

Najjar in Doha For Security Talks

Interior Minister Mostafa Mohammad Najjar started a two-day visit to the Persian Gulf state of Qatar on Monday and was welcomed by his Qatari counterpart at Doha International Airport.

Upon arrival he told reporters that Tehran and Doha are due to sign a key security agreement.

"Tomorrow we will sign a security agreement to fight terrorism, organized crime, drugs, human trafficking and other crimes which threaten the security of the two neighbors. The agreement will also include cooperation in maritime patrolling," Fars News Agency quoted him as saying.

The minister called the two states' ties "good and constructive". He is scheduled to discuss economic cooperation and ways to expand trade exchanges with Qatari officials.

Governor-Generals of Iran's southern provinces of Fars, Bushehr and Khuzestan plus the northern province of Mazandaran are accompanying him.

Najjar will confer with Crown Prince Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani on issues of mutual interest.

Iran and Qatar have improved relations over the years, particularly in defense fields.

The crown prince recently visited Iran and held talks with senior officials, including President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani, Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Secretary Saeed Jalili and Vice-President Mohammad-Reza Rahimi.

Last month, Iran and Qatar signed a defense protocol.

Foreign Powers Benefit From Regional Turmoil

Deputy Foreign Minister Mohammad-Baqer Khorramshad has reiterated that regional conflicts largely serve the interests of foreign powers, and underlined Tehran's readiness and ability to bolster cooperation, interaction and convergence in the Middle East.

His remarks alluded to attempts by hegemonic powers to attain their goals in the Middle East by sowing discord among regional countries.

"They (West) claim that regional nations have historical differences and raise old and obsolete issues (to justify their claims)," Fars News Agency quoted him as saying in Tehran on Monday.

"Hegemonic powers pledge to support certain regional states... But history has shown that war produces nothing but more destruction," he said in reference to the huge foreign military presence in the Middle East and the US-led invasion and occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan.

Khorramshad urged regional countries to boost mutual cooperation in the interest of peace and stability, and expressed Iran's readiness to facilitate such moves.

Iran attaches importance to the interests of all regional states and looks forward to their progress and prosperity in peace, he concluded.

Free Trade Zone Planned With Iraq

Iran and Iraq will set up joint free trade zone in the near future to expand cooperation between the two neighbors, an Iranian official announced on Monday.

"In a meeting with Iraqi officials, Iranian authorities tabled the initiative for establishing a joint free trade zone," lawmaker from Khuzestan province, Mostafa Matouzaadeh, told Fars News Agency.

The proposal has been welcomed by the Iraqis.

The MP said several plans have been prepared to also form a joint industrial zone near the common borders.

A joint industrial zone will help the manufacturing sector and also help attract foreign investments, Matouzaadeh emphasized. Iran and Iraq have improved ties ever since the overthrow of the former Iraqi dictator, Saddam Hussein, in the US-led invasion in 2003.

Chairman of Iran's State Expediency Council Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani said last April that major obstacles to closer Iran-Iraq ties had been removed and the two nations should promote cooperation in key sectors.

Iran is due to inaugurate a trade center in the northern Iraqi city of Soleimaniyeh by the end of March, which will serve as another example of growing cooperation between the two Muslim neighbors.

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He pointed to comments by Intelligence Minister Heidar Moslehi that Rigi visited a US military base in Afghanistan 24 hours before his arrest.

"Why was Rigi in a US regional military base? What did he talk about in his meeting with the NATO secretary general? Extraterritorial powers rather tend to underestimate the intelligence of the people of the world. Such moves have deprived the peoples' trust in them."

Mottaki also referred to Rigi's confession that he met a high-ranking US official in Menas military base in Kyrgyzstan.

"American actions contradict its words... How can the US possibly build relations with a man who has killed and wounded 40 people in terrorist attacks?," he asked.

Iran is doing all within its reach to help resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and is cooperating closely with regional countries to curb terrorism, drug smuggling and organized crime. "Central Asia and the Caucasus, due to its particular geopolitics, has always been the center of attention of great powers in history... Understanding power structures and developments in this region is not possible without first contemplating the role and influence of the big powers," he concluded.

President Receives Mugabe Envoy



President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (R) meets Zimbabwe's visiting Minister of State for Presidential Affairs Didymus Mutasa in Tehran on Monday.

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad Monday said Iran has always denounced pressures exerted by the bullying powers and it will stand by Zimbabwe to the best of its ability.

"Expediting implementation of previous agreements between Iran and Zimbabwe will further facilitate bilateral ties in all sectors," he said in a meeting with Zimbabwe's Minister of State for Presidential Affairs Didymus Mutasa, Mehr News Agency reported.

He recalled that the two countries possess vast potentials for boosting cooperation.

"By identifying and deploying the existing capacities and rich resources of the two countries, effective steps can and should be taken for further deepening of mutual bonds," he noted.

Ahmadinejad described the heroic resistance of the people of Zimbabwe against the pressures of bullying powers as noteworthy.

The world's bullies are on the verge of decline and an effulgent future awaits independent and freedom-seeking nations, he told the visitor.

Mutasa delivered a message from President Robert Mugabe to Ahmadinejad and called for expansion of bilateral relations in various areas.

"The capacities and rich resources of Zimbabwe pave the ground for joint investment ventures and two-way cooperation," he noted.

On Monday Mutasa also met Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki.

Mottaki said bilateral ties are on the right path.

The struggle of the people of Zimbabwe for gaining independence and withstanding arrogant powers hint at their independence-seeking spirit, the minister said.

"African nations have all the necessary capacities for development and Iran is prepared to expand ties with them in all areas," he noted.

Mutasa said his people and Iran are in the same front against hegemonic powers.

He commended the scientific and technological progress of Iranians and said his country is keen in buying Iranian products.

IRGC Fighting on Several Fronts

A commander of the Islamic Revolution's Guards Corps (IRGC) highlighted its role in defending the Islamic Revolution and its values.

"The IRGC is now confronting enemies of the revolution on several fronts," General Hossein Salami said in Tehran on Monday, Fars News Agency reported.

He added that enemies are resorting to assorted measures, such as pushing Iran into political isolation, imposing sanctions and launching cultural propaganda to harm the republic and the revolution "but to no avail".

He recalled the prominent role of the Guards in defending the country against the enemies' soft threats and underscored the need for resisting arrogant powers with all possible means.

"Iran and the Muslim world are facing soft threats much more and much deeper than the threat of military attacks".

IRGC Commander General Mohammad Ali Jafari in August called for comprehensive efforts in cultural, economic, political and social spheres to confront "soft threats" posed by enemies of the state.

Petraeus Betraying Signs Of Powerlessness

In what appears to be an effort to try a "new pressure track" on Iran, a top US commander has again interfered in Iran's internal affairs by criticizing the government over the handling of last year's post-election unrests.

US Central Command (CENTCOM) Chief General David Petraeus, claimed in an interview Sunday with CNN, that the Islamic Republic's conduct in dealing with the unrests following last June's presidential election showed that Iran has gone "from being a theocracy to a thugocracy".

The inflammatory remarks by the general, whose command stretches from Egypt to Pakistan and includes Iran, came two weeks after he threatened Tehran with what he described as "a new pressure track" to subvert Iran's uranium enrichment activities.

"I think no one at the end of this time can say that the United States and the rest of the world have not given Iran every opportunity to resolve the issues diplomatically," the CENTCOM head claimed on February 21.

The general is a regular visitor in Israel to coordinate policies with the occupying power.

"That puts us in a solid foundation now to go on



David Petraeus

(with) what is termed the pressure track. That's the course on which we are embarked now," he told the NBC TV broadcast news.

Petraeus used the February comments to caution that any attack on Iran's nuclear sites, as threatened by Israel and the US in the past, could backfire by boosting "nationalist tendencies" in the country.

The rhetoric by Petraeus comes despite the fact that the US has for long been a prime sponsor of autocratic regimes across continents, especially in the Persian Gulf.

Observers say the US general's broadside reflects his rage about Iran's growing achievements in various fields as well as its popularity in the region as a positive force for security and stability.

Petraeus in fact represents a roguish and declining superpower that has propped up a variety of despots by sponsoring coups and removing popular and elected governments. Over the years the US has emerged as a global cop with plenty of secret prisons and torture chambers in oppressive countries under the false rubric of defending 'national security' and 'fighting terrorism'.

UNCND Chairmanship Sign of Int'l Trust

Head of the Anti Drug Taskforce General Esmail Ahmadi-Moqaddam said Monday Iran's chairmanship of the annual session of the United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs (UNCND) shows the trust of the comity of nations, especially Asians, in Iran as a lead player fighting illegal drugs.

The 53rd session of UNCND opened Monday in Vienna. Iran's representative to international bodies, Ali Asghar Soltanieh chairs the meeting, which runs until Friday.

Ahmad-Moqaddam emphasized that all countries now accept that Iran is the trailblazer in fighting narcotics and organized crime as a whole, IRNA reported.

"Until recently the world recognized Iran for its drive against drugs. In the past three years we have taken lofty steps for curbing the use of narcotics, treating drug addicts and treating addicts," Ahmad-Moqaddam, who also is national police chief, said.

Iran's presidency of the forum says also that the country's responsibility for fighting the merchants of death has become heavier.

"We will try to keep our anti-narcotics drive void of political considerations and target the technical and human-related aspects. We expect the international community to contribute to the anti-drug campaign."

"As an important neighbor of Afghanistan and the most important country in the drive against narcotics, Iran should be given meaningful political and financial support. Countries that have troops in Afghanistan should be more responsible toward the issue of drug control," he noted.

Ministers and senior officials from over 150 countries will review issues such as plantation, production, distribution and smuggling of narcotics at the five-day meeting.

Israel OKs New...

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> Israeli Security First!

"But the diplomatic process is not a game, it is real, and rooted first and foremost in (Israel's) security," he added.

Jewish construction in the West Bank and east Beit-ul-Moqaddas is a particularly sore point with the Palestinians because it challenges their claims to lands they want for a future state.

Under heavy US pressure, Israel agreed in November to restrict building in the West Bank to some 3,000 apartments whose construction was already under way. But it rejected any curbs in east Beit-ul-Moqaddas, which the Palestinians want for their future capital.

The government said at the time that exceptions to the slowdown could be allowed, and on Monday, the Ministry of Defense said an exception was made in the case of the ultra-Orthodox Beitar Illit because of what it termed safety and infrastructure issues. The ministry said it was the biggest exception granted since the slowdown went into effect.

Israeli anti-settlement watchdog Peace Now also questioned Israel's motives. "The Israeli government is welcoming the (US) vice president by demonstrating, to our regret, that it has no genuine intention to advance the peace process," said the group's settlement expert, Hagit Ofran.

On Sunday, Palestinian Authority leaders agreed to take part in US-brokered peace talks with Israel for four months, ending a 14-month breakdown. In so doing, they backed off from a demand that Israel freeze all building in the West Bank and east Beit-ul-Moqaddas before they returned to the negotiating table.

Palestinian groups like the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) have condemned Abbas' decision to renew talks, and on Monday several factions based in Damascus accused the Palestinian Authority of caving in to pressure from the US and Israel.

Perspective

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The polling centers had more security than all the previous elections. This is more important because Maliki and company undertook the responsibility of the safety of the centers without the participation of the US troops. The Saudi-owned newspaper Al Hayat referred to the huge turnout and underlined that the Iraqis challenged Al-Qaeda and overcame religious differences by voting in unusually large numbers.

It should add that an important outcome of the election pertains to future of ties between Baghdad and Washington. Analysts say the result can help remove ambiguities among US officials for the much-awaited and complete US military withdrawal from the fractured country.

Many experts have interpreted the elections as the first major step for political independence of Iraq. Britain's Daily Telegraph said the message of congratulation from Barack Obama and UK Foreign Secretary David Miliband to Maliki exemplify the role and efficiency of the government in Baghdad.

Iraqis have paid a colossal price to reach this phase. Millions of Iraqis have now laid the cornerstone for peaceful co-existence. All the friends of Iraq and its people, Iran in particular, hope and pray that terrorism and sectarian violence will soon become a thing of the past.