

Iran gold reserves hit \$17.5bn

TEHRAN - The head of Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries and Mines, Yahya Ale-Eshaq says Iran's gold reserves have set a new record, standing at nearly \$17.5 billion.

The value of the gold reserves, which amount to nearly 907 tons, has reached the record figure over the purchase price of \$600 on each ounce, Ale-Eshaq said.

This is while Iran's foreign exchange reserves now stand at \$120 billion, the official said, adding that the country faces no shortage of gold and foreign currency reserves.

Iran's Minister of Economic Affairs and Finance Shamseddin Hosseini said in April 2011 that the country's foreign exchange reserves stood at 100 billion dollars in the previous Iranian calendar year, which ended on March 20, 2010.

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11 Iranian pilgrims kidnapped in Syria

TEHRAN - At least eleven Iranian pilgrims have been kidnapped on a road between the Syrian city of Hama to the capital, Damascus, Press TV reports.

The Iranian pilgrims were on their way to Damascus when they were abducted. No further details of the incident have surfaced yet.

This is not the first time that Iranians have become the target of abduction by unknown gunmen in Syria over the past months.

On January 26, a group of unidentified armed men attacked a bus carrying Iranian pilgrims on the road connecting Damascus to the northwestern city of Aleppo.

The assailants kidnapped 11 men and drove off to an unknown destination, leaving the female passengers in the vehicle. Their whereabouts still remain unknown.

Ahmadinejad hails Palestinian people's exemplary resistance



President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (R) meets with the secretary general of the Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine, Ramadan Abdullah Mohammad Shallah, in Tehran

TEHRAN - President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has hailed the Palestinian people's "exemplary" resistance against Israel and highlighted the Palestinian cause as an inspiring drive in the popular revolutions and the

awakening of Muslim nations in North Africa and the Middle East.

In a meeting with the secretary general of the Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine, Ramadan Abdullah Mohammad Shallah, on Wednesday, Ahmadinejad said the wave of Islamic Awakening sweeping the Arab world has lent momentum to the underway fall of the Israeli regime.

"The awareness of nations has accelerated and intensified the disintegration of the Zionist domination," Ahmadinejad said, Press TV reported.

Ahmadinejad also spoke about the ongoing violence in Syria, saying the pressure imposed on Damascus by Western powers is the result of the country's active support for the Palestinian resistance.

The Islamic Jihad leader, for his turn, vowed that the Palestinian nation will remain steadfast in its anti-Israeli resistance.

Shallah also stated that the intensification of pressure against the Palestinian people and factions indicates the impaired position of hegemonic powers in the world.

Foreign minister:

Nuclear talks with group 5+1 to be held in near future

TEHRAN - Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi said on Wednesday that nuclear talks with Group 5+1 will be held in near future.

He told reporters that the team of experts from the International Atomic Energy Agency did not inspect Iranian nuclear sites, IRNA reported.

Asked whether Secretary of Supreme National Security Council Saeed Jalili has responded to a letter from European Union Foreign Policy and Security chief Catherine Ashton and whether Russian step-by-step plan to resolve the nuclear dispute will be considered in the upcoming

talks, Salehi said that Iran's chief negotiator has already announced he was ready to resume nuclear talks and would send a written response to Ms Ashton. Responding to another question about a visit to Tehran of IAEA deputy director general Herman Nackaerts and whether his team inspected the nuclear sites, Salehi said, "We were prepared to make arrangements for inspection, but they did not want to do so." Preparatory works have been done to go ahead with nuclear talks and consultations are underway to take next steps. I hope negotiations with the Group 5+1 will be held in near future.

Majlis Speaker:

West plotting against resistance

TEHRAN - Iranian Majlis (parliament) Speaker Ali Larijani has called for awareness against enemy plots, saying the West wanted to derail resistance through forcing the popular movements in the region into deviation.

"We should not allow the United States and the West to afflict the resistance with problems by plotting a game," Larijani said at a meeting with the secretary general of the Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine, Ramadan Abdullah Mohammad Shallah, on Wednesday.

"We should not let the world powers uproot the resistance through creating deviation in the course of the regional developments," he insisted.

Larijani said the popular

uprisings that broke out in many Arab nations following the February 2011 ouster of Egyptian dictator Hosni Mubarak have seriously shaken the footing of the Israeli regime in the region.

He rejected any negotiations with Israeli leaders at the status quo as a "big mistake," and emphasized that the only way for the Palestinians to regain their historical right to their homeland is through dedication to their cause and resistance.

The official pledged the Iranian nation's full support for the Palestinian cause till the eventual victory of the Palestinian nation against the Israeli occupation, and described the country's 1979 revolution as a new chapter in the history of the Islamic

IAEA plans another meeting in Tehran

TEHRAN - The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has announced plans for holding another round of talks in Iran's capital, Tehran, later this month.

After the high-ranking IAEA delegation left Tehran on Wednesday, the UN nuclear agency said in a statement on the same day that another meeting will be held in Tehran from February 21 to 22, Press TV reported.

The delegation, headed by Deputy Director General Herman Nackaerts and Assistant Director General for Policy Rafael Grossi, made a three-day trip to Iran to discuss issues regarding Tehran's nuclear program. Upon arrival in Vienna airport, Nackaerts said the

IAEA was "committed to resolving all the outstanding issues and the Iranians said they are committed too."

The IAEA said in its statement that during the visit the delegation "explained its concerns and identified its priorities, which focus on the clarification of possible military dimensions to Iran's nuclear program."

"The IAEA also discussed with Iran the topics and initial steps to be taken, as well as associated modalities," it added.

"The agency is committed to intensifying dialogue. It remains essential to make progress on substantive issues," IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano said.

The US, Israel and their allies accuse Iran of pursuing a military nuclear program and have used this allegation as a pretext to sway the UNSC to impose four rounds of sanctions on Iran.

Echoing the US-led allegations, the IAEA released a report in November 2011 and accusing Iran of conducting activities related to the development of nuclear weapons before 2003 and saying that these activities "may still be ongoing."

Iran has refuted the allegations, arguing that as a signatory to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and a member of the IAEA, it has the right to develop and acquire nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.

Iran marks Islamic Revolution victory



TEHRAN - Millions of Iranians across the country mark the 33rd anniversary of the victory of the 1979 Islamic Revolution, holding various cultural and artistic programs.

The ceremonies kicked off all over the country on

Wednesday morning at 9:33 a.m. local time (0603 GMT), the time when the late founder of the Islamic Republic, Imam Khomeini, returned to the Iranian capital, Tehran, on February 1, 1979 after a 14-year exile in Paris.

The day of Imam Khomeini's return to Iran marks the beginning of the Ten Days of Dawn, which culminates with the anniversary of the victory of the Islamic Revolution on February 11, Press TV reported.

Iranians have arranged dif-

ferent programs to celebrate the event by honoring Imam Khomeini's historical return and the memory of the revolution martyrs.

Several cultural programs will also be held in some 30,000 mosques including photo exhibitions, film and photo festivals as well as sports competitions.

According to director of Ten Days of Dawn ceremonies Mohammad-Hossein Zare, artists from 100 countries and 200 Muslim scholars have requested to attend the ceremonies.

The Iranian nation topped the US-backed Pahlavi regime 33 years ago, ending the 2,500 years of monarchic rule in the country.

The Islamic Revolution, under the guidance of the late Imam Khomeini, established a new political system based on Islamic values and democracy.

EU ban on Iranian oil worries Ireland

TEHRAN - The recent EU-engineered sanction on Iranian oil industry has drawn mixed reactions from Irish lawmakers as the ban will result in an increase in the price of oil and petrol, Press TV reports.

Finian McGrath a member of Ireland's parliament on Tuesday told Press TV that the assembly is concerned about a possible increase in the price of oil if the EU "crazy embargo" comes into force.

He stressed that the vast

majority of Irish people "have strong independent foreign policy mindset" and "have no issues with the Iranian people."

Due to the EU debt crisis and runaway inflation, the price of gas has almost doubled in Ireland and people are now concerned about another spike in fuel price as a result of the European oil ban on Iran.

Many believe that as an independent state, Ireland should not follow the EU ban

and must adopt measures in line with its national interests.

Foreign ministers of the European Union reached an agreement on January 23 to impose

sanctions on Iran's oil imports and freeze the assets of the Central Bank of Iran within the EU. The EU has also imposed a ban on the sale of diamonds, gold, and other precious metals to Iran. Tehran has warned that the embargo will have negative consequences, such as an increase in oil prices.

Envoy nixes chance of hit on Iran N-sites

TEHRAN - Iran's Ambassador to Italy Mohammad Ali Hosseini has downplayed the prospect of a US-Israeli venture to launch a military strike on the Islamic Republic's nuclear facilities.

Iran sees the possibility of a military confrontation as very unlikely and faint, IRNA quoted Hosseini as saying in an interview with Italian newspaper Il Manifesto on Tuesday.

The United States and Israel are still suffering from their previous military debacles, he added.

Washington and Tel Aviv have repeatedly threatened

Tehran with the "option" of a military strike, based on their allegation that Iran is seeking to acquire a military nuclear technology, a claim Tehran has strongly rejected.

The Iranian envoy further emphasized that the Western sanctions against Tehran would make no change in the country's strategic policies and will only strengthen the Iranian nation's resolve to safeguard its nuclear and scientific achievements.

The Iranian diplomat denounced the recent agreement by the European Union (EU) to impose an oil embargo on Iran, saying the measure has

been adopted in line with the US demands, with specific political motivation.

The ineffective policy of sanctions against a nation that seeks to achieve its legitimate rights is unreasonable and runs counter to human values, Hosseini stated.

On January 23, EU foreign ministers reached an agreement to ban oil imports from Iran, freeze the assets of Iran's Central Bank within the bloc and ban the sales of diamonds, gold and other precious metals to the Islamic Republic.

Earlier, the US had slapped new sanctions against Iran's banking and energy sectors.

Iran Army to unveil new air defense systems soon



TEHRAN - A top Iranian Army commander has announced the upcoming launch of new air defense systems to boost Iran's aerial defense capabilities.

Tens of radar and missile systems with various ranges have been manufactured and deployed in Iran's defense

sector so far and new systems are on their way to join the defense network during the 10-Day Dawn celebrations,

which began on February 1 to mark the 33th anniversary of the victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, Brigadier General Farzad Esmaili, the commander of the Army's Khatam al-Anbiya Air Defense Base, announced on Wednesday, Press TV reported.

Brig. Gen. Esmaili also pointed out that Iran's scientific and technological progresses, which have irked the

arrogant powers, come in the face of US-led sanctions.

They are imposing tougher sanctions against Iran to impede the country's development, the senior Iranian commander noted.

However, the Iranian nation will turn the tougher sanctions into opportunities, he stressed.

In recent years, Iran has made major breakthroughs in its defense sector and attained self-sufficiency in important military equipment and systems.

The Islamic Republic has, however, repeatedly assured that its military might poses no threat to other countries, saying the country's defense doctrine is based on deterrence.

President presents rls 5,100 trillion budget plan to Majlis

TEHRAN - President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad on Wednesday presented the next year's budget bill worth rls 5,100 trillion to the parliament to be approved and go into effect from March 20.

He said that the budget for the state-owned companies which operate independently is estimated at rls 4,000 trillion registering a growth compared to that of last year.

The President said that the general spending of the government decreased by 5.6 percent compared to last year's.

He said that the government has managed to reduce the general spending, adding that the growth in the budget for the state-run companies will go to investment in the manufacturing and services sectors, MNA reported.

Ahmadinejad said that total investments of the government and the state companies will stand at rls 1,360 trillion up by 20 percent compared with the preceding year.

The President made it clear that the government has planned to drastically reduce reliance on oil revenues and shifted the government spending to be provided from non-oil income.

He said that the government has planned to increase taxes by 20 percent and non-oil revenues by 89 percent compared with the preceding year to provide money for the general spending.

He said that the government has raised tax revenues by 27 percent owing to the rise in gross national product (GNP) from seven percent to 7.5 percent in line with the Five-Year Economic Development Plan which targeted a 10 percent GNP growth.

UN urged to curb Iran scientists' killings

TEHRAN - The spouse of an assassinated Iranian scientist has called on the United Nations to condemn the assassinations of Iranian nuclear scientists, and adopt measures to prevent such incidents, and prosecute the perpetrators.

In a letter sent to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on Tuesday, Shohreh Pirani, the wife of assassinated Iranian nuclear scientist Dariush Rezaeinejad, said that "Terrorism is one of the major threats to international peace and security, which violates fundamentals of human rights. Given the improvement of technology and communications, terrorists can easily plan and carry out acts of terrorism anywhere they wish."

The letter pointed out that the overall objective of all anti-terrorist resolutions is to fight terrorism by criminalizing acts of terror, bringing the perpetrators to justice, and preventing state terrorism.

However, no effective measure has been taken to virtually combat terrorist activities and state terrorism, it argued.

"Why isn't there a concrete step to prevent targeted killings of Iranian scientists and researchers, which take place through collaboration among the US and UK intelligence services and Israeli assassins?" the letter asked.

It added, "The most painful of all is that no international

human rights body has taken a slight measure to condemn such conducts, which flout basic human rights."

"Why does the UN Security Council introduce terrorism as one of the most serious threats against international peace and security in the 21st century, and yet fails to take proper action against the terrorist bids targeting Iranian scientists?" the letter argued.

On July 23, 2011 unidentified gunmen killed Rezaeinejad outside his house.

Rezaeinejad and his wife were on their way to their child's kindergarten when they were approached by two men on a motorbike. The gunman called him by name and shot Rezaeinejad, 35, in the neck when he turned around.

On November 29, 2010, Dr. Majid Shahriari and Dr. Fereydoon Abbasi were targeted by terrorist attacks. Shahriari was killed immediately but Abbasi, the current director of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization, only sustained injuries.

Similarly, Iranian nuclear scientist Mostafa Ahmadi Roshan was targeted on January 11, when an unknown motorcycleist attached a magnetic bomb to his car near a college building of Allameh Tabatabaee University in northern Tehran.

He was immediately killed and his driver, who sustained serious injuries, died a few hours later in hospital.

Riahi assigned Iran charity ambassador



TEHRAN - The award-winning Iranian actress Katayoun Riahi has been assigned as the new ambassador of the country's Mehrafarin Charity Society.

Riahi was announced as the successor to the former title holder actress Fatemeh Motamed-Aria during a ceremony held at Tehran's Milad Tower on January 30, 2012.

Mehrafarin Charity Society also

introduced Tehran Wind Instruments Orchestra as the Co-Ambassador at the event.

Riahi had earlier paid a visit to the famine stricken Somali refugees in the North Eastern Province of Kenya.

She visited there to dedicate Mehr Afarin Panah-e Asr Institute's help, express her sympathy and offer her own financial aid to the Somali people.

"The warm and hopeful look of these people who host you with smile amid all the misery was the most impressive part of my trip," Riahi said.

Born in 1961, Riahi has starred in many Iranian movies and TV series and received several awards.

Her role in the internationally renowned Iranian TV series Prophet Joseph earned her international fame.

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