



Talks With US Postponed Indefinitely

A fourth round of talks between the United States and Iran over the situation in Iraq has been indefinitely postponed, Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari said on Wednesday. "I don't think they will succeed in holding the fourth round of talks ... There is increased tension in the area," Zebari told reporters, AFP reported. "Neither side has rejected (the holding of talks)



Hoshiyar Zebari

but we need to get them at the right time, at the right place, in the right atmosphere."

Tehran on Monday called off further Iraq security talks with Washington until US forces stop their crackdown on Shiite areas in Iraq. US-led forces are locked in fierce street battles in Sadr City, a Shiite militia stronghold in Baghdad.

"It is impossible to hold a new round (of talks) because of exchange of accusations between the two sides," Zebari said in Baghdad.

Zebari said "resuming dialogue" between Iraq, Iran and the United States was crucial.

"We had three important rounds but they yielded no fast results," said Zebari, adding that Iraq's efforts to hold the next round of talks have failed.

Zebari said deadly fighting in Baghdad's Sadr City between US forces and Shiite militiamen, mostly from anti-American cleric Muqtada Al-Sadr's Mahdi Army, has contributed to tensions between Washington and Tehran.

The situation in Sadr City has "contributed definitely to tension. Tension has always been there but it escalated."

"Since the drive began in Basra, Baghdad and other areas...tension increased," Zebari said, referring to a government crackdown on Shiite militias launched in late March.

Hundreds of people have been killed since then in Sadr City, the slum district of some two million Shiites, most of whom support Sadr.

Tehran, with whom Washington severed ties in 1980 after the takeover of the US Embassy in Tehran by revolutionary students, strongly opposes the US military presence in Iraq.

Without giving any new date for the trilateral talks, Zebari said there had been "misunderstanding" regarding the previous date.

An Iranian delegation had arrived in the Iraqi capital on March 6 for the fourth round of talks but left after US officials said it was unaware of the date.

Since then Baghdad had not proposed any new date, Zebari said on Wednesday.

"We have not gone to any party ... the conditions are not conducive," he said, adding there was a general "lack of enthusiasm".

Zebari said new "confidence-building measures" were needed to encourage holding the talks given the sustained criticism in the media.



UK Court Backs MKO

Britain's Court of Appeal on Wednesday affirmed a lower court ruling that an Iranian criminal group should not be listed as a terrorist organization, AP reported.

In a move reeking of double standards and politicization, three justices led by Chief Justice Lord Phillips rejected an appeal by the Home Office against a lower court ruling in November in favor of the terrorist Mujahideen Khalq Organization.

The group is also regarded as a terrorist organization by the United States and the European Union.

The Court of Appeal claimed there were no valid grounds for contending that the Proscribed Organizations Appeal Commission made errors of law in ordering the organization deleted from the list of terrorist organizations. It refused to allow the government to appeal its ruling.

MKO has carried out numerous terrorist operations in Iran and Iraq against civilians in the past three decades and remains on the list of terrorist outfits of the US and the European Union.

Call for Int'l Anti-Drug Cooperation



Police Chief Brigadier General Esmaeel Ahmadi-Moqaddam called for a serious and pragmatic cooperation of the international community, especially Europe, for confronting drug production and trafficking.

Addressing the second trilateral meeting of Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan on fighting drugs, he said, "Fighting against drugs requires the support of the global community, especially the United Nations, and the assistance of Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and other regional countries. This anti-drug campaign especially requires the assistance of Europeans who are the main target of traffickers."

Ahmadi-Moqaddam, who is secretary-general of the Drug Control Headquarters, noted that production of opium and other drugs increased in Afghanistan during 2007-8, thus creating many problems for Iran, which is located on the transit route of drugs, IRNA reported.

The brigadier general expressed Iran's

readiness to transfer its experiences in fighting drugs to other regional countries.

"Special plans must be devised for destroying laboratories that produce compressed heroin in Afghanistan," he said.

Ahmadi-Moqaddam noted that the absence of schemes based on indigenous and regional priorities is the most important reason for the failure in confronting drug trafficking.

"Unfortunately since 2001, drug production in Afghanistan has increased annually ... Realistic plans based on the conditions of Afghanistan must be prepared to rid the world of serious threats posed by drugs," he said.

Ahmadi-Moqaddam expressed hope that Afghanistan's economic system would become healthy and not rely on drug production.

"So far, the policies and plans of foreign forces in Afghanistan have not been successful in fighting drugs and providing the country with stability and security," he said.

EI Baradei Appeals to Washington

Head of the International Atomic Energy Agency Mohamed ElBaradei urged Washington on Tuesday to show more sensitivity in dealing with Iran if it hoped to see Tehran make concessions on its nuclear program, diplomats said.

The diplomats, speaking to AP after a meeting between IAEA chief and top US nonproliferation official, Undersecretary of State John Rood, said Rood made no commitments but promised to take ElBaradei's concerns back to his superiors.

Rood, speaking to reporters after his talks, declined to go into details of his discussions with ElBaradei beyond confirming that Iran and Syria were among the topics of the meeting.

But one of the diplomats, who agreed to talk only on condition of anonymity, said ElBaradei

urged the US to broaden its approach by addressing Tehran's economic and security concerns in exchange for nuclear concessions.

Iran is under three sets of relatively mild UN Security Council sanctions for its refusal to freeze uranium enrichment.

World powers agreed on Friday to try again to lure Iran to the nuclear bargaining table with a repackaged set of carrots to accompany the stick of UN sanctions.

> Generous Package

Also on Tuesday, French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner said an incentive package offered by leading powers to draw Iran into dialogue is "very generous" and will be delivered to Tehran within days.

Kouchner, speaking to report-

ers, would not reveal details of the package before it was seen by Iran. However, he said that if Iran does not make the proposal public once it has been delivered, it will be put on the Internet.

"They are very precise and very generous," Kouchner said of the measures being offered by France, the United States, Britain, Russia, China and Germany.

"Each word was weighed, believe me," he said, adding that he believes they could "change a bit the nature of the game and above all the state of mind."

Kouchner said it was not clear who would be taking the proposals to Tehran, hoping the proposal would be published by Iran so the Iranian public knows "we are ready to do anything. That is the sense of this proposal. After sanctions, dialogue."

Cultural Agreement With Algeria

Iran and Algeria signed an agreement on expansion of bilateral cultural cooperation.

The agreement was signed by Iran's Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Mohammad Hossein Saffar Harandi and his visiting Algerian counterpart, Khalida Toumi, IRNA reported.

During the ceremony, the Iranian minister said culture is the key that opens all closed doors. Expressing his satisfaction

with the current visit to Tehran of the Algerian culture minister, Harandi urged his counterpart to play a more active role in boosting cultural relations between the two Muslim countries.

Toumi reiterated her country's serious determination to further boost all-out ties with Tehran.

Termining her meetings with senior Iranian officials, including President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, as positive, she

underscored the need for implementing the cultural agreement signed between the two nations.

During her visit with President Ahmadinejad on Tuesday evening, the two sides called for establishing closer relations between the two nations.

Toumi, who has come to Iran to attend Algerian Cultural Week, met with several Iranian senior officials and visited the two ancient cities of Isfahan and Shiraz.

Persian Press Watch

Inflationary Pressures

HAMSHAHRI: Serious concerns are being expressed in economic circles about the rising inflation rate, which has created many hardships for the people and led to economic instability. If the trend were to continue, it will definitely harm national development plans. Manufacturers are also worried about its economic ramifications, as they grapple with many problems emanating from the inflationary pressures. Actually what we are witnessing in the Iranian economy is inflationary recession. The private sector is expected to help the government overcome financial woes and cause an economic recovery. Experience has shown that decisions taken behind closed doors have been inefficient. Therefore, policymaking procedures should also be revised. One of the hot economic topics nowadays is the package of proposals presented by the Central Bank of Iran. The major issue discussed in the package is its focus on production and productivity. As a general rule, the success of monetary and financial policies depends on revising the banking system.

Moral Values

IRAN: Societies help develop close emotional bonds that are pillars of improving morality and social norms. It is regrettable that some political groups claim to be advocating people's rights by demonstrating sensitivity about the Islamic dress code while relations between young men and women neglect social values and norms. These values, which are of great importance in every civilized society, include honesty, trust and all the good traits human beings can possess. After all, the primary mission of all divine prophets was to safeguard and promote moral values.

Lofty Goals

HAMBASTEGI: The 2025 Vision document is unanimously hailed as the most comprehensive plan outlining the country's development process. It is also one of those few works on which senior officials and decision-makers have consensus. The document outlines a set of lofty goals, ambitions and needs of the Iranian nation. It has been compiled after years of hard work and expert studies, and after taking regional and international realities into consideration. In other words, the document is the result of the convergence of national aspirations and capabilities. The executive branch of the government should devise workable mechanisms for materializing the document's objectives and targets within the next two decades. Iran tops the Middle East countries in terms of economic and technological progress due to its close interaction with other nations.



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