

The Aug. 21 opening of Iran's first nuclear power plant will show the country's resistance to "extraordinary pressure and sanctions," said Ali Akbar Salehi, head of the Iranian Atomic Energy Organization.

The 1,000-megawatt Russian-built facility in the southern province of Bushehr will be a "thorn in the eye of ill- seekers," the official Islamic Republic News Agency cited Salehi as saying today.

The Persian Gulf nation is under four sets of United Nations sanctions over its nuclear program, which the U.S. and many of its allies say may be aimed at creating a weapon. Iran denies the allegation, saying it needs nuclear energy for civilian purposes, such as generating electricity.

'Israel's Existence Is in Danger' If It Attacks Nuclear Plant, Iran Says

By Ali Sheikholeslami - Tue Aug 17 09:10:37 GMT 2010

Iran will respond if Israel attacks its first nuclear power plant, which will begin loading fuel Aug. 21, according to the Persian Gulf country's defense minister.

"In that case we will lose a power plant, but Israel's existence will be in danger," Ahmad Vahidi was cited as saying today by the state-run Mehr news agency, in response to questions about the possibility of an attack by Israel on the Russian-built atomic facility at Bushehr.

The Foreign Ministry's spokesman, Ramin Mehmanparast, said today he "doubts" that Israel would "make such a dangerous move." In comments on state television, he said, "Any aggression against this power plant will result in a serious reaction."

Israeli leaders have said that all options are on the table in dealing with Iran's nuclear aspirations. Iran is under four sets of United Nations sanctions over its nuclear program, which the U.S. and many of its allies say is aimed at creating a weapon. Iran, the second-largest oil producer in the Middle East, denies the allegation, saying it needs nuclear energy for civilian purposes, such as generating electricity.

Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman Yigal Palmor declined to comment when asked about the Iranian defense minister's remarks.

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad yesterday announced the enactment of a law that obliges Iran to produce nuclear fuel for its Tehran medical-research reactor, on the day the country said it will build its third uranium-enrichment plant as part of a program to add 10 such facilities. Iran's first uranium-enrichment plant is at Natanz and a second plant is under construction at Qom.

Iran has defied UN demands to cease production of enriched uranium, which can fuel a reactor or, at higher concentrations, form the core of a bomb.

The Bushehr power station will begin producing electricity in several months, Sergei Novikov, spokesman for Rosatom Corp., the Russian state nuclear holding company that built the plant, said Aug. 13.

Iran condemns possible US military action

New York: Iran took its case against the United States to the United Nations on Wednesday and strongly condemned the top US military chief for saying military action remains a possibility if the country develops nuclear weapons.

Iran's acting UN ambassador Eshagh Alehabib claimed in letters circulated to the secretary-general and presidents of the Security Council and General Assembly that Adm Mike Mullen, chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, and other US officials and lawmakers "threatened" to use military action under the "totally false" pretence that Iran is developing nuclear weapons.

Mullen said earlier this month that the US military has a plan to attack Iran although he thinks a military strike is probably a bad idea. Still, he said the risk of Iran developing a nuclear weapon is unacceptable and he reiterated that "the military option" remains on the table.

Iran's supreme leader, meanwhile, told Iranian state TV that there will be no talks with the US under the shadow of threats.

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who has the final say on all state matters in Iran, was apparently referring to recent calls by the US and other key powers for Iran to resume talks on its nuclear program following the UN Security Council's recent vote imposing a fourth set of tougher sanctions against the country for refusing to halt uranium enrichment.

The US and some of its allies accuse Iran of using its civilian nuclear program as a cover to build nuclear weapons. Iran has denied the charges, saying its nuclear program is geared merely toward generating electricity, not bombs.

U.S. assures Israel nuclear Iran not imminent: report

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The Obama administration has assured Israel that Iran's process of converting nuclear material into a working weapon would take at least a year, The New York Times reported on Thursday.

The newspaper cited White House officials saying they believed the assessment had dimmed prospects of a pre-emptive Israeli strike against Iran's nuclear facilities within the next year.

Israel, widely assumed to have its own atomic arsenal, has hinted at military strikes, as a last resort, to deny Iran the means to make a nuclear bomb. Iran insists its nuclear program is peaceful.

The United States, the European Union and the U.N. Security Council have imposed sanctions on Iran over a nuclear program the West suspects is aimed at developing atomic weapons.

"We think that they have roughly a year dash time," Gary Samore, President Barack Obama's top adviser on nuclear issues, was quoted as saying, referring to the key question of how long it would take Iran to convert existing stocks of low-enriched uranium into weapons-grade material.

"A year is a very long period of time," Samore said.

He said the United States believed international inspectors would detect such a move by Iran within weeks, leaving a considerable amount of time for Washington and Israel to consider military strikes, the Times reported.

U.S. and Israeli officials now believe Iran would not be close to that stage anytime soon, the Times reported, citing administration officials who spoke on condition of anonymity.

U.S. officials cited "evidence of continued troubles inside Iran's nuclear program" as the basis for the new assessment of how long it would take Tehran to build a nuclear weapon, the Times reported.

"Either they don't have the machines, or they have real questions about their technical competence," Samore told the newspaper.

Israeli intelligence officials had argued that Iran could complete such a race for the bomb in months, while U.S. intelligence agencies have come to believe in the past year the timeline is longer, the newspaper said.

Iran starts to fuel up first nuclear power plant

BUSHEHR | Sat Aug 21, 2010 9:54am EDT

BUSHEHR Iran (Reuters) - Iran began fuelling its first nuclear power plant on Saturday, a potent symbol of its growing regional sway and rejection of international sanctions designed to prevent it building a nuclear bomb.

Iranian television showed live pictures of Iran's nuclear chief Ali Akbar Salehi and his Russian counterpart watching a fuel rod assembly being prepared for insertion into the reactor near the Gulf city of Bushehr.

"Despite all the pressures, sanctions and hardships imposed by Western nations, we are now witnessing the start-up of the largest symbol of Iran's peaceful nuclear activities," Salehi told a news conference afterwards.

Iranian officials said it would take two to three months before the plant starts producing electricity and would generate 1,000 megawatts, a small proportion of the nation's 41,000 megawatt electricity demand recorded last month.

Russia designed, built and will supply fuel for Bushehr, taking back spent rods which could be used to make weapons-grade plutonium in order to ease nuclear proliferation concerns.

Saturday's ceremony comes after decades of delays building the plant, work on which was initially started by German company Siemens in the 1970s, before Iran's Islamic Revolution.

The United States criticized Moscow earlier this year for pushing ahead with Bushehr given persistent Iranian defiance over its nuclear program.

Moscow supported the latest U.N. Security Council resolution in June which imposed a fourth round of sanctions and called for Iran to stop uranium enrichment which, some countries fear, could lead it to obtain nuclear weapons.

"The construction of the nuclear plant at Bushehr is a clear example showing that any country, if it abides by existing international legislation and provides effective, open interaction with the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency), should have the opportunity to access peaceful use of the atom," Sergei Kiriyenko, head of Russian state nuclear corporation Rosatom, told the news conference.

CONCERN

The fuelling of Bushehr is a milestone in Iran's path to harness technology which it says will reduce consumption of its abundant fossil fuels, allowing it to export more oil and gas and to prepare for the day when the minerals riches dry up.

Iran's neighbors, some of whom are also seeking nuclear power, are wary of Tehran's nuclear ambitions and its growing influence in the region, notably in Iraq where fellow Shi'ites now dominate and Lebanon, where it is a backer of Hezbollah.

While most nuclear analysts say Bushehr does not add to any proliferation risk, many countries remain deeply concerned about Iran's uranium enrichment.

It disclosed the existence of a second enrichment plant only last year and announced in February it was enriching uranium to a level of 20 percent, from about 3.5 percent previously, taking it closer to weapons-grade levels and well above what is needed to fuel a power plant.

Iran, which says its nuclear program is entirely peaceful, said it needed to enrich to that level as a deal with major world power and the IAEA to supply special fuel for a medical reactor in Tehran had fallen apart.

Reacting to the Bushehr opening, British Foreign Office Minister Alistair Burt said: "We have always respected Iran's right to develop an exclusively civil nuclear power program.

"The problem is Iran's continued refusal to satisfy the IAEA and international community that its work on uranium enrichment and heavy water projects are exclusively peaceful," he said.

Salehi dismissed U.S. suggestions that Russia's guarantee to supply nuclear fuel meant Iran no longer needed to enrich its own uranium, but said Iran was in "no hurry" to build 10 new enrichment plants, something he had previously said would start by next March.

"This is not at all in contradiction to our agreement with the Russians," he said of Iran's determination to keep enriching uranium. "We intend only to show to the international community that we have the capability to supply our own fuel in case anything comes up that is unexpected."

Economic Front:

Turkmenistan, Pakistan to Boost Gas Trade With Iran

TEHRAN (Shana) - Turkmenistan is willing to ink a new contract to increase gas export to Iran to 20 billion cubic meters per annum while Pakistan is interested to receive more gas from Iran, deputy managing director of the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) announced on Sunday.

Noting that under the 20-year outlook plan, Iran's share in world gas trade is scheduled to increase to 10 percent, Mostafa Kashkouli said currently our share in global gas trade is limited to 1 percent.

He said regarding the prospect of launching all phases of the South Pars gas field and rising gas exports, it is expected Iran's share in global gas trade to rise to 10 percent.

He predicted that over the next three years, current gas production capacity to increase by 140 to 150 million cubic meters per day while under the contract with Turkmenistan, gas imports from the country will grow from 8 billion cubic meters to 14 billion cubic meters per year in the next three years.

“While gas contract with Pakistan has been finalized, supplying gas to the country will start by 2014 and based on dealings with Turkey to transit gas to Europe, the target is within reach.

He said the sixth national gas pipeline network from Assaluyeh to Bazargan, near the border with Turkey, is a suitable route to export gas to Europe, noting that by completion the pipeline in addition to meeting the domestic needs, there is the possibility to export 60 to 70 million cubic meters of gas to Europe each day.

The official said during the last two years gas exports had risen considerably due to mounting investment.

He said statistics show that gas exports have been raised by more than 44 percent during the previous year and by 56 percent in the first five month of the current Iranian year (started March 21).

Iran Imports 23 Tons of Gold in 4 Months, 22 Tons in the Previous Year

By Ali Sheikholeslami - Tue Aug 17 09:02:08 GMT 2010

Iran imported 23 tons of gold in the four months ending July 22, the state-run Fars news agency reported. Imports of the precious metal totaled \$855 million and came from Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, Russia and Switzerland, Fars said. The Persian Gulf country imported 22 tons of gold in the year ending March 20, the agency said.

Iran gas ambition requires China to crack LNG secret

LONDON (Reuters) - Iran is unlikely to become a big exporter of natural gas unless China -- a crucial partner as international sanctions scare others off -- can develop tricky technology to liquefy the country's massive gas reserves.

Iran sits on the world's second-largest gas reserves after Russia but U.S. trade restrictions have frustrated plans to develop them for export and booming domestic demand has made Iran the third-largest consumer and a top-30 importer.

New European Union bans on supplying energy equipment make it almost impossible for Tehran to get full-scale liquefaction (LNG) technology from Germany's Siemens (SIEGn.DE), with the only other process patented by U.S. industrial giant and military supplier GE (GE.N) already off limits under U.S. laws.

"It just makes it more clear that if LNG is going to happen from Iran it's going to have to be under the blanket of the Chinese and the Chinese are going to have to come up with their own technology," Noel Tomnay, global gas analyst at Wood Mackenzie in Edinburgh said of the EU sanctions.

"The Chinese have been working on this for quite some time ... and if that were to happen successfully then Iranian LNG, under a dedicated China project, could still proceed but that's very uncertain."

China's National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) signed a deal this year to develop the South Pars field, replacing France's Total (TOTF.PA), as part of an international search by state-run Chinese energy companies to fuel rapid economic growth.

One analyst said China's interest in developing Iranian gas export projects could have been tempered by slower economic growth and healthy LNG supply from other producing countries.

Industry observers have long doubted Iranian claims it would soon catch up with neighboring Qatar, with which it shares the world's largest gas field, and whose booming exports have made it the leading LNG exporter.

Sanctions, together with endemic delays to Iranian gas projects, have deterred western companies from dipping into the Iranian end of the field.

Two weeks after the EU banned technology transfers by European companies or citizens to Iran, Tehran finally admitted plans to build two new plants to freeze gas for export by tanker had been shelved to focus on pipeline gas exports.

"Without access to Western liquefaction technology, it will be nearly impossible for Iran to move any LNG projects forward," Andrew Clayton, an analyst at PFC Energy in Washington said.

Even its most advanced project, Iran LNG, which began construction in 2007, is unlikely to be completed this decade.

"Under current Europe sanctions, there is a very slim chance that Iran will be able to procure key liquefaction equipment," Siamak Adibi of FACTS Global Energy said.

"Without any improvement in the political environment, the Iran LNG project would not be onstream anytime in the future."

EXPORT PLANS

Although Iran has accepted the LNG projects needed to access a global market would have to be put on hold, it remains optimistic at least publicly about prospects for exporting by pipeline to markets closer to home.

Soaring residential demand, an increasingly gas-dependent industrial sector and plentiful gas needed to inject into Iranian oilfields to increase production will limit exports for the foreseeable future. "It either involves the lifting of sanctions or way out in the future when the Chinese are capable of doing it, but you are talking 10 years away, probably," Greg Priddy, an energy analyst at Eurasia Group in Washington, said.

Iran has not always been able to honor supply commitments to Turkey, its only gas export market to date, because its own demand often exceeds supply in winter.

Analysts say that even before the EU solidified the western technology and energy investment blockade, U.S. sanctions had effectively barred those European companies able to develop Iran's export business from working there.

International energy companies -- like Royal Dutch Shell (RDSa.L), Total and Repsol (REP.MC) -- have resisted the lure of Iran's vast reserves for fear of risking their sizeable North American businesses by angering Washington.

Another sting in the new EU sanctions, analysts said, was their controls on banking, making it very difficult to process any kind of Iranian transactions through European banks and stifling fuel trade.

Iran's gas pipeline strategy, which is focused on boosting sales to EU-hopeful Turkey and to Pakistan, looks only slightly more likely to succeed than its LNG plans.

It is building a pipeline to Pakistan, with a view to ultimately exporting as far as India. But Pakistan was already struggling to finance its section of the link before floods engulfed large parts of the country, raising fears of an economic disaster to follow the natural one.

Despite not producing enough gas for consistent export to even Turkey, Iranian gas officials have said they could supply Europe through proposed pipelines like Nabucco -- which is intended to reduce reliance on Russia by sourcing gas from Central Asia and even Iraq.

But analysts say the prospect of a big increase in pipeline exports to Europe remains as gloomy as Iran's LNG plans as long as sanctions are in force. There seems little chance of that happening soon after Iran said on Monday it would push ahead with its nuclear enrichment program.

"If Europe is really worried about security of supply, is a Nabucco pipeline supported by Iranian gas really the way to do it? It does seem like out of the frying pan and into the fire," Woodmac's Tomnay said.

U.S. urges vigilance in sanctions on Iran shipping

LONDON (Reuters) - All governments should step up their vigilance against dealings with Iran's shipping sector, a senior U.S. official said Monday, describing it as a "critical lifeline for Iran's proliferation and evasion."

Writing in the Financial Times, Treasury Undersecretary Stuart Levey said Iranian tactics to evade sanctions included repainting or renaming ships, falsifying shipping documents and assigning vessel ownership to front companies outside Iran.

In its latest move to counter this, Friday Washington designated for sanctions three Malta-based shipping companies owned directly or indirectly by the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines (IRISL), the national carrier, he said.

"We must redouble our vigilance over both their (Iran's) domestic shipping lines, and attempts to use third-country shippers and freight forwarders for illicit cargo," Levey wrote in a guest column.

The U.N. Security Council imposed a fourth round of sanctions on Iran in June over a nuclear program the West suspects is aimed at developing atomic weapons, though Iran says its goals are peaceful.

The United States and the European Union have also imposed sanctions of their own on the Islamic Republic.

The sanctions blacklist dozens of Iranian military, industrial and shipping companies, tighten an arms embargo and provide for inspections of suspect cargoes to and from Iran.

"U.S. companies involved in third-country trade -- as well as foreign shippers and freight forwarders doing business with the US -- must be aware of their sanctions responsibilities," Levey wrote.

"All shippers, wherever they do business, should exercise enhanced vigilance, particularly where shipments may involve Iran."

Levey urged businesses as well as governments to put sanctions into practice. "The broader private sector is restricting business with Iran, rather than risk facilitating Iran's illicit activities," he wrote.

"But while private business actions are critical for sanctions to work, it is essential that governments throughout the world now ensure that new sanctions are also translated into action."

Brazil's Caixa to Finance \$1.3 Billion in Beef Exports to Iran, Valor Says

By Joshua Goodman - Fri Aug 13 12:21:29 GMT 2010

Brazil's state-controlled Caixa Economica Federal will finance up to 1 billion euros (\$1.3 billion) in beef shipments to Iran after private banks refused to extend credit to exporters, fearing retaliation from the U.S. and European Union, Valor Economico said.

The financing will be backed by Brazil's Treasury, which will be responsible for collecting payment from the Iranian government, the Sao Paulo-based newspaper said.

Sanctions imposed by the United Nations in June over Iran's nuclear program, and followed up with tighter restrictions by the U.S. and EU, has led Brazilian banks to reject credit guarantees issued by Iranian banks, the newspaper said.

President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, in a visit to Tehran in May, signed an agreement to finance food exports to Iran, as well as boost investment and expand air connections between the two countries. Annual trade with Iran has more than doubled to \$1.2 billion since Lula took office in 2003.

U.S. Sanctions on Iran Target Banking Sector

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - New penalties kicked in Friday against foreign banks doing business with institutions that Washington has designated as supporting Iran's nuclear program or terrorist activities.

The penalties are part of the stepped-up U.S. sanctions against Iran signed into law last month by President Obama.

Much of the debate on those sanctions focused on how they would limit the sale of refined petroleum to Iran. But the law also cracks down on foreign banks that provide financial services to Iran's Revolutionary Guards Corps, or any related companies. The corps is deeply involved in Iran's missile and nuclear programs.

"I've already had financial institutions reach out to me to say they've read the statute. And they are immediately adjusting to ensure they are not engaged in any transactions" that violate the law, Treasury Undersecretary Stuart Levey told reporters Friday.

The new measure increases the risk that such foreign financial institutions could be denied access to U.S. banks, making it difficult for them to do business in dollars.

Tehran, Damascus to Sign Free Trade Agreement

TEHRAN – Iran and Syria are to sign a free trade agreement, Iranian Commerce Minister said yesterday.

Syria and Turkey signed the free trade agreement and we hope that our negotiations with Syrian side leads to signing the related contract, Mehdi Ghazanfari told IRIB on the sidelines of his meeting with the head of Syrian Prime Minister's office.

He added all nations sign unilateral and bilateral agreements to provide economic opportunities to offer their production in global markets.

He said we have inked some preferred tariff contracts with several countries but we have had no free trade agreement yet. He expressed hope that with signing free trade agreement with Syria, we can reduce tariff by 20 percent every year.

He went on to say that experts believe that free trade does not have any negative effect on country's industry and agriculture.

Referring to the establishment of a joint bank with Syria, Ghazanfari said setting up a joint bank aims to facilitate trade, banking issues and support the exports of technical and engineering services.

Teisar Al-Zaabi, for his part, said negotiations on free trade agreement started on Saturday, adding that we are keen to develop cooperation between the two countries.

“Based on this agreement, Iranian and Syrian commodities will be exported to global markets especially Arab states without any obstacles,” he added.

“This agreement will help establish a free trade zone between Iran, Syria, Turkey and Iraq.”

He went on to say that with the implementation of this agreement, we would witness a fivefold increase in Iran-Syria trade volume from the current 400 million dollars to 2 billion dollars.

Tehran, New Delhi Call for More Investment

TEHRAN (FNA) - Iran and India called for boosting joint ventures by the two countries and increasing investments in Iranian refineries and power plants by a number of Indian companies.

India and Iran expressed desire to sign the Bilateral Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement (BIPA) after completion of legal formalities.

As regards investments in Iranian refineries and power plants, some Indian companies have taken steps for this purpose.

"During a meeting between finance ministers of both countries on July 8, the two sides discussed issuance of BIPA and the draft text of the agreement was finalized. However, BIPA has not yet been signed with Iran," India's Minister of State for Finance S.S. Palanimanickam said on Friday.

The objective of BIPA is to promote and protect both sides' investors to make investment in either country, he added.

Such agreements increase the comfort level and boost the confidence of the investors by assuring a minimum standard of treatment and non-discrimination in all matters while providing for settlement of disputes with the host country. It is perceived that such agreements serve as a major catalyst for investment flows from India to these countries and vice versa.

IRICO to Export Wagon Parts to S. Korea

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Managing director of Iran Khodro Rail Transport Industries Company (IRICO) said yesterday that the company will export wagon parts to South Korea.

Iran and South Korea have inked a 14-million-euro agreement on the issue, Naser Soufi told IRNA. Soufi said the IRICO products are produced according to the latest European standards.

Iran Khodro Rail Transport Industries Company (IRICO) has been established by Iran Khodro Investment Development Company in 2003 for manufacturing various parts of the industry.

U.A.E. Says It's Checking to Be Sure Its Trade With Iran Complies With UN

By Camilla Hall and Ali Sheikholeslami - Mon Aug 16 13:22:21 GMT 2010

The United Arab Emirates' ambassador to the U.S. said his country is checking its trade connections with Iran to be sure they don't violate United Nations sanctions over the Iranian nuclear program.

"We do a significant amount of trade with Iran; it cannot be all illicit and it can't be all illegal," Ambassador Yousef al-Otaiba told reporters today in Abu Dhabi. "What we're trying to do is sift the good from the bad."

Al-Otaiba said the scrutiny involves intelligence cooperation, law enforcement and the emirates' export controls. His comments echoed those of Foreign Affairs Minister Anwar Gargash, who told reporters earlier today in Abu Dhabi that it's "important to have that balance right" between commitments to UN resolutions and undertaking legitimate trade.

The U.A.E.'s central bank asked financial institutions in the federation to freeze 41 bank accounts of Iranian individuals and companies in compliance with a fourth round of UN sanctions against Iran that were approved on June 9, Emirates Business 24/7 reported on June 28,

citing a bank circular. The U.S. and the European Union last month followed the UN sanctions with tighter measures of their own against Iran.

The U.S. and many of its allies say the Iranian nuclear program may be aimed at producing weapons. Iran, the second- largest producer of oil in the Middle East, denies the allegation, saying it needs nuclear energy for civilian purposes, such as electricity generation.

‘More Cohesiveness’

“There’s more cohesiveness in the international community than before,” al-Otaiba said. “You saw that in the Russia and China position in the UN, you saw it when the U.S. sanctions came out weeks after the UN, and the EU weeks after that. So the world seems to be united on the Iran issue. We want to know what that means for the U.A.E.”

The UN restrictions bar financial transactions if they may have a nuclear purpose. On July 1, the U.S. blocked access to the American financial system for banks that do business with Iran. On July 26, the EU restricted export-credit guarantees and insurance and ordered closer monitoring for such banks.

“We are 100 percent behind the diplomatic solution; we support President Obama’s two-track strategy, sanctions and engagement,” al-Otaiba said. “A military engagement would destabilize an already unstable region.”

Al-Otaiba said last month an attack on Iran may be necessary if sanctions fail to halt the country’s nuclear program, the Washington Times reported, citing remarks the U.A.E. diplomat made in a July 6 event in Aspen, Colorado. Today, he declined to comment on his earlier remarks.

Social Front:

Tehran Museum Loans Van Dongen Painting to Dutch Show

TEHRAN (MNA) -- The Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art (TMCA) has agreed to loan a painting by Dutch artist Kees van Dongen (1877-1968) to the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam.

The painting, named “Trinidad Fernandez” (1907), was loaned at the request of the museum in Rotterdam, and the return of masterpiece back to the country has been guaranteed by the Dutch Embassy in Tehran, TMCA Public Relations Office reported on Thursday. The museum has arranged the exhibition “All eyes on Kees van Dongen” in September, showcasing some eighty masterpieces by the renowned painter Kees van Dongen.

The exhibit will open on September 18 and will run for four months until January 23, 2011.

No fewer than sixty paintings and a selection of drawings, ceramics, posters and photographs are being flown over from leading international collections especially for the exhibition. They are coming from as far away as Iran, New York, Monaco, Geneva and Moscow.

Cornelis Theodorus Maria van Dongen was born on January 26, 1877 in Delfshaven, near Rotterdam. At the age of fifteen, Kees began drawing lessons at what is now the Willem de Kooning Academy in Rotterdam.

Van Dongen blossomed in Paris, becoming a celebrated artist. The left-wing illustrator's success came through his association with Fauvism, the first major avant-garde movement. Van Dongen was notorious for his contemporary use of color, paint and electric light and almost as much for his lifestyle. His lavish studio parties in the 1920s and 30s were attended by film stars, famous politicians and artists.

What Andy Warhol was to New York in the 1960s, Kees van Dongen was to the Paris of the 1920s - a society of artist and Bohemian who brought added color and excitement to the city.

Prominent Iranian Artist Taraghijah Dies at 67

TEHRAN -- Renowned Iranian painter Mohhamd-Ali Taraghijah died of a heart attack Thursday night in Tehran.

According to Mehr News Agency, Taraghijah's funeral was held on Saturday in Tehran's southern suburb of Rey and his body laid to rest in the courtyard of the shrine of Hazrat Abdolazim (AS).

Born in Tehran in 1943, Mohammad Ali Taraghijah enjoyed painting from childhood. Although he began his career as an engineer, he turned away from that work to professionally pursue art which is his true passion. In 1968 he won his first Golden Award in Iran's National Art Competition. His first exhibition in 1976 was of still-life paintings at the Tehran Gallery and later at the Basel's International Art Fair, Switzerland in 1978. By the beginning of the 1980's, Taraghijah developed his unique style of painting, characterized by stylized horses that became his trademark. The International Museum of 21st Century Arts (TIMOTCA), in U.S.A. selected his paintings as representative of Iranian art. His paintings are part of the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art (TMCA), the Museum of Modern Arts of Sharjah (U.A.E.) and Wereld Museum, Rotterdam, Leiden, Netherlands collections.

Taraghijah has emerged as a truly exceptional contemporary Iranian artist. His art reveals a man at ease with himself and his surroundings. His peaceful and tranquil paintings use figures of horses, roosters and rural Iranians in a fairy tale land. Taraghijah creates translucent, peaceful, insightful and long lasting impressions, which remind the viewer of the Orient and legends of the desert.

Car bomb aimed at Iranian pilgrims kills 5 in Iraq

BAGHDAD (Reuters) - A car bomb exploded Monday in a town northeast of the Iraqi capital while a bus full of Iranian Shi'ite pilgrims was passing, killing five people and wounding nine, security officials said.

The blast in Muqdadiya, 80 km (50 miles) northeast of Baghdad, was the latest in a series of attacks testing the mettle of Iraqi security forces as U.S. troops prepare to end combat operations at the end of August before a full withdrawal next year.

Four of the dead were Iranian pilgrims, who have flocked to Iraq's Shi'ite religious sites in the hundreds of thousands since the U.S.-led invasion removed Sunni dictator Saddam Hussein in 2003. Saddam banned Shi'ite rites and fought an eight-year war with Shi'ite-ruled Iran in the 1980s.

All of the wounded were Iranian, said a police source and a source in the security operations center of Diyala province, where a volatile ethnic and religious mix of Sunnis, Shi'ites and Kurds has helped sustain a stubborn insurgency.

Overall violence in Iraq has fallen sharply since the height of sectarian warfare between once-dominant Sunnis and majority Shi'ites in 2006 and 2007, but attacks have risen since an inconclusive election in March and before the end of U.S. combat operations this month.

No coalition won a majority in the March parliamentary election. Shi'ite, Sunni and Kurdish coalitions have been jockeying for position in the new government ever since.

Iraqi and U.S. military officials say insurgents are seeking to exploit the tension caused by the failure of political factions to agree on the country's next government.

Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's Shi'ite-led bloc is locked in a tussle with the vote leader, the Sunni-backed Iraqiya alliance of former Prime Minister Iyad Allawi, in the race to head a new government. Five months after the vote, neither side has been able to assemble the necessary majority.

Insurgents linked to al Qaeda appear to be challenging Iraqi police and soldiers as the United States prepares to cut its troop numbers to 50,000 by September 1, compared with a peak of about 170,000 three years ago. The number of civilians killed in bomb blasts and other attacks soared in July to 396 from 204 the month before, according to Iraqi government figures.