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M. Rasheed

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Summary of Report:

Mullen Urges Turkey to Give Help on Iran, Extend Its Afghan Troop Command President Barack Obama's top military adviser, Navy Admiral Mike Mullen, urged Turkey to help ensure Iran doesn't gain the capacity to make atomic weapons and to extend the period of its commands in Afghanistan.

Iran to stand by its nuclear rights' Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast says Iran will not bow to pressure meant to discourage the country from pursuing its nuclear rights. The foreign ministry official made reference to the latest UN Security Council (UNSC) sanctions against the Islamic Republic over its nuclear program and said Iran does not "welcome sanctions or resolutions."

'IAEA report confirms Iran's clean slate' Latest International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) report on Iran's nuclear activities reaffirms Tehran's commitment to the agency's rules, Iranian envoy to the watchdog group says.

'Non-diversion basis of IAEA report' The main point of the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) report on Iran's nuclear activities is the verification of its non-diversion nature, Tehran's nuclear chief says. On IAEA's claim about Iran's denial of inspecting its heavy water plant, Salehi argued that such an inspection is not within the framework of the Safeguards Agreement between Iran and the nuclear watchdog.

Russia urges Iran-IAEA cooperation Russia has urged Iran to maintain cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), a day after Tehran rejected the agency's claim that it had restricted UN inspectors.

IAEA envoy: UNSC intervention illegal Iran's envoy to IAEA says the interference of the UNSC in Iran's nuclear dossier prompted the Majlis to halt implementation of additional protocol. Iran will not implement additional protocol as long as the UN Security Council interferes in Iran's nuclear program, says Iran's ambassador to the IAEA.

S Korea imposes sanctions on Iran Under extensive US pressure, South Korea says it will take unilateral measures against Iranian banks and individuals carrying out foreign exchange transactions. On Wednesday, Foreign Ministry Spokesman Kim Young-Sun claimed that the Seoul branch of Bank Mellat has facilitated hundreds of millions of dollars in transactions for Iran's defense programs.

China opposes unilateral Iran sanctions China has opposed unilateral sanctions against Iran over its nuclear program, calling for a diplomatic solution on the issue. The US and its allies accuse Iran of developing a nuclear weapons program. Iran rejects the allegation, saying it is only after peaceful nuclear energy.

NAM supports Iran's nuclear program' The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) has passed a statement in support of Iran's nuclear program, Tehran's envoy to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) says. IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano on Monday released its latest report on Iran's nuclear work, in which he once gain confirmed that the IAEA continued to "verify the non-diversion of declared nuclear material in Iran."

Iran to host reps. from 40 African states Tehran is slated to host a summit that will focus on the expansion of political and economic ties between Iran and the African continent.

Iran urges change in P5+1 structure Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki says talks with major world powers (P5+1) requires a change in the structure of the group which has been offered by Tehran. Talks on fuel swap will be held only within the framework of the Vienna group (the US, Russia, France and the International Atomic Energy Agency)," Mottaki said in a press conference

Amano ready to discuss Iran's fuel swap Head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Yukiya Amano has expressed readiness to discuss supplying nuclear fuel for Tehran's research reactor. Amano's introductory statement to the board of governors at Monday's conference noted the agency's readiness to hold a meeting with all involved parties on ways to supply the Tehran research reactor with fuel.

Iran lauds Turkey's referendum results Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki has congratulated Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu on the country's referendum results. In a telephone conversation on Monday, Mottaki congratulated the Turkish nation's vote of confidence to the Ankara government in the recent referendum on constitutional amendments. Davutoglu, for his part, expressed gratitude for Iran's stance.

Iran Is Developing Secret Uranium-Enrichment Site, Dissident Group Claims Iran is developing a secret uranium enrichment site near Qazvin, 120 miles west of Tehran, a dissident group said today, citing satellite images of the area. The facility is called Behjatad-Abyek and is code-named 311, according to the Iran Policy Committee, which supports the anti-regime People's Mujahedeen of Iran.

Ahmadinejad to visit NY for UN meeting Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is scheduled to visit New York to attend a UN General Assembly meeting on disarmament, the UN chief says. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon noted that the meeting will be held on Sep. 24.

Iran Denies Dissidents' Allegation It's Building Secret Nuclear Facility Iran's atomic energy chief denied allegations by a dissident group that it has been building a secret uranium-enrichment site west of Tehran.

Clinton Says U.S. Is Open to Talks With Iran Even as Sanctions Intensify The U.S. remains open to negotiations with Iran even as sanctions intended to constrain the country's nuclear program begin, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said today in a speech.

Iran Says It Is Ready to Release U.S. Hiker Sarah Shourd on \$500,000 Bail Iran is ready to free the U.S. hiker Sarah Shourd on bail of \$500,000, Tehran prosecutor Abbas Jafari-Dolatabadi said, after authorities delayed her release scheduled for yesterday, citing incomplete legal procedures. Iran and the U.S. have had no diplomatic ties since the 1979 Islamic revolution which replaced Iran's monarchy with the Islamic Republic.

Fidel Castro Says Iran Should Recognize the Holocaust, Persecution of Jews Former Cuban President Fidel Castro criticized Mahmoud Ahmadinejad for denying the Holocaust and said the Iranian leader's anti-Semitism doesn't help the cause for peace. Iran's government should understand that Jews "were expelled from their land, persecuted and mistreated all over the world," Castro said in an interview posted on The Atlantic magazine's website. "I don't think anyone has been slandered more than the Jews. I would say much more than the Muslims."

Iran's Jewish MP raps Quran desecration Jewish member of Iran's Parliament (Majlis) Siamak Moreh Sedq describes the desecration of the holy Quran in the US as an "insane act without rational justification." The Jewish lawmaker said that such sacrilegious insults against religions would only serve the interests of "Zionism," saying, "God believers should prove that [such actions] will only consolidate their will to counter Zionism and arrogant powers."

Iranian Diplomat Quits Post in Brussels to Join Opposition, Heydari Says Iranian diplomat Farzad Farhangian has resigned from his post in Belgium to join the opposition, Mohammad Reza Heydari, former consul of the Iranian embassy in Norway who himself quit last year, said in a phone interview from Oslo.

Iran Nuclear Monitors' Report Is a 'Source of Concern,' UN Chief Ban Says Iran's pursuit of uranium enrichment, as reported by nuclear inspectors last week, is a "source of concern," United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon told reporters today.

Iran's Former Embassy in U.S. Can't Be Seized to Pay Damages, Judge Rules A Hamas bombing victim's family can't seize Iran's former embassy and other Washington properties to satisfy a \$12 million default judgment, an appeals court ruled. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia today rejected arguments by Marla Ann Bennett's family that the properties were no longer used for diplomatic purposes, so they are no longer immune from attachment.

American Citizen Sarah Shourd Leaves Iran for Oman After Release, AFP Says U.S. citizen Sarah Shourd left Iran for Oman after her release today following a year in detention on spying charges, Agence France-Presse reported, citing the Swiss ambassador in Tehran.

Iran Diplomat Who Defected in Brussels Seeks Political Asylum in Norway Iranian diplomat Farzad Farhangian, who resigned from his post in Brussels last week to protest his government's policies, is seeking asylum in Norway, his lawyer said. Farhangian arrived in Oslo yesterday with his family, Arild Humlen said today by telephone. Farhangian is receiving protection from the authorities, Humlen said, without giving further details.

Iranian-African Cooperation Has 'No Limits,' Ahmadinejad Tells Conference President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said he sees "no limits or restrictions" on Iran's cooperation with countries in Africa. Iran and African nations are "culturally and historically friends and brothers who are fighting in the same camp," Ahmadinejad said today at the opening of a conference in Tehran, according to the official Islamic Republic News Agency.

U.S. Hiker Should Be Freed on Bail After Year in Iranian Prison, Lawyer Says U.S. hiker Sarah Shourd was freed on bail by Iranian authorities today, her lawyer Masoud Shafie said in a phone interview in Tehran.

Iran urges enhanced ties with Africa President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad stresses the importance of taking practical steps to promote relations with African countries in view of common interests with Iran.

Freed American Arrives in Oman as Iran Keeps Companions Jailed Sarah Shourd arrived in Oman after Iran freed the American from detention on spying charges, while keeping her two companions jailed in a case that highlights friction between the U.S. and Iran. The government of Oman welcomed Shourd's release and "expressed its sincere thanks and appreciation to the Iranian leadership," according to the state-run Oman news agency.

Ahmadinejad's envoys become advisors Amid controversy over President Ahmadinejad's controversial appointment of his own envoys for international affairs, the Iranian chief executive assigns the men as advisors. The president made the decision after the appointment of his special envoys in the arena of foreign policy provoked outrage among Iranian officials, including members of the Parliament (Majlis) who said he was conducting parallel tasks in the international sector.

IAEA to meet on Iran, Syria, Israel The Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is to hold a meeting at the agency's headquarters to review Iran, Syria and Israel's nuclear programs. The IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano's latest report on Iran's nuclear program is due to be discussed in the regular meeting of the agency on Wednesday.

Economic Front:

Japan Suspends Iran Energy Investments, Freezes Assets in New Sanctions Japan said it is suspending new oil and gas investments in Iran and freezing the assets of 88 organizations and 24 individuals in its latest round of sanctions for the Middle Eastern country's nuclear program.

NIBA slams EU sanctions against Iran The Netherlands Iranian Business Association (NIBA) criticizes the new EU sanctions against Iran targeting its foreign trade, financial services, and energy and gas sectors. More than one hundred businessmen slammed the 27-member economic and political union for a recent package of sanctions against the Islamic Republic in a statement released on Thursday.

Iran mulling over gas export to Bahrain Iran says it is mulling over the outlines of a joint agreement with Bahrain for the export of Iranian natural gas to the Persian Gulf state. Iran's Deputy Oil Minister Javad Oji said on Saturday that Iranian and Bahraini officials met in Tehran to discuss measures for the establishment of a joint commission to increase cooperation in the natural gas sector, Mehr news agency reported.

Iran imports rise 22% in 5 months Tehran's imports have passed \$24.2 billion in the first five months of the current Iranian calendar year (started March 21), Iran's Customs says. New data show the country's imports increased by 22.2 percent between March and August compared with the corresponding figure last year, Mehr news agency reported.

Iran car production increases by 6.21% Iran's car production has increased by 6.21 percent in the first 5 months of the current Iranian calendar year to reach 602,052 vehicles Iran's Ministry of Industries and Mines said in a report that Iranian car manufacturers have produced 514,434 passenger cars and 87,618 heavy vehicles between March 21 and August 23, IRIB reported.

Iran gas export to Turkey resumes Iran's natural gas exports to Turkey has resumed after it was halted due to an explosion in Turkey on August 25 that damaged a pipeline. Last week, Dini pointed out that gas supplies would begin with 4 to 5 million cubic meters and will reach 24 to 25 million cubic meters per day.

Iran exports 5.5 bn kWh of electricity Iran ranks the 19th largest producer and 20th largest consumer of electricity in the world. Iran has exported more than 5.5 billion kWh of electricity to its neighboring countries during the past Iranian calendar year (ending March 20).

Iran to invest \$13bn in South Pars Iran has the world's second largest natural gas reserves after Russia. Iran plans to invest around \$13 billion to develop the remaining phases of the giant South Pars gas field, says a senior Iranian oil official. He further pointed out that the Iranian Oil Ministry would also use oil revenues and foreign investments to finance the gas field that is jointly owned by Iran and Qatar.

India to buy Iran gas via sea pipeline? Iran's 7th cross-country gas pipeline was put into operation in July. The 902-kilometer pipeline is the first phase of the proposed Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline project, dubbed the Peace Pipeline. A year after moving back from a gas pipeline project with Iran and Pakistan, India has again expressed interest in buying Iran's natural gas, but this time via a sea pipeline. Iran's Oil Ministry officials have not yet commented on the report.

South Korea to Ban New Oil, Gas Investments in Iran on Nuclear Program South Korea said it will ban any new investments for Iranian oil, gas and construction projects, joining nations including the U.S. in imposing sanctions for the Middle Eastern country's nuclear program.

U.A.E. Freezes Four Iranian Accounts After UN Sanctions, Ittihad Reports The United Arab Emirates Central Bank froze four Iranian accounts, Al Ittihad reported, citing a central bank official it didn't identify.

Iran Bans Imports of 49 Agricultural Products Including Apples, Donya Says Iran's Agriculture Ministry banned the import of 49 agriculture products, Donya-e-Eqtesad reported. Iranian Agriculture Minister Sadegh Khalilian wrote to the Commerce Ministry demanding imports of certain fruit, fruit concentrates and dairy products to be halted until further notice, the newspaper said, citing the document.

Iran govt. urged to enforce subsidy law A senior Iranian lawmaker warns against government delays in implementing the targeted subsidies plan, saying the Parliament (Majlis) is closely monitoring the matter. The controversial plan, scheduled to be implemented in September is expected to phase out up to USD 20 billion in state subsidies for staples such as food and fuel.

Iran carpet exports pass \$204mn Iran's carpet exports have increased by nearly 50 percent to reach \$204 million in the first five months of the current Iranian year (started on March 21). The Iranian official predicted that the country's carpet exports will pass \$500 million by the end of the year.

Iranian carmaker plans Venezuela plant Iranian auto giant Iran Khodro Company (IKCO) has submitted a plan to the Venezuelan government for building a car manufacturing plant worth \$101 million in the Latin American country. Soleimani said the plant will be able to produce 100,000 automobiles a year.

Iran's oil output falls by 15,000 bpd Iran's oil production has decreased by around 15,000 barrels per day (bpd) in August, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) says. OPEC, in its monthly oil market report released on Sunday, said that the oil-rich country produced 3.680 million bpd during the period down from the 3.695 million bpd in July.

Iran builds car assembly plant in Sudan Saipa, Iran's second largest car-maker, is to setup a plant in Sudan. Iran's second largest auto manufacturer has signed a contract to open a factory in Sudan to produce some 35,000 cars over the next five years.

Iran Plans to Boost Crude Exploration in Border Areas, Oil Ministry Says Iran plans to set up four drilling platforms in border regions to accelerate oil exploration, the Oil Ministry said on its news website Shana, citing Mahmoud Mohaddes, National Iranian Oil Co. director for exploration. Iran's Oil Minister Masoud Mir-Kazemi last week said that more than \$1.5 billion have been allocated to explore for oil and gas, Shana reported.

Social Front:

Iran Ayatollahs Issue Fatwas Calling for Killing Those Who Burn the Koran Two Iranian grand ayatollahs issued fatwas calling for the killing of those who insult the Koran, including anyone who burns the Islamic holy book, the state-run Fars news agency reported. No one was specified in the decrees, which were issued by Nasser Makarem-Shirazi and Hossein Nouri-Hamedani in response to questions asked by student groups from universities in Tehran, Fars said.

British Museum to Lend Iran the Cyrus Cylinder for Four Months The British Museum said it will lend Iran an ancient artifact known as the Cyrus Cylinder for a period of four months, allowing the treasure to be featured in an exhibition opening Sept. 12 at the National Museum of Iran.

India hosts Iranian short films The ninth edition of Third Eye Asian Film Festival is to screen two award-winning Iranian short films for competition in Mumbai, India. Sasan Farrokhnia's *The Sea was Mine One Day* and Morteza Akuchekian's *Bitter End of Coffee* will compete in the Short Film Competition section of the event scheduled to run from October 28 to November 4.

Priceless antiques seized in Iran Police in Iran have arrested two smugglers who were trying to illegally sell antiques, including two ancient bodies of a king and a goddess belonging to 4000 BCE. Iranian security officials arrested the two smugglers while inking a fake deal with them as undercover agents.

Iran to guard universities against 'plots' Minister of Science, Research and Technology Kamran Daneshjoo says the "enemies" of Iran are plotting a cultural invasion of the country's universities.

Detailed News

Politico-strategic Front:

Mullen Urges Turkey to Give Help on Iran, Extend Its Afghan Troop Command

By Viola Gienger - Sep 4, 2010 2:36 PM GMT+0500

President Barack Obama's top military adviser, Navy Admiral Mike Mullen, urged Turkey to help ensure Iran doesn't gain the capacity to make atomic weapons and to extend the period of its commands in Afghanistan.

"The mutual goal of Iran not achieving a nuclear-weapons capability, that we completely agree on, we just need to reinforce," Mullen, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told reporters today in Ankara. Both countries need to "do all we can to make sure that doesn't happen."

The U.S. needs the backing of Turkey's military, which includes one of the world's largest standing armies, as a critical player in the Middle East and Central Asia and a member of NATO. Turkey shares a border with Iraq and Iran and has about 1,700 troops in Afghanistan.

Mullen praised Turkey's role in charge of international troops in the region around the Afghan capital, Kabul, which expires in October, and in providing police training and staffing for reconstruction teams.

"We would like to see Turkey sustain all of those efforts because they've been so important in Afghanistan and also because of the critical time in which we find ourselves in Afghanistan right now," Mullen said.

Iraq Withdrawal

Still, Mullen sought to dispel reports in Turkish media suggesting the U.S. is putting pressure on its ally on issues including the withdrawal of heavy equipment and weapons from Iraq. He said the U.S. doesn't expect to use Turkish land routes to remove weapons when the last American forces leave Iraq by the end of 2011.

"We do not transport weapons through Turkey, nor do we plan to in the future," Mullen said. "Reports or suggestions to the contrary are simply false and completely without merit."

Mullen met yesterday with the new head of the Turkish armed forces, General Isik Kosaner, and with Defense Minister Vecdi Gonul and is scheduled to meet today with Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

On Iran, Turkey's stated agreement to enforce the most recent United Nations sanctions is important regardless of its decision to oppose the measures in the Security Council in June,

Mullen said. Turkey and Brazil brokered an agreement with Iran in May under which Turkey would receive unprocessed uranium from Iran and send back smaller amounts of enriched uranium for use in a medical reactor.

'Note With Gratitude'

"I did not come here to question or in any way rebut Turkey's decision not to support United Nations sanctions against Iran," Mullen said. "I note with gratitude your government's stated intent to enforce those sanctions."

He also said the North Atlantic Treaty Organization is discussing locations for a potential missile-defense system of radar and interceptors, though he didn't specifically address the plan with Kosaner.

"The membership of NATO believes that having a missile- defense architecture is a very important capability that needs to be put in place and evolve over time," Mullen said. "There have been discussions with several members of NATO -- to include Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania - - in terms of parts of this."

Mullen lamented deteriorating relations between Turkey and Israel over incidents such as the May 31 Israeli raid on an aid flotilla for the Gaza Strip that left nine Turkish citizens dead. He declined to comment on the incident, citing investigations under way.

"I would just hope that the countries can recognize the importance of stability in this part of the world and learn lessons from what happened here and move forward," he said.

Iran to stand by its nuclear rights'

Sun Sep 5, 2010 10:3AM

Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast says Iran will not bow to pressure meant to discourage the country from pursuing its nuclear rights.

The foreign ministry official made reference to the latest UN Security Council (UNSC) sanctions against the Islamic Republic over its nuclear program and said Iran does not "welcome sanctions or resolutions."

"The sanctions and resolutions are an illegal approach [to the issue] as our nation is being tried for a crime it has not committed," Mehmanparast said in an interview with the IRIB on Sunday.

However, the Iranian spokesperson pointed out that Tehran will continue to pursue the "nation's basic rights and not renounce [them] in the face of pressures."

The UNSC imposed a fourth round of punitive measures against the Islamic Republic on June 9, targeting Iran's energy sector.

The United States, Israel, and some of their allies accuse Tehran of pursuing military objectives in its nuclear program.

Yet, as a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and a member of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Iran has the right to develop and acquire nuclear technology meant for peaceful purposes.

In addition, the IAEA has conducted numerous inspections of Iran's nuclear facilities but has never produced any evidence showing a diversion to nuclear weapons production.

'IAEA report confirms Iran's clean slate'

Mon Sep 6, 2010 5:59PM

Latest International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) report on Iran's nuclear activities reaffirms Tehran's commitment to the agency's rules, Iranian envoy to the watchdog group says.

Commenting on the report released by IAEA's Director General Yukiya Amano on Monday, Iran's Ambassador to the UN nuclear watchdog Ali Asghar Soltanieh said, "After seven years of constant inspections, the report once again confirms the non-diversion of Iran's nuclear activities towards military and banned objectives."

"Although the report has tarnished the Agency's technical credibility by mentioning technical details and quoting some parts of UN Security Council's resolution, it clearly shows that all of Iran's nuclear activities, especially the enrichment efforts, have been conducted under the supervision of the agency," Soltanieh told Mehr News Agency after Amano's report was published Monday night.

"The report reflects achievements made by the Islamic Republic and its mastery of nuclear technology, especially in the field of enrichment, and clearly indicates Iran's commitment to IAEA's Statute and Safeguards Agreement, confirming that all of Iran's nuclear activities are conducted under the Agency's supervision," he added.

Commenting on appeals proclaimed in Amano's report, Soltanieh reiterated that the UN Security Council (UNSC) demands are not applicable since they have no legal basis and exceed the provisions of Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

On May 17, Iran, Turkey and Brazil issued a declaration based on which Tehran agreed to exchange the bulk of its low-enriched uranium on Turkish soil with fuel for the Tehran research reactor.

The US and its European allies snubbed the declaration and used their influence on the UNSC to press for fresh sanctions against Iran.

Both Ankara and Brasilia condemned the new sanctions, saying it was a major setback in resolving the standoff over Iran's nuclear program.

Following the UNSC resolution, the US and EU also imposed additional unilateral sanctions on Iran over its nuclear program, targeting the country's energy and financial sectors.

Iran has criticized the UNSC sanctions arguing that as a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and an IAEA member it has every right to pursue and benefit from nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.

'Non-diversion basis of IAEA report'

Tue Sep 7, 2010 5:51AM

The main point of the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) report on Iran's nuclear activities is the verification of its non-diversion nature, Tehran's nuclear chief says.

"Like the previous [IAEA's] reports, the new report reiterates the non-diversion of declared nuclear material Therefore, we believe that the other issues mentioned in the report are minor," Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran Ali Akbar Salehi told ISNA on Monday.

On IAEA's claim about Iran's denial of inspecting its heavy water plant, Salehi argued that such an inspection is not within the framework of the Safeguards Agreement between Iran and the nuclear watchdog.

"The IAEA should tell us that by which clause of the mutual agreement can it inspect the heavy water facilities. We have not found such a clause ... if they prove it, I will immediately allow inspectors to visit [the plant]," he went on to say.

Referring to IAEA's request from Iran to inform the agency of building 10 new enrichment sites, Salehi noted that based on the old version of Code 3.1 of the Subsidiary Arrangements, Iran is not bound to submit that information.

Based on the regulations, the Islamic Republic will inform the agency 180 days before transferring nuclear materials to the site, he further explained.

Salehi also called on the IAEA to maintain an impartial position, saying "due to political coercions, minor issues are highlighted while the main points of the report which insist that Iran's nuclear activities are peaceful have become overshadowed."

IAEA's reporting approach has changed negatively over the past year, while Iran has fulfilled its commitments more than before and, even in some cases, Tehran cooperated with the agency beyond its obligations in order to build trust, Salehi went on to say.

On May 17, Iran, Turkey and Brazil issued a declaration based on which Tehran agreed to exchange the bulk of its low-enriched uranium on Turkish soil with fuel for the Tehran research reactor.

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Iran has criticized the UNSC sanctions arguing that as a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and an IAEA member it has every right to pursue and benefit from nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.

Russia urges Iran-IAEA cooperation

Tue Sep 7, 2010 6:42PM

Russia has urged Iran to maintain cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), a day after Tehran rejected the agency's claim that it had restricted UN inspectors.

"The IAEA must continue its work ... Iran must fulfill the requirement of the IAEA," RIA Novosti quoted Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov as saying on Tuesday.

On Monday, IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano handed his latest report on the implementation of the Safeguards Agreement in Iran to the agency's Board of Governors.

According to the supposedly confidential report that was made immediately available to the press, the agency confirms that it "continues to verify the non-diversion of declared nuclear material in Iran," calling on Tehran to provide "necessary cooperation."

Iranian officials have criticized the report for mixing technical issues with politics, stressing that Tehran has fully complied with IAEA regulations.

Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran Ali Akbar Salehi said Iran, like all IAEA members states, has the right to vet IAEA inspectors and bar those it believes are prejudiced.

Regarding the IAEA claim that Iran has denied inspectors access to its heavy water plant, Salehi argued such an inspection did not fall within the framework of the Safeguards Agreement between Iran and the agency.

Remarks of the Russian foreign minister were made following a meeting with his French counterpart Bernard Kouchner in Paris, two weeks after Russia delivered its first supply of nuclear fuel for the launch of Iran's first nuclear power plant in the southern city of Bushehr.

Tehran rejects Western allegations that it is following a military nuclear program, arguing that as a member of the IAEA and a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty it has every right to pursue a peaceful nuclear program.

IAEA envoy: UNSC intervention illegal

Wed Sep 8, 2010 9:44AM

Iran's envoy to IAEA says the interference of the UNSC in Iran's nuclear dossier prompted the Majlis to halt implementation of additional protocol.

Iran will not implement additional protocol as long as the UN Security Council interferes in Iran's nuclear program, says Iran's ambassador to the IAEA.

On February 6, 2006, Iran's Majlis (parliament) suspended voluntary implementation of the Additional Protocol and all other voluntary and non-legally binding cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) beyond what is required by its safeguards agreement.

"The IAEA is seeking implementation of additional protocol and Iran will not implement this protocol as long as the UNSC is involved in Iran's nuclear issue. We ask the IAEA Director General, Yukiya Amano, to understand this fact," Asharq al-Awsat quoted Ali Asghar Soltanieh as saying.

Soltanieh declared Iran's readiness for nuclear talks with the Vienna Group (the US, Paris, Russia and the IAEA), citing political pressure for imposing preconditions on Iran as the causes of the delay of the meeting. according to a Mehr news agency report.

"Such behaviors and actions have obliged Iran to supply its required enriched uranium," he added.

The Iranian representative at the IAEA rejected the claim that the recent UN Agency's report highlighted Iran's poor cooperation with the IAEA, saying the report calls for more cooperation. "Iran will continue its cooperation with the IAEA in accordance with the signed agreements and not beyond that," Soltanieh added.

IAEA's Director General Yukiya Amano on Monday released its latest report on Iran's nuclear work in which he once again confirmed that the agency continued to "verify the non-diversion of declared nuclear materials in Iran."

The report, however, urged Iran to "cooperate in clarifying outstanding issues" and suspend its uranium enrichment activities.

The Islamic Republic insists that it has been fully cooperating with the IAEA, reiterating that it has answered all questions regarding its nuclear work.

S Korea imposes sanctions on Iran

Wed Sep 8, 2010 12:55PM

Under extensive US pressure, South Korea says it will take unilateral measures against Iranian banks and individuals carrying out foreign exchange transactions.

On Wednesday, Foreign Ministry Spokesman Kim Young-Sun claimed that the Seoul branch of Bank Mellat has facilitated hundreds of millions of dollars in transactions for Iran's defense programs.

The government will restrict foreign exchange transactions of 102 institutions... including Bank Mellat, and 24 individuals... without the approval of the Bank of Korea," Reuters quoted a government statement as saying.

Under the sanctions, all financial institutions will have to report to authorities or gain prior permission should they want to engage in financial transactions with Iran.

After the UN Security Council issued a resolution imposing a fourth round of sanctions on Iran in June, the United States and the European Union imposed their own unilateral sanctions.

The US then pressured its allies like Japan, Canada, and Australia to impose similar unilateral sanctions on the Islamic Republic, targeting investments in energy-related industries.

The US, Israel, and their European allies claim that Iran -- a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty -- is pursuing a covert military nuclear program through its enrichment activities.

Iranian officials, however, reject the charges, stressing that they have fully cooperated with the International Atomic Energy Agency in demonstrating that the country is solely seeking nuclear energy for civilian electricity generation and medical research.

China opposes unilateral Iran sanctions

Thu Sep 9, 2010 10:31AM

China has opposed unilateral sanctions against Iran over its nuclear program, calling for a diplomatic solution on the issue.

"We don't approve of unilateral sanctions on Iran," Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Jiang Yu told reporters on Thursday.

"We hope relevant parties can stick to the direction of diplomatic resolution and seek an effective resolution through dialogue and negotiations."

This comes after South Korea joined the US, EU, Australia, Canada and Japan in imposing unilateral sanctions against Iran.

South Korea said Wednesday it will take unilateral measures against Iranian banks and individuals carrying out foreign exchange transactions.

South Korea's Foreign Ministry spokesman Kim Young-Sun claimed that the Seoul branch of Bank Mellat has facilitated hundreds of millions of dollars in transactions for Iran's defense programs.

Under the sanctions, 102 entities will be targeted by Seoul and all financial institutions will have to report to authorities or gain prior permission should they want to engage in financial transactions with Iran.

Following the UN Security Council's resolution imposing a fourth round of sanctions on Iran in June, the United States and the European Union imposed their own unilateral sanctions.

The US then pressured Japan, Canada, and Australia to impose similar unilateral sanctions on the Islamic Republic, targeting investments in energy-related industries.

The US and its allies accuse Iran of developing a nuclear weapons program. Iran rejects the allegation, saying it is only after peaceful nuclear energy.

NAM supports Iran's nuclear program'

Thu Sep 9, 2010 1:22PM

The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) has passed a statement in support of Iran's nuclear program, Tehran's envoy to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) says.

IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano on Monday released its latest report on Iran's nuclear work, in which he once gain confirmed that the IAEA continued to "verify the non-diversion of declared nuclear material in Iran."

The report, however, urged Iran to "cooperate in clarifying outstanding issues."

After the IAEA report was issued, the NAM envoys in Vienna "passed a statement supporting Iran's nuclear program," Ali-Asghar Soltanieh was quoted by Fars News Agency as saying on Thursday.

Amano's previous report on Iran's nuclear program also drew criticism from 118 NAM member states, who criticized the IAEA chief for abandoning "the standard verification language" in the report.

NAM explained that the first report by Amano blatantly ignored Iran's cooperative efforts to address concerns and resolve ambiguities over its nuclear work.

In a statement, they also voiced their support for Iran's right to peaceful use of nuclear energy after UN Security Council imposed a fourth round of sanctions against Iran on June 9.

Iran to host reps. from 40 African states

Sun Sep 12, 2010 6:47PM

Tehran is slated to host a summit that will focus on the expansion of political and economic ties between Iran and the African continent.

"Representatives from the governments and private sectors of over 40 African nations will be coming to Tehran to attend the Forum," senior Foreign Ministry official Ali Amirshahidi said on Sunday.

The summit will explore ways to expand Iran's relations with African nations such as exporting technical services and expertise, increasing trade volume, and aiding the development of the continent, IRNA reported.

According to the Iranian official, the industries, health, and transport ministers of several African countries will be attending the Forum which will be held on September 14 and 15.

Amirshahidi added that president Bingu wa Mutharika of Malawi would be among the attendees at the Forum.

Malawi currently holds the presidency of the African Union where Iran has observer status. Tehran has recently boosted efforts to promote its economic and political ties with African states.

Iran urges change in P5+1 structure

Mon Sep 13, 2010 9:31AM

Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki says talks with major world powers (P5+1) requires a change in the structure of the group which has been offered by Tehran.

"Talks on fuel swap will be held only within the framework of the Vienna group (the US, Russia, France and the International Atomic Energy Agency)," Mottaki said in a press conference with Burkina Faso Foreign Minister Alain Be'douma Yoda in the Iranian capital of Tehran on Monday.

"Negotiations can begin by the time the IAEA prepares the ground," he further explained.

The Iranian top diplomat criticized the positive approach of the P5+1 to the imposition of the fourth round of sanctions resolution by the UN Security Council on the Islamic Republic after Iran, Turkey and Brazil issued a joint declaration on the enriched-uranium swap.

"The P5+1 showed its lack of honesty. So, a change in structure of the group is necessary," he went on to say.

Mottaki said new mechanisms intended by the Islamic Republic within the P5+1 have been announced, adding Tehran welcomes negotiations within the framework stipulated in the May 17 Tehran Declaration.

Based on the declaration, Iran agreed to exchange 1,200 kilograms of its low-enriched uranium on Turkish soil with fuel for the Tehran research reactor.

Amano ready to discuss Iran's fuel swap

Mon Sep 13, 2010 3:17PM

Head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Yukia Amano has expressed readiness to discuss supplying nuclear fuel for Tehran's research reactor.

Amano's introductory statement to the board of governors at Monday's conference noted the agency's readiness to hold a meeting with all involved parties on ways to supply the Tehran research reactor with fuel.

"I stand ready to convene such a meeting, subject to the agreement of all concerned parties," Amano was quoted as saying on the IAEA website.

Iran, Turkey and Brazil issued a nuclear declaration on May 17 based on which Tehran announced readiness to swap its low-enriched uranium for nuclear fuel on Turkish soil.

However, the West effectively disregarded the declaration by imposing a fourth round of sanctions against Iran over its nuclear program.

The US and its European allies accuse Iran of pursuing a military nuclear program. Tehran rejects the allegation arguing that as a member of the IAEA and a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty it has the right to a civilian nuclear program.

Iran lauds Turkey's referendum results

Mon Sep 13, 2010 6:41PM

Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki has congratulated Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu on the country's referendum results.

In a telephone conversation on Monday, Mottaki congratulated the Turkish nation's vote of confidence to the Ankara government in the recent referendum on constitutional amendments.

Davutoglu, for his part, expressed gratitude for Iran's stance.

According to a Foreign Ministry statement, both sides expressed hope for further the expansion of all-out ties and described First Vice President Mohammad Reza Rahimi's upcoming trip to Turkey as another step towards bolstering Tehran-Ankara relations.

Turkish voters have firmly supported constitutional amendments proposed by the country's Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who leads the ruling Justice and Development Party.

Changes to the make-up of the Constitutional Court and the judiciary are among the proposed reforms.

Erdogan says the changes to a charter drafted in the 1980s after a military coup are needed to strengthen democracy and bring his country closer to European norms.

The referendum result could also enhance Erdogan's chances of forming a single-party government for a third consecutive term after an election due in July next year.

Iran Is Developing Secret Uranium-Enrichment Site, Dissident Group Claims

By Flavia Krause-Jackson - Sep 9, 2010 8:43 PM GMT+0500

Iran is developing a secret uranium enrichment site near Qazvin, 120 miles west of Tehran, a dissident group said today, citing satellite images of the area.

The facility is called Behjatad-Abyek and is code-named 311, according to the Iran Policy Committee, which supports the anti-regime People's Mujahedeen of Iran.

“This is certainly part of the secret weapons program,” said Alireza Jafarzadeh, who presented the photos at a Washington press conference. “It’s just moved underground, in tunnels, hidden from the outside world.”

The Iranian government has spent \$100 million on the mountainous site, where the photos, taken as far back as 2008 and as recently as last month, show excavation and tunneling, the group said.

Jafarzadeh said intelligence information the group obtained indicates the facility could accommodate thousands of enrichment centrifuges, and construction at the site will be finished this year. He wouldn’t describe the sources of the information, saying that would endanger the lives of informants.

Iran hasn’t provided information that would confirm the peaceful intent of its nuclear program, United Nations nuclear inspectors said in a report disclosed this week.

The Iranian government boosted its uranium stockpile while failing to increase cooperation with inspectors probing whether the Persian Gulf country is trying to build nuclear weapons, the International Atomic Energy Agency said.

Uranium, the key ingredient for producing nuclear power or bombs, is at the center of the international dispute over Iran’s atomic work. Iran, home to the world’s No. 2 oil and gas reserves, is under four sets of UN sanctions because it refuses to curtail its nuclear work, which the U.S. and European Union say is a shield for weapons development.

Iran, which insists it wants to develop nuclear technology for peaceful purposes, has been under UN investigation since 2003. The country’s Russian-built nuclear power reactor in the southern city of Bushehr was turned on Aug. 21.

Ahmadinejad to visit NY for UN meeting

Mon Sep 13, 2010 10:36PM

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is scheduled to visit New York to attend a UN General Assembly meeting on disarmament, the UN chief says.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon noted that the meeting will be held on Sep. 24.

The UN chief will discuss Iran's nuclear program with the country's top officials during the forthcoming session of the UN General Assembly, reports say.

Ban also called for further cooperation on the part of the Islamic Republic to help resolve the standoff with the West over the country's nuclear program.

"On numerous occasions I have been urging and use this opportunity to urge again Iran to extend its cooperation [with the International Atomic Energy Agency] and to resolve all outstanding issues," RIA Novosti quoted him as saying.

"I will have an opportunity to meet with the officials from the Iranian leadership, possibly with the President of Iran during the General Assembly," he added.

Iran maintains its insistence on exercising its legitimate rights to pursue a civilian nuclear program and has fiercely rejected Western allegations that it may be after nuclear armaments. The Islamic Republic has also repeatedly called for a global nuclear disarmament, a call ignored by the very nuclear powers that accuse Iran of trying to develop nuclear weapons.

The 65th session of the UN General Assembly will open in New York on Tuesday.

Created in Geneva in 1978, the Conference on Disarmament negotiated biological and chemical weapons conventions but has been unable to carry out significant work since 1998 because members could not agree on priorities.

Iran Denies Dissidents' Allegation It's Building Secret Nuclear Facility

By Caroline Alexander - Sep 10, 2010 3:48 PM GMT+0500

Iran's atomic energy chief denied allegations by a dissident group that it has been building a secret uranium-enrichment site west of Tehran.

In Iran "there is no nuclear facility with its own specific definition" that has not been declared to the United Nations' International Atomic Energy Agency, Ali Akbar Salehi was quoted today by the state-owned Mehr news agency as saying. "If they have news of such a thing, then they can tell us."

Alireza Jafarzadeh, a member of the Iran Policy Committee, told reporters in Washington yesterday that the government in Tehran has spent \$100 million building an underground site, citing satellite images and people he didn't indentify. The IPC backs the anti-government People's Mujahedeen of Iran.

Iran, which insists it is developing nuclear technology for peaceful purposes, has been under UN investigation since 2003. Last month, the Iranian government announced that it found sites for 10 uranium enrichment plants and would begin building the first new facility by around March. The Persian Gulf state has declined an IAEA request for more information on the location.

After an overture last year, the U.S. has been raising pressure on its allies to isolate Iran over suspicions it may be using the nuclear program as cover for weapons development. On Sept. 8, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said, "Through our continued willingness to engage Iran

directly, we have re-energized the conversation with our allies and are removing easy excuses for lack of progress.”

Jafarzadeh said intelligence information the group obtained indicates the alleged facility could accommodate a “few thousand” enrichment centrifuges, putting it on par with Iran’s Qom plant rather than a larger facility in Natanz. He declined to describe his sources, saying that would endanger the lives of informants.

The Mujahedeen, which said it disarmed in 2003, has periodically released information about Iran’s nuclear program. It is the biggest member of the National Council of Resistance of Iran, an alliance of exiled opposition groups. While no longer blacklisted by the European Union, the NCRI is still considered a terrorist organization by the U.S., which refers to it by the Iranian government’s name for it, Mujahedeen-e Khalq.

Clinton Says U.S. Is Open to Talks With Iran Even as Sanctions Intensify

By Nicole Gaouette - Sep 8, 2010 7:01 PM GMT+0500

The U.S. remains open to negotiations with Iran even as sanctions intended to constrain the country’s nuclear program begin, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said today in a speech.

“Sanctions and pressure are not ends in themselves,” Clinton said in remarks prepared for the Council on Foreign Relations in Washington. “They are the building blocks of leverage for a negotiated solution, to which we and our partners remain committed.”

In the speech, Clinton said the Obama administration’s foreign policy is working and that U.S. leadership provides the “best hope in a dangerous world.” She cautioned that “rising debt and crumbling infrastructure” at home pose a threat to U.S. economic power and the country’s long-term ability to project its leadership abroad.

The administration is struggling to end the war in Afghanistan, even as it withdraws troops from Iraq. Along with its allies, the U.S. is also coping with a possible succession of power in nuclear-armed North Korea.

The U.S. is also trying to develop deeper ties with “emerging centers of influence,” including China, India, Brazil, Indonesia and Turkey, Clinton said.

“The world is counting on us,” Clinton said. “For the United States, global leadership is both a responsibility and an unparalleled opportunity.”

Iran Says It Is Ready to Release U.S. Hiker Sarah Shourd on \$500,000 Bail

By Ladane Nasserri - Sep 12, 2010 11:11 PM GMT+0500

Iran is ready to free the U.S. hiker Sarah Shourd on bail of \$500,000, Tehran prosecutor Abbas Jafari-Dolatabadi said, after authorities delayed her release scheduled for yesterday, citing incomplete legal procedures.

“Sarah Shourd, the U.S. spy, can be released on bail of \$500,000,” Jafari-Dolatabadi was quoted as saying today by the state-run Fars news agency.

White House Advisor David Axelrod said the administration was “hopeful” and “encouraged” by the reports, but told NBC’s “Meet the Press” that he wouldn’t comment specifically because “we’re at a sensitive stage here.”

Shourd, 32, was arrested in July 31, 2009, along with two other U.S. citizens, Shane Bauer and Josh Fattal, for illegally crossing into Iran from Iraqi Kurdistan. Iranian state-run news agencies had reported last week she would be released yesterday in an act of clemency.

Shourd’s lawyer Massoud Shafei said he’d relayed the terms of the release to her family and to the Swiss embassy in Tehran, which represents U.S. interests in the country.

“I spoke to the family. Once the bail is ready I will be able to follow up for her release. It will depend on the family,” he said in a phone interview from Tehran. He said he didn’t know whether the bail will be ready tonight.

Prosecutor Jafari-Dolatabadi today criticized the government announcement regarding the imminent release, saying it had been made while the judiciary was still working on the case, the state-run Mehr news agency reported.

‘Espionage’

“There are enough reasons” for the three Americans to be accused of espionage, Jafari-Dolatabadi said in a separate report on the official Islamic Republic News Agency. “Their case is almost complete and the judge has issued an indictment,” he said, adding that the two men are to be taken into custody while the judge decided Shourd could be freed “based on her illness.”

Shourd suffers from depression, has a precancerous condition and told her mother that she had discovered a lump in her breast, according to an Aug. 5 report on freethehikers.org, a campaign website set up to help gain the three Americans’ release.

Shourd’s mother had asked the United Nations’ Special Rapporteur on Torture last month to step in to help end her daughter’s solitary confinement, according to the website.

Iranian local media announced Sept. 9 that Shourd would be released two days later after Iranian officials, including President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, “closely studied the case.”

The gesture to free Shourd marked the end of the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, and symbolizes Islamic compassion and Iran's "special regard for women," Foreign Ministry spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast said of the original release plan.

U.K. Sailors

Iran sparked a crisis in 2007 when it held 15 U.K. sailors and marines for two weeks for allegedly trespassing into Iranian waters. Two years earlier, Iran jailed a Frenchman and a German citizen who strayed into Iranian waters during a fishing trip. They were released from an 18-month prison term in 2007 after being granted clemency by Iran's highest authority, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Shourd lived with Bauer in the Syrian capital, Damascus, where she taught English, according to freethehikers.org. Bauer, 28, is a freelance journalist and photographer who has traveled in the Middle East and northern Africa over the past seven years. Their friend Fattal, also 28, is an environmentalist who was visiting Damascus before they headed to Iraq, according to the website.

Iran and the U.S. have had no diplomatic ties since the 1979 Islamic revolution which replaced Iran's monarchy with the Islamic Republic.

Fidel Castro Says Iran Should Recognize the Holocaust, Persecution of Jews

By Blake Schmidt - Sep 8, 2010 10:46 PM GMT+0500

Former Cuban President Fidel Castro criticized Mahmoud Ahmadinejad for denying the Holocaust and said the Iranian leader's anti-Semitism doesn't help the cause for peace.

Iran's government should understand that Jews "were expelled from their land, persecuted and mistreated all over the world," Castro said in an interview posted on The Atlantic magazine's website. "I don't think anyone has been slandered more than the Jews. I would say much more than the Muslims."

The interviewer, Jeffrey Goldberg, said in his blog yesterday that he was summoned by the Cuban leader to discuss his article in the September issue of The Atlantic on the possibility of an Israeli air attack on Iran's nuclear facilities.

In a second installment from a series of meetings with Castro, posted online today, Goldberg said Castro was asked whether the Cuban economic and political system was worth exporting.

"The Cuban model doesn't even work for us anymore," Castro responded, according to Goldberg. Castro didn't expand on the comment.

Since emerging in July to give his first public speeches after undergoing surgery four years ago, Castro has repeatedly warned an attack on Iran could trigger a nuclear war.

Fidel, 84, began transferring control to his brother Raul in July 2006, when he underwent intestinal surgery, and officially stepped down as president in 2008.

Iran's Jewish MP raps Quran desecration

Tue Sep 14, 2010 11:0AM

Jewish member of Iran's Parliament (Majlis) Siamak Moreh Sedq describes the desecration of the holy Quran in the US as an "insane act without rational justification."

The Jewish lawmaker said that such sacrilegious insults against religions would only serve the interests of "Zionism," saying, "God believers should prove that [such actions] will only consolidate their will to counter Zionism and arrogant powers."

"What has been proven to everyone is that such a heinous act has been orchestrated by the most brainless followers of imperialism and Zionism," Moreh Sedq told Mehr news agency on Monday.

Five other minority members in the Iranian parliament also denounced the catastrophe in a statement.

Prior to this year's anniversary of the September 11 attacks, an extremist Florida pastor, Terry Jones, officially declared that he would set the Quran on fire, but he was forced to call off his decision after he faced international condemnation.

Yet, some anti-Islam protestors burned pages of the Muslim's holy book on September 11, facing no police intervention or reaction whatsoever.

Meanwhile, another group tore some pages of the holy Quran in front of the White House.

The insulting move triggered angry protests across the world, particularly in Muslim states.

Iranian Diplomat Quits Post in Brussels to Join Opposition, Heydari Says

By Ladane Nasserri - Sep 13, 2010 11:20 PM GMT+0500

Iranian diplomat Farzad Farhangian has resigned from his post in Belgium to join the opposition, Mohammad Reza Heydari, former consul of the Iranian embassy in Norway who himself quit last year, said in a phone interview from Oslo.

Farhangian resigned on Sept. 9 and is now in Oslo under police protection, Heydari said today.

Iran Nuclear Monitors' Report Is a 'Source of Concern,' UN Chief Ban Says

By Bill Varner - Sep 13, 2010 9:33 PM GMT+0500

Iran's pursuit of uranium enrichment, as reported by nuclear inspectors last week, is a "source of concern," United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon told reporters today.

Iran "should have provided necessary cooperation to confirm that all their nuclear material is for peaceful activities," Ban said. "The report further states that contrary to Security Council resolutions Iran has not suspended enrichment-related and heavy water-related activities."

The International Atomic Energy Agency concluded that Iran is boosting its enriched uranium stockpile while failing to help the agency determine the intentions of the program.

Iran's Former Embassy in U.S. Can't Be Seized to Pay Damages, Judge Rules

By William McQuillen - Sep 10, 2010 10:25 PM GMT+0500

A Hamas bombing victim's family can't seize Iran's former embassy and other Washington properties to satisfy a \$12 million default judgment, an appeals court ruled.

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia today rejected arguments by Marla Ann Bennett's family that the properties were no longer used for diplomatic purposes, so they are no longer immune from attachment.

Bennett was a 24-year-old student at Hebrew University in Jerusalem when she was killed in a bombing in July 2002. Her family, who lived in California, sued Iran after Hamas, which the Iranian government has helped fund, claimed responsibility for the attack.

The U.S. has looked after the properties, which include the ambassador's residence, another residence and two parking lots, since cutting diplomatic ties in 1980 following the take-over of the U.S. embassy in Tehran. Since 1983, the U.S. has periodically rented out the properties, with the revenue earmarked for the upkeep under the Vienna Convention.

The court rejected the Bennetts' claim that renting the property has removed the diplomatic protection, pointing out that the rent is used for a diplomatic purpose.

The case is *Bennett v. Islamic Republic of Iran*, 09-5147, U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia. The lower court case is 03-cv-01486, U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia (Washington).

American Citizen Sarah Shourd Leaves Iran for Oman After Release, AFP Says

By Heather Langan - Sep 14, 2010 8:31 PM GMT+0500

U.S. citizen Sarah Shourd left Iran for Oman after her release today following a year in detention on spying charges, Agence France-Presse reported, citing the Swiss ambassador in Tehran.

Iran Diplomat Who Defected in Brussels Seeks Political Asylum in Norway

By Marianne Stigset - Sep 14, 2010 1:35 PM GMT+0500

Iranian diplomat Farzad Farhangian, who resigned from his post in Brussels last week to protest his government's policies, is seeking asylum in Norway, his lawyer said.

Farhangian arrived in Oslo yesterday with his family, Arild Humlen said today by telephone. Farhangian is receiving protection from the authorities, Humlen said, without giving further details.

"As far as I've understood, he chose to come to Norway out of concern for his personal safety," said Humlen, who was asked to represent Farhangian by the Norwegian-Iranian Support Committee. Farhangian's resignation "is a protest against Iranian policy and violation of human rights," Humlen said.

Farhangian is the third Iranian diplomat to seek asylum in the Nordic countries in less than a year. Hossein Alizadeh said he is seeking political asylum in Finland after resigning last week as the deputy head of the mission for Iran's embassy in Helsinki to protest his government's crackdown on dissidents following the 2009 presidential elections. Mohammad-Reza Heydari, who was a consul at the Iranian Embassy in Norway, obtained asylum in the country earlier this year.

Gunnar Johansen, a spokesman at the Ministry of Justice, and Aasmund Eide, the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration's spokesman, declined to comment on the grounds that the agencies don't discuss specific applications.

Iranian-African Cooperation Has 'No Limits,' Ahmadinejad Tells Conference

By Ladane Nasserli - Sep 14, 2010 2:07 PM GMT+0500

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said he sees "no limits or restrictions" on Iran's cooperation with countries in Africa.

Iran and African nations are "culturally and historically friends and brothers who are fighting in the same camp," Ahmadinejad said today at the opening of a conference in Tehran, according to the official Islamic Republic News Agency.

Iran and Africa have lands that are rich in natural resources and have had to counter the presence of “oppressors and foreign pillagers,” Ahmadinejad was cited by IRNA as telling conference guests, including Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade and his Malawian counterpart, Bingu wa Mutharika.

The two-day Iran-Africa conference is aimed at exploring ways of expanding political and economic ties between the Persian Gulf country and African states. Iran is under four sets of United Nations economic sanctions over its nuclear program, which the U.S. and many of its allies allege may be disguising the development of weapons.

The second-largest Iranian auto manufacturer, Saipa, signed a contract to open a factory in Sudan for the production of about 35,000 cars over the next five years, Iran’s state-run Press TV reported today.

Saipa’s “successful presence” in the Sudanese market led it to build a factory to produce cars there, Nematollah Poustindouz, the company’s chief executive officer, was quoted as saying in the report. Saipa, which 48 percent is owned by the government, plans to expand into the nine countries that border Sudan, he said.

U.S. Hiker Shourd Freed on Bail After Year in Iranian Prison, Lawyer Says

By Ladane Nasserli - Sep 14, 2010 4:57 PM GMT+0500

U.S. hiker Sarah Shourd was freed on bail by Iranian authorities today, her lawyer Masoud Shafie said in a phone interview in Tehran.

Iran urges enhanced ties with Africa

Wed Sep 15, 2010 9:53AM

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad stresses the importance of taking practical steps to promote relations with African countries in view of common interests with Iran.

"Iran and African countries have great potential which can be used to benefit their nations," said President Ahmadinejad in a meeting with Burkina Faso Foreign Minister Alain Be'douma Yoda in Tehran on Tuesday on the sidelines of a two-day Iran-Africa summit.

"Bolstering cooperation between Iran and African countries will be beneficial to the region and the world and will not be harmful to anyone," he added.

The Burkina Faso minister, for his part, said his country attaches special significance to Iran's role in regional and international developments and called for improving relations with Tehran.

In a meeting with Sudanese Foreign Minister Ali Ahmed Karti, the Iranian president denounced an "arrogant view by arrogant powers of the Sudanese government and nation" and said the Islamic Republic supports the rights of the Sudanese people in all international bodies.

"The hegemonic system is not interested in the existence of any powerful country in the world. So, it uses various means to counter independent and freedom-seeking nations," the Iranian president said.

Karti praised relations with the Islamic Republic and urged further promotion of cooperation in trade and economic fields.

He said Sudan supports Iran's right to use nuclear technology for peaceful applications and added that Tehran's resistance to the US and its allies is a matter of honor for Khartoum.

President Ahmadinejad told the Ivory Coast's parliament speaker that the two countries should draw up plans to promote bilateral and regional cooperation.

In a meeting with Somali Foreign Minister Yusuf Hassan Ibrahim, the Iranian president said arrogant powers do not support the establishment of peace and security in Somalia which enjoys a "very sensitive position geographically."

Urging all countries to help Somalia establish sustainable security, Ahmadinejad said, "No one benefits from insecurity. We hope extremism and insecurity will be eradicated through the resistance of governments and nations in the world."

The Somali minister said "historical ties and common culture" between the two countries would play a leading role in expanding relations.

Freed American Arrives in Oman as Iran Keeps Companions Jailed

By Ladane Nasser - Sep 15, 2010 3:48 AM GMT+0500

Sarah Shourd arrived in Oman after Iran freed the American from detention on spying charges, while keeping her two companions jailed in a case that highlights friction between the U.S. and Iran.

The government of Oman welcomed Shourd's release and "expressed its sincere thanks and appreciation to the Iranian leadership," according to the state-run Oman news agency.

Iran's state-run Press TV showed Shourd, wearing a dark red scarf over her hair, walking toward a plane in Tehran that would carry her across the Persian Gulf to Oman's capital, Muscat. She waved goodbye from a window of the aircraft after more than a year of detention in Iran.

Shourd, 32, thanked Iranian officials, including President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, and religious leaders “for this humanitarian gesture,” she was shown on television saying. In an interview from Tehran yesterday, Shourd’s lawyer, Masoud Shafiei, said Shourd was in good spirits and was planning to be reunited with her mother in Oman.

The Iranian government hopes that Shourd’s release will be seen as a goodwill gesture, Anoush Ehteshami, professor of international relations at Durham University in the U.K., said. The freeing of Shourd may improve Iran’s image at the opening of the United Nations General Assembly next week, he said.

Ahmadinejad “cannot go to New York empty-handed, as it were, particularly as he will be asked about prisoners at every turn during his visit,” Ehteshami wrote in an e-mail.

Iran and the U.S. are at odds over Iranian nuclear efforts that American and European officials say may be intended to create a weapons capability. The U.S. is pressing financial and trade sanctions on Iran while holding out the possibility of negotiations over the dispute.

Two Other Prisoners

U.S. President Barack Obama said he was “pleased” that Shourd was released, and called on the Iranian government to free the other two prisoners.

“We remain hopeful that Iran will demonstrate renewed compassion by ensuring the return of Shane, Josh and all the other missing or detained Americans in Iran,” Obama said in a statement.

Shourd was arrested on July 31, 2009, along with Americans Shane Bauer and Josh Fattal, for illegally crossing into Iran from Iraqi Kurdistan. The U.S. government has said the three mistakenly wandered across the border during a hiking trip and has denied they were working for the U.S. as spies.

Prosecutor Abbas Jafari-Dolatabadi said Sept. 12 that Iran was ready to free Shourd on bail of \$500,000. Shafiei said he saw a document stating that the bail had been paid by Shourd’s family.

Paying Bail

The Associated Press cited unidentified U.S. officials as saying that Oman had helped organize the payment and ensured it didn’t violate U.S. sanctions on Iran.

State Department spokesman Philip J. Crowley told reporters Sept. 13 that under U.S. policy the “government does not fund prisoner bail.”

Jafari-Dolatabadi said that there were “enough reasons” for the three Americans to be accused of espionage, and the judge in the case decided that Shourd could be freed “based on her illness.”

Shourd suffers from depression and told her mother that she had discovered a lump in her breast, according to an Aug. 5 report on freethehikers.org, a website set up to help gain the Americans' release.

Bauer and Fattal's detention has been extended, Jafari- Dolatabadi said yesterday, according to Press TV. He said the two men have the right to appeal.

Espionage Cases

"Their files will be sent to the Revolutionary Court, which is in charge of handling espionage cases," he said. "They should await their trial and therefore there is no talk of granting them release for now."

Authorities had delayed freeing Shourd as initially scheduled on Sept. 11, citing incomplete legal procedures.

Iran sparked a crisis in 2007 when it held 15 U.K. sailors and marines for two weeks over allegations they had trespassed into Iranian waters. Two years earlier, Iran jailed a Frenchman and a German citizen who strayed into Iranian waters during a fishing trip. They were released from an 18-month prison term in 2007 after being granted clemency by Iran's highest authority, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Shourd lived with Bauer in the Syrian capital, Damascus, where she taught English, according to freethehikers.org. Bauer is a freelance journalist and photographer who traveled in the Middle East and northern Africa during the past seven years, while Fattal is an environmentalist who was visiting Damascus before they headed to Iraq, according to the website.

Shourd is from California, while Bauer is a Minnesota native and Fattal is from Pennsylvania.

Ahmadinejad's envoys become advisors

Wed Sep 15, 2010 9:17AM

Amid controversy over President Ahmadinejad's controversial appointment of his own envoys for international affairs, the Iranian chief executive assigns the men as advisors.

The president made the decision after the appointment of his special envoys in the arena of foreign policy provoked outrage among Iranian officials, including members of the Parliament (Majlis) who said he was conducting parallel tasks in the international sector.

In a written notice, 122 lawmakers urged President Ahmadinejad to avoid such actions and stick to guidelines recently offered by the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei.

Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast also urged the government to avoid adopting measures that may "weaken the country's foreign policy system."

"The Iranian Foreign Ministry is the place where foreign policy decisions are finalized," Mehmanparast said.

The president's decree cancels his envoys' assignments but appoints them as his advisors for the identical international areas, Mehr news agency reported on Wednesday.

The recent decree appoints Esfandiyar Rahim-Mashaei, Hamid Baqaee, Mohammad Mehdi Akhoundzadeh and Abolfazl Zohrehvand as presidential advisors on the Middle East, Asian Affairs, the Caspian Sea and Afghanistan Affairs, respectively.

Meanwhile, Shamseddin Hosseini and Mohammad Abbasi have been chosen as President Ahmadinejad's advisors on African and Latin American affairs.

IAEA to meet on Iran, Syria, Israel

Wed Sep 15, 2010 5:44AM

The Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is to hold a meeting at the agency's headquarters to review Iran, Syria and Israel's nuclear programs.

The IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano's latest report on Iran's nuclear program is due to be discussed in the regular meeting of the agency on Wednesday.

Amano's report, released early September, has reaffirmed Tehran's commitment to the agency's rules and confirmed the non-diversion of Iran's nuclear activities towards military or banned objectives.

Although the technical details of the report continue to evade most readers, it underscores the Islamic Republic's successful achievements in technical and scientific activities, particularly enrichment, Iran's Ambassador to the IAEA Ali Asghar Soltanieh told Fars news agency after the release of the report.

Earlier, the Iranian envoy said that he would provide the Board of Governors with a technical analysis of the IAEA report.

The Non-Aligned Movement's statement in support of Iran's nuclear program, released three days after Amano's report, will be read out by the Egyptian ambassador to the IAEA during the meeting.

The 35 members of the Board of Governors will also address Israeli and Syrian nuclear capabilities and IAEA technical cooperation programs as well.

Economic Front:

Japan Suspends Iran Energy Investments, Freezes Assets in New Sanctions

By Takashi Hirokawa and Sachiko Sakamaki - Sep 3, 2010 7:21 AM GMT+0500

Japan said it is suspending new oil and gas investments in Iran and freezing the assets of 88 organizations and 24 individuals in its latest round of sanctions for the Middle Eastern country's nuclear program.

"We've decided to add more sanctions to prevent nuclear proliferation and development," Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshito Sengoku told reporters today in Tokyo. "It's important for the international community to unify pressure on Iran to make a wise decision while keeping open the window for dialogue."

The United Nations in June passed a fourth round of restrictions against Iran for refusing to suspend its enrichment of uranium, which can produce reactor fuel or bomb-grade material. Iran denies it plans to make weapons and says the enrichment is for peaceful purposes, such as fueling a medical- research reactor in Tehran.

The Obama administration two weeks ago concluded talks with eight countries including Japan about ways to strengthen financial sanctions against Iran. Catherine Ashton, the European Union's high commissioner in charge of foreign affairs, urged China yesterday to help make a new round of EU sanctions on Iran effective.

Iran is Japan's third-biggest supplier of crude oil. Japan imported \$9.3 billion worth of goods from the country in 2009, almost all in fuel, while exporting \$1.7 billion in automobiles and machines, according to the Japan External Trade Organization.

NIBA slams EU sanctions against Iran

Fri Sep 3, 2010 3:18AM

The Netherlands Iranian Business Association (NIBA) criticizes the new EU sanctions against Iran targeting its foreign trade, financial services, and energy and gas sectors.

More than one hundred businessmen slammed the 27-member economic and political union for a recent package of sanctions against the Islamic Republic in a statement released on Thursday.

They maintained that the move by Iran's largest trading partner is to the detriment of Dutch firms, a Press TV correspondent reported.

Late July, the European Union's foreign ministers approved tougher, unilateral sanctions against Iran, which target investment and technical assistance to the country's refining, liquefaction and natural gas sectors.

The punitive measure goes beyond a fourth round of UN Security Council sanctions imposed on June 9, targeting Iran's oil and gas sectors.

The United States, Israel, and some of their allies accuse Tehran of pursuing military objectives in its nuclear program.

Yet, as a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and a member of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Iran has the right to develop and acquire nuclear technology meant for peaceful purposes.

In addition, the IAEA has conducted numerous inspections of Iran's nuclear facilities but has never found any evidence showing that Iran's civilian nuclear program has been diverted to nuclear weapons production.

Iran mulling over gas export to Bahrain

Sat Sep 4, 2010 6:30PM

Iran says it is mulling over the outlines of a joint agreement with Bahrain for the export of Iranian natural gas to the Persian Gulf state.

Iran's Deputy Oil Minister Javad Oji said on Saturday that Iranian and Bahraini officials met in Tehran to discuss measures for the establishment of a joint commission to increase cooperation in the natural gas sector, Mehr news agency reported.

"If [a deal is] finalized, a new natural gas pipeline will be built under the Persian Gulf waters; the pipeline is expected to transfer one billion cubic feet of Iran's gas to Bahrain," said Oji, who also heads the National Iranian Gas Export Company.

A joint working group has been set up to facilitate the signing of the major gas deal between the two regional states.

The Iranian energy ministry official said the gas transfer will be carried out in two phases, explaining that 500 cubic feet of natural gas will be sent to Bahrain each day in the first stage, while up to one billion feet of gas is expected to be dispatched to the Persian Gulf state if a final agreement is reached on the issue.

The remarks come as Iranian Oil Minister Massoud Mir-Kazemi and Bahraini Oil and Gas Affairs Minister Abdul-Hussain Bin Ali Mirza met last week to discuss the export of Iran's natural gas to Bahrain.

Iran holds the world's second largest-natural gas reserves after Russia.

Iran imports rise 22% in 5 months

Sun Sep 5, 2010 6:39AM

Tehran's imports have passed \$24.2 billion in the first five months of the current Iranian calendar year (started March 21), Iran's Customs says.

New data show the country's imports increased by 22.2 percent between March and August compared with the corresponding figure last year, Mehr news agency reported.

According to the report, gasoline accounted for 9.24 percent of total imports.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) exported \$7.7 billion worth of goods to Iran in the mentioned period to rank first among exporter countries.

The figures also indicate that Tehran exported more than \$11.8 billion worth of non-oil goods (including gas condensates) during the same period.

The amount shows a 23.86 percent increase compared to the pervious year.

The main target markets for exports were China, Iraq, the UAE, India, and South Korea.

Iran car production increases by 6.21%

Mon Sep 6, 2010 4:44AM

Iran's car production has increased by 6.21 percent in the first 5 months of the current Iranian calendar year to reach 602,052 vehicles.

Iran's Ministry of Industries and Mines said in a report that Iranian car manufacturers have produced 514,434 passenger cars and 87,618 heavy vehicles between March 21 and August 23, IRIB reported.

Iran's two major car manufacturers, Iran Khodro and Saipa, produced more than 1.4 million different models of cars last year.

An August report by the International Organization of Motor Vehicle Manufacturers places Iran on the list of top-five global car producers with the most growth in 2009.

Iran's car production showed a 9.5 percent growth last year, ranking fifth after China, Taiwan, Romania and India.

With the total production of 1,395,421 cars, including 35,901 commercial vehicles, Iran also climbed the chart to become the world's twelfth carmaker.

In 2008, Iran ranked 16th with the total production of 1,274,184 passenger and commercial cars.

Japan lost its ranking to China with a 31.5 percent fall in overall production, but maintained second place, followed by the United States and Germany according to the Paris-based organization's report.

Iran gas export to Turkey resumes

Mon Sep 6, 2010 5:27AM

Iran's natural gas exports to Turkey has resumed after it was halted due to an explosion in Turkey on August 25 that damaged a pipeline.

Valiollah Dini, an official with the Iranian Oil Ministry, said on Sunday that Iran's gas flow to Turkey resumed from the Bazargan border after twelve days of disruption.

Last week, Dini pointed out that gas supplies would begin with 4 to 5 million cubic meters and will reach 24 to 25 million cubic meters per day.

The dispatching director of the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC), Hassan Montazer Torbati, told SHANA news agency that the Turkish state-run pipeline operator, Botas, informed NIGC on Sunday that it is through with repairs and ready to receive the Iranian gas.

Torbati further added that following the call "gas exports to Turkey resumed at 10:40 a.m. today (Sunday) from the border at Bazargan."

Iran is supplying Turkey with 24 million cubic meters of gas per day, and it can be increased to 30 million cubic meters if requested, he stated.

An overnight blast on August 25, allegedly carried out by the separatist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), forced Turkish authorities to shut down the conduit in the country's eastern province of Agri, which borders Iran.

It was the second time over a month that an explosion disrupted gas supplies via the key link.

Last month, a similar blast occurred in another section of the pipeline close to the eastern Turkish town of Dogubayazit, near Iran's border. When the explosion on July 21 halted gas flows, it took 10 days to fix the pipeline.

The contract to export gas to Turkey was signed in 1996 with Botas. Under the terms of the contract, NIGC is obliged to deliver 10 billion cubic meters of natural gas annually for 25 years.

Iran has sent 2.5 billion cubic meters of natural gas to Turkey since late March.

Iran is Turkey's second-biggest supplier of natural gas after Russia. Iran's gas exports to Turkey in 2009 amounted to roughly \$7 billion. Turkey uses gas to fuel half of its power plants.

Iran exports 5.5 bn kWh of electricity

Mon Sep 6, 2010 6:9AM

Iran ranks the 19th largest producer and 20th largest consumer of electricity in the world.

Iran has exported more than 5.5 billion kWh of electricity to its neighboring countries during the past Iranian calendar year (ending March 20).

Iran's Energy Ministry said in a statement on Monday that new data shows a 180 percent growth in electricity exports compared with corresponding figures in the previous year, IRNA reported.

On Sunday, Iranian Energy Minister Majid Namjou said Iran's electricity network has integrated into power grids of seven neighboring countries including Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan.

He further pointed out that Iran also plans to connect its national power network to the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Russia, India, Qatar, the UAE, Jordan, Syria and Oman are the new countries that have asked Iran for electricity.

According to Namjou, the Islamic Republic has the capability to turn into a regional electricity hub.

Iran to invest \$13bn in South Pars

Mon Sep 6, 2010 8:3AM

Iran has the world's second largest natural gas reserves after Russia.

Iran plans to invest around \$13 billion to develop the remaining phases of the giant South Pars gas field, says a senior Iranian oil official.

“13 billion dollars would be invested in (the South Pars gas) field's projects by issuing bonds and using other resources in the current year,” Head of Pars Oil and Gas Company (POGC) Ali Vakili told SHANA news agency on Monday.

He further pointed out that the Iranian Oil Ministry would also use oil revenues and foreign investments to finance the gas field that is jointly owned by Iran and Qatar.

The Iranian share of the field has reserves of about 14 trillion cubic meters of gas, which accounts for about eight percent of the total world gas reserves.

Vakili went on to say that the ministry has received the required permit from the Central Bank of Iran to issue bonds worth 3 billion euros and Iranian rial-dominated bonds worth around \$3 billion to finance the project.

Last month, Iranian Oil Minister Masoud Mirkazemi said that when all phases of the South Pars field become operational, the annual revenue of the field will soar to \$100 billion, raising Iran's gas output to 1.1 billion cubic meters per day.

Stressing the need for attracting foreign investment in the country's oil industry, the minister said the oil ministry's resources alone can not meet the country's developmental needs, while adding that Iranian and foreign companies could finance energy projects or help acquire the required sources for the oil industry's undertakings.

Known as the world's largest gas field, South Pars holds an estimated 50.97 trillion cubic meters (1,800 trillion cubic feet) of in-situ gas and some 50 billion barrels of condensates.

The gas field covers an area of 9,700 square kilometers, of which 3,700 square kilometers (South Pars) is in Iranian territorial waters and 6,000 square kilometers (North Dome) is in Qatar's territorial waters.

India to buy Iran gas via sea pipeline?

Tue Sep 7, 2010 7:43AM

Iran's 7th cross-country gas pipeline was put into operation in July. The 902-kilometer pipeline is the first phase of the proposed Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline project, dubbed the Peace Pipeline.

A year after moving back from a gas pipeline project with Iran and Pakistan, India has again expressed interest in buying Iran's natural gas, but this time via a sea pipeline.

India has expressed willingness to restart negotiations through an international firm, to independently import natural gas from Iran via a sea pipeline, Deputy Oil Minister and Managing Director of the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) Javad Owji said.

"No exact date has been yet finalized for the gas talks between Iran and India but they are expected to start after the month of Ramadan," he told Mehr news agency on Tuesday.

He noted that there has been no decision yet on how to export Iran's gas to India.

"Using a pipeline through Pakistan's soil or building a deepwater pipeline are the main possible options," he said.

Iran's deputy foreign minister said in August that the country welcomes the presence of India in a regional gas transfer project, which is known as the 'Peace Pipeline' 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," Mohammad Ali Fathollahi said.

In July, the Iranian Oil Ministry's gas exports authority, Asghar Soheilipour, advised India to reconsider joining the Peace Pipeline project.

The official stressed that the Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline would be the most economical and efficient export route.

Earlier this year, Iran and Pakistan signed a deal to build the pipeline under which Tehran agreed to deliver 21.2 million cubic meters (750 million cubic feet) of natural gas per day to Pakistan beginning in 2014.

Meanwhile, Mehr news agency said that Bangladesh also has made a proposal to receive Iran's natural gas through the regional gas pipeline.

Iran's Oil Ministry officials have not yet commented on the report.

South Korea to Ban New Oil, Gas Investments in Iran on Nuclear Program

By Bomi Lim and Eunkyung Seo - Sep 8, 2010 11:35 AM GMT+0500

South Korea said it will ban any new investments for Iranian oil, gas and construction projects, joining nations including the U.S. in imposing sanctions for the Middle Eastern country's nuclear program.

South Korea also put 102 Iranian organizations including Tehran-based Bank Mellat and 24 individuals on a list banning financial transactions without central bank approval, according to an e-mailed statement today from the Ministry of Strategy and Finance. South Korea will prohibit its own banks from opening new branches in Iran and Iranian banks from expanding in South Korea.

"The Bank of Korea will apply very strict rules in approving financial and trade transactions," Vice Finance Minister Yim Jong Yong told reporters today in Gwacheon, south of Seoul. "We will sincerely follow the UN resolution."

The move comes after the United Nations imposed new sanctions against Iran in June, prompting the U.S., European Union, Canada, Australia and Japan to toughen their punitive measures. The U.S. has pressed South Korea to follow, after backing South Korean claims that North Korea sank one of its warships in March.

Deputy Assistant Secretary of Treasury Daniel Glaser said on Aug. 2 in Seoul that it was “absolutely vital” for South Korea to impose measures against Iran.

Iran is South Korea’s fourth-largest supplier of crude oil, according to the state-run Korea National Oil Corp. South Korea imported \$5.7 billion of Iranian goods last year, while exporting \$4 billion, according to the Korea International Trade Association. South Korea’s total imports were \$323 billion, and exports \$363 billion.

Seoul-based GS Engineering & Construction Corp. on July 1 said a 1.42 trillion won (\$1.2 billion) order to build a gas project in Iran was canceled because of strengthened U.S. and United Nations sanctions.

U.A.E. Freezes Four Iranian Accounts After UN Sanctions, Ittihad Reports

By Zahraa Alkhalisi - Sep 7, 2010 9:23 AM GMT+0500

The United Arab Emirates Central Bank froze four Iranian accounts, Al Ittihad reported, citing a central bank official it didn’t identify.

The four are from a list of 41 names which the United Nations Security Council requested to have their accounts frozen, the newspaper said. The remaining 37 don’t have bank accounts in the country, the newspaper added.

Iran Bans Imports of 49 Agricultural Products Including Apples, Donya Says

By Ladane Nasserli - Sep 9, 2010 1:18 PM GMT+0500

Iran’s Agriculture Ministry banned the import of 49 agriculture products, Donya-e-Eqtasad reported.

Iranian Agriculture Minister Sadegh Khalilian wrote to the Commerce Ministry demanding imports of certain fruit, fruit concentrates and dairy products to be halted until further notice, the newspaper said, citing the document.

The list of products includes onions, garlic, potatoes, pear, strawberries as well as apples from France, pears from China and oranges from Egypt, the newspaper said. The ban also includes powdered milk, pomegranate and tomato concentrates.

The move comes two weeks after the agriculture Ministry announced that non-“essential” imports would be restricted.

Iran govt. urged to enforce subsidy law

Wed Sep 8, 2010 6:34PM

A senior Iranian lawmaker warns against government delays in implementing the targeted subsidies plan, saying the Parliament (Majlis) is closely monitoring the matter.

In early January, Majlis passed a bill proposed by the government of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad which is aimed at distributing a portion of the revenues recovered from rolling back subsidies on fuel and some food items in the form of direct payments to low-income Iranians.

The government has undertaken to deposit the payments into accounts opened for individuals two months before the implementation of the plan to partially compensate for possible resulting price hikes.

“The government has not done much about implementing the targeted subsidies plan,” Mehr News Agency quoted Hassan Ghafourifard as saying on Wednesday.

“If this plan is not implemented by the end of September, Majlis will use its supervisory tools and diligently follow up [on the implementation of] this law,” said the lawmaker, who is also on the Majlis Presiding Board.

The Economic Reform Plan, encompassing targeting the goods subsidies, is probably one of the most important undertakings in Iran's recent economic history.

The controversial plan, scheduled to be implemented in September is expected to phase out up to USD 20 billion in state subsidies for staples such as food and fuel.

Iran carpet exports pass \$204mn

Sun Sep 12, 2010 6:25AM

Iran's carpet exports have increased by nearly 50 percent to reach \$204 million in the first five months of the current Iranian year (started on March 21).

"The exports of hand-woven carpets jumped by 49.37 percent in the first five months of the current year compared with corresponding figures in the same period of the previous year," IRNA quoted Feysal Mardasi, the head of Iran's National Carpet Center, as saying on Saturday.

The Iranian official predicted that the country's carpet exports will pass \$500 million by the end of the year.

Mardasi further added that the 19th Hand-Made Carpet Grand Exhibition would be held in the Iranian capital of Tehran September 23-29 to show carpets, rugs, kilims and Persian handicrafts.

The United States is the largest customer of Iranian hand-woven carpets. It imports 17 million dollars worth of carpets annually from Iran, Mardasi said last month.

Iran exports carpets to more than 100 countries in the world. The country produces about five million square meters of carpets annually, of which 80 percent are sold in international markets.

There is an estimated population of 1.2 million weavers in Iran who produce carpets for both domestic and international markets.

Carpet-weaving is undoubtedly one of the most distinguished manifestations of Persian culture and art, dating back to ancient Persia.

Iranian carmaker plans Venezuela plant

Mon Sep 13, 2010 12:37PM

Iranian auto giant Iran Khodro Company (IKCO) has submitted a plan to the Venezuelan government for building a car manufacturing plant worth \$101 million in the Latin American country.

Mir Javad Soleimani, IKCO's deputy CEO for quality and product development, made the appeal in a meeting with Venezuelan Ambassador to Tehran David Velasquez Caraballo on Sunday.

In case the plan receives approval from the Venezuelan government, IKCO will begin construction of the factory within a month, projecting its completion within two years, Moj news agency quoted Soleimani as saying.

Soleimani said the plant will be able to produce 100,000 automobiles a year.

Venirauto, an Iran-Venezuela joint factory, started assembling IKCO's Samand sedans in Venezuela in 2006.

Iran has a 51% stake in the factory while Venezuela holds 49 percent of the shares.

The IKCO, the Middle East's largest automaker, exports its products to a number of countries, including Belarus, Russia, Syria, Tajikistan and Venezuela.

Iran's oil output falls by 15,000 bpd

Mon Sep 13, 2010 1:21PM

Iran's oil production has decreased by around 15,000 barrels per day (bpd) in August, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) says.

OPEC, in its monthly oil market report released on Sunday, said that the oil-rich country produced 3.680 million bpd during the period down from the 3.695 million bpd in July.

“Iran's oil consumption has been on the decline since the beginning of year,” the report added.

Iran produced 3.749 million bpd and 3.728 million bpd in the first and second quarters of this year, the OPEC said.

“Crude oil production from Angola, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela increase by more than 10,000 bpd in August while crude output from Iran, Kuwait, Nigeria, and the UAE decreased by more than 10,000 bpd,” the report added.

The average price of Iran's heavy oil increased by 20 dollars to 74.67 dollars in the first eight months of 2010 compared to the same period of the previous year.

“Imports from the UAE, Japan's second largest crude supplier in July, rose 22.8 percent month on month (m-o-m) and 2.3 percent year on year to 755.7 trillion bpd, while imports from Iran were up 50.1 percent m-o-m to 460.1 trillion bpd, making it the country's third-largest supplier for the month,” the OPEC report said.

China also experienced a significant decrease in its imports from Venezuela, Kuwait, Iraq and Nigeria, while imports from Iran and Libya showed positive growth, the report added.

Iran is OPEC's second-largest oil producer after Saudi Arabia. In 2009, Iran's crude production stood approximately at 3.8 million bpd.

Iran builds car assembly plant in Sudan

Tue Sep 14, 2010 4:57AM

Saipa, Iran's second largest car-maker, is to setup a plant in Sudan.

Iran's second largest auto manufacturer has signed a contract to open a factory in Sudan to produce some 35,000 cars over the next five years.

Saipa Automotive Manufacturing Group signed a deal to build a plant in Sudan that will produce various models, Iran's Mehr news agency reported.

"Saipa's successful presence in the Sudanese market in the past persuaded us to build a factory to produce our cars there," Nematollah Poustindouz, CEO of Saipa, told Mehr. "Our plan is to sell cars in Sudan and eventually launch our products in its nine neighboring countries."

Saipa produces a number of models from the French carmaker Citroen, ranging from the mid-sized C5 and Xantia to a MPV, in addition to its domestic compact models such as Saba and Nasim.

Saipa's vehicles are currently being sold in several countries in the region, including Sudan, Syria, Iraq, Egypt, and Algeria, due to low fuel consumption, competitive pricing and readily available after-sales services.

The Iranian government owns 48 percent of Saipa.

Iran Plans to Boost Crude Exploration in Border Areas, Oil Ministry Says

By Ladane Nasserli - Sep 13, 2010 11:26 AM GMT+0500

Iran plans to set up four drilling platforms in border regions to accelerate oil exploration, the Oil Ministry said on its news website Shana, citing Mahmoud Mohaddes, National Iranian Oil Co. director for exploration.

The platforms will be installed within two months near the northeast border with Turkmenistan and on the western border with Iraq, Shana said. Kalat, Bojnourd, Daregaz and Kermanshah have been given priority for exploration, the website said.

Iran's Oil Minister Masoud Mir-Kazemi last week said that more than \$1.5 billion have been allocated to explore for oil and gas, Shana reported.

Iran has discovered 13 new oil and gas fields with combined reserves of 14 billion barrels of oil and 45 trillion cubic feet of natural gas within the past year, the Oil Ministry said last month. The country has \$69.1 billion in revenue from oil exports in the past year, according to the ministry.

Social Front:

Iran Ayatollahs Issue Fatwas Calling for Killing Those Who Burn the Koran

By Ali Sheikholeslami - Sep 13, 2010 7:11 PM GMT+0500

Two Iranian grand ayatollahs issued fatwas calling for the killing of those who insult the Koran, including anyone who burns the Islamic holy book, the state-run Fars news agency reported.

No one was specified in the decrees, which were issued by Nasser Makarem-Shirazi and Hossein Nouri-Hamedani in response to questions asked by student groups from universities in Tehran, Fars said. Such an action against any individual could only be carried out with the authorization of an Islamic religious judge, they said.

“Undoubtedly, the blood of a person who burns the Koran should be shed,” Makarem-Shirazi was cited by Fars as saying. Everybody should “strongly condemn” such an act.

A pastor from Florida planned to hold a Koran-burning event on Sept. 11 to mark the ninth anniversary of the 2001 al-Qaeda attacks on the U.S. Cleric Terry Jones of the Dove World Outreach Center, suspended and then canceled the act after an appeal by President Barack Obama.

“We feel that God is telling us to stop,” Jones said Sept. 11 in an interview with NBC’s “Today Show.” The move may open the way for talks with Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, who plans to build an Islamic center near the World Trade Center site, Jones said.

Death to Democracy

Students who protested outside the Swiss Embassy in Tehran today set fire to the U.S. flag, the official Islamic Republic News Agency reported. The Swiss Embassy represents U.S. interests in Iran. They also destroyed a coffin that had the phrase “Liberal Democracy” written on it.

Jones, who has acknowledged receiving more than 100 death threats, said he “wasn’t scared into calling off the burning.”

Ceremonies, as well as protests for and against the Islamic center in New York, were held on Sept. 11 at the three sites where terrorists crashed the hijacked planes in 2001, killing almost 3,000 people.

A man was escorted by police from one of the protests after ripping pages from a copy of the Koran and setting them on fire, the New York Daily News reported. The man, who wasn’t identified by the newspaper, didn’t appear to have been arrested, the Daily News said.

Iran has been led by Shiite clerics since the 1979 Islamic Revolution that ousted the monarchy. The publication of “The Satanic Verses” by Salman Rushdie in 1988 prompted Iran’s then-supreme leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, to issue a fatwa condemning him to death for alleged blasphemy. The Indian-born writer spent nine years in hiding, living with guards in various locations in the U.K.

British Museum to Lend Iran the Cyrus Cylinder for Four Months

By Farah Nayeri - Sep 10, 2010 11:24 PM GMT+0500

The British Museum said it will lend Iran an ancient artifact known as the Cyrus Cylinder for a period of four months, allowing the treasure to be featured in an exhibition opening Sept. 12 at the National Museum of Iran.

“You could almost say that the Cyrus Cylinder is a history of the Middle East in one object,” said Neil MacGregor, director of the British Museum, in an e-mailed media release. “Objects are uniquely able to speak across time and space, and this object must be shared as widely as possible.”

The Cylinder, a 539-530 B.C. artifact dating back to the reign of Cyrus the Great, is inscribed in Babylonian cuneiform, and has been described as the world’s earliest charter of human rights. It has been at the core of a dispute with Iran’s Cultural Heritage, Handicraft and Tourism Organization, which cut ties with the museum in February for delaying the loan.

The British Museum originally promised to loan the Cylinder to Iran after its 2005-6 exhibition, “Forgotten Empire: The World of Ancient Persia.” In October 2009, following widespread protests in June 2009 against the re-election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the museum said that it was monitoring the Iranian political situation to make sure the loan was made in the best possible circumstances.

The loan was further delayed in January 2010 when the British Museum said it discovered, in its own collections, inscriptions similar to the Cylinder’s on two pieces of cuneiform tablets from Babylonia.

India hosts Iranian short films

Sat Sep 11, 2010 7:16AM

The ninth edition of Third Eye Asian Film Festival is to screen two award-winning Iranian short films for competition in Mumbai, India.

Sasan Farrokhnia's *The Sea was Mine One Day* and Morteza Akuchekian's *Bitter End of Coffee* will compete in the Short Film Competition section of the event scheduled to run from October 28 to November 4.

The documentary *The Sea was Mine One Day* is a postmodern work shot on several locations, one being Iran's Dasht-e Lut, the world's 25th largest desert.

The short aims to convey a message of peace as it depicts the fight between good and evil.

The Iranian film *Bitter End of Coffee* which recently received an award at Italy's 4th SHORTini International Short Film Festival is based on *Breakfast*, a French poem by Jacques Prevert.

The Third Eye Asian Film Festival was established in 2002 with the aim of promoting Asian cinema in India.

The event consists of film competition and short film competition sections.

This year's Third Eye Asian Film Festival showcases more than 100 films and 50 short films for over 50,000 viewers.

Priceless antiques seized in Iran

Tue Sep 7, 2010 10:8AM

Police in Iran have arrested two smugglers who were trying to illegally sell antiques, including two ancient bodies of a king and a goddess belonging to 4000 BCE.

Following a full scale operation, security officials in Iran's Khorasan Razavi Province also confiscated some 1,422 coins dating to the Elymais kingdom, a pot belonging to the Great Seljuq Empire, precious statues of animals, and a number of priceless jewelries.

Earlier in July, Iran's Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, and Tourism Organization (ICHHTO) initiated an investigation into the case through an intelligence report of an illegal auction of invaluable antiques, CHTN reported on Monday.

Iranian security officials arrested the two smugglers while inking a fake deal with them as undercover agents.

Iran to guard universities against 'plots'

Sun Aug 29, 2010 3:28PM

Minister of Science, Research and Technology Kamran Daneshjoo says the "enemies" of Iran are plotting a cultural invasion of the country's universities.

"The enemies are making efforts to replace the Islamic atmosphere in [Iranian] universities with their liberal democratic environment," Daneshjoo said Sunday, referring to remarks by the Leader of the Islamic Revolution.

Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei told a gathering of university students in Tehran last week that higher education institutions had become the main "target" of plots hatched by domineering powers.

The Iranian minister added that Tehran would publish evidence proving the involvement of several foreign spy agencies in efforts to "negatively influence" students, Fars News Agency reported.

Daneshjoo went on to add that neither the nation nor the students would ever tolerate universities that disrespect Islamic values.

On the large-scale emigration of individuals with technical skills or knowledge from Iran, the Leader said on August 22 that "moral and religious" motivation could make expatriate elite return to serve their country.