

President Calls for Regional Cooperation

TEHRAN (Kayhan Int'l) — President Hassan Rouhani here on Saturday called on regional countries to work together to resolve existing problems. "Enduring security and stability in the region is possible if all the regional countries play a positive role in its establishment," he told Jordanian Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh. Rouhani said Iran sees no limit to expansion of relations with Muslim countries, including Jordan. "The people of Iran and Jordan have traditionally held very friendly relations and today, they need to strengthen the level of their cooperation and ties on the basis of their interests."

Kayhan

International



Zionist Navy Kills Gaza Fisherman

GAZA (Dispatches) — The occupying regime of Israel's navy opened fire on boats off the coast of the Gaza Strip on Saturday, killing one Palestinian fisherman, Gaza hospital officials said. A Zionist military spokeswoman said four vessels had strayed from the fishing zone and that the Israeli army opened fire after the boats did not heed calls to halt. Gaza hospital officials named the fisherman killed on Saturday as Tawfiq Abu Reyala, 34. The Palestinians say the fishing zone is not big enough to supply the demands of Gaza's 1.8 million people, who are kept under a tight Israeli-Egyptian blockade.

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Viewpoint

By: Kayhan Int'l Staff Writer

Zionist Regime Torture Program

Bush Raps Clinton's State Department Email Storage



Shaikh Salman Discusses Development of Asian Football With President of Iran Football Federation



150 ISIL Terrorists Slain In Iraqi Army Strikes



Iran, Jordan Discuss Fight on Terrorism

TEHRAN (Press TV) — Iranian Foreign Minister Muhammad Javad Zarif said here Saturday the occupying regime of Israel seeks to sidetrack major issues in the Middle East by using diversionary tactics.

"The Zionist regime is trying to distract regional countries from major issues to minor matters and vigilance in the face of this Israeli ploy will benefit all in the region," Zarif told his Jordanian counterpart, Nasser Judeh.

Denouncing crimes by terrorist groups, including the recent burning alive of a Jordanian pilot by ISIL Takfiri militants, Zarif underlined the need for consultations and cooperation among regional countries on fighting extremism and terrorism.

"The bestial terrorist measures, an example of which we witnessed in the death of the Jordanian pilot, are unacceptable and will result in the tarnishing of the image of Islam," Zarif said.

Last month, ISIL released a video online showing the Takfiri terrorists purportedly setting alight Jordanian pilot, Moaz al-Kassasbeh,

who had been taken hostage in December 2013.

Elsewhere in the meeting, Zarif said Iran seeks serious interaction with regional countries on various issues.

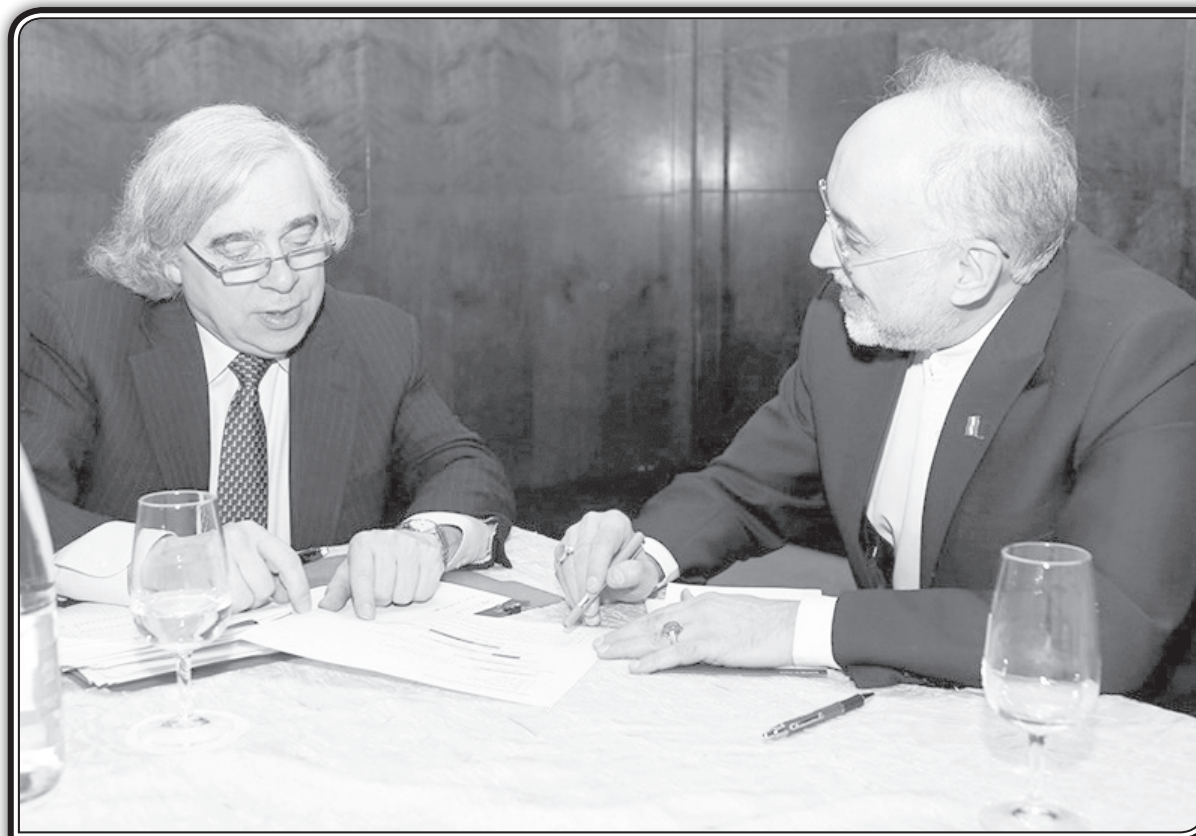
He also described relations with neighboring countries as a top priority in Iran's foreign policy, saying, "Iran is ready to cooperate with all regional countries on long-term plans for different issues."

The Jordanian foreign minister, for his part, described Iran as an important country in the region and called for Tehran-Amman talks on different challenges facing the Middle East.

Judeh said terrorism and extremism are the main challenges in the region, saying both Sunnis and Shias are targeted by such threats.

Instability, violence, and extremism have plagued the Middle East over the past few years, and Jordan believes that stability and security must be restored to the region as soon as possible, Judeh said, calling for unity and solidarity among all Islamic countries toward this objective.

Salehi: Technical Roadblocks Removed



Head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization Ali Akbar Salehi, right, and U.S. Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz view a document during their recent nuclear talks.

TEHRAN (Dispatches) — Iran's vice president said Saturday technical roadblocks hampering a final nuclear accord with world powers have been eliminated during ongoing discussions with American negotiators.

Ali Akbar Salehi, who is also in charge of Iran's nuclear agency, told national television Tehran offered proposals to remove "fake concerns" over the country's nuclear program, paving the way for a final deal.

"We had reached a sort of deadlock in our technical talks," Salehi said.

"In those talks, we discussed (uranium) enrichment, Arak research reactor, the issue of research and development, the issue of Fordo nuclear site and some more detailed subjects," the AEOI chief explained.

"On enrichment and Arak, we have made very good progress. We have replied to their fake concerns... by making technical proposals while also defending our national interests and our nuclear industry," Salehi said.

Over the past two weeks, Salehi held several meetings with U.S. Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz in Geneva and Montreux to discuss details of technical issues.

The Iranian official said the meetings were very productive and good steps were taken, the Tasnim news agency reported.

But the daily Kayhan slammed the negotiations, saying that an American proposal of a 10-year suspension of Iran's uranium enrichment activities is a first step aimed at finally toppling Iran's ruling Islamic government.

Iran and the six-nation group — the U.S., Russia, China, Britain, France and Germany — hope to reach a final agreement by June 30.

On Saturday, top U.S. diplomat John Kerry sought to smooth purported differences with France over nuclear talks with Iran, agreeing with the French that there were still gaps to overcome in the "critical weeks" ahead.

The U.S. secretary of state said it was up to Iran to prove its peaceful intentions to the world if it wants to deal on its nuclear program ahead of the looming deadline.

He was speaking to reporters after a 20-minute meeting with French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius in Paris where they tried to iron out their differing views on the deal.

"We want an agreement that's solid," Kerry said.

"We want an agreement that will guarantee that we are holding any kind of program that continues in Iran accountable to the highest standards so that we know in fact that it is a peaceful program."

Fabius emphasized that any deal to remove sanctions could not be thrashed out only between Iran and the U.S.

"These are multilateral negotiations and we are making sure our position is known," he said.

Fabius acknowledged that progress had been made in the months of

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Tikrit Recapture, Only a Matter of Time

SAMARRA, Iraq (Dispatches) — Iraqi forces faced tough resistance from ISIL terrorists around Tikrit Saturday, but the top U.S. military officer said ahead of a Baghdad visit that victory was only a matter of time.

Iran has actively and visibly supported Baghdad's biggest operation yet against the ISIL group, General Martin Dempsey said.

The Takfiri group's footprint in Iraq has been shrinking steadily since federal and volunteer forces went on the counter-offensive roughly six months ago.

"Iraqi security forces and tribal fighters from the Anbar region have successfully cleared Al-Baghdadi of ISIL, retaking both the police station and three Euphrates River bridges," the U.S. military said.

An offensive was also launched this week to recapture Gurma, another town in Anbar which is just 10 kilometers (six miles) from the ISIL stronghold of Fallujah and less than 30 kilometers from Baghdad airport.

"Gurma will soon be liberated totally, our forces are on the edge of town," a statement from Baghdad operations command said.

It claimed that 73 Takfiris were killed in the first two days of fight-

ing and a number of bombs defused.

An official with the religious authority in the holy city of Najaf, where many Shias want to be buried and which has the world's largest cemetery, said the bodies of 64 fighters killed in the Tikrit battle and elsewhere had been brought in since March 4.

Undated footage surfaced on the Internet Saturday of the bodies of eight men described as pro-government volunteers hanging from a bridge in Hawija, 75 kilometers north of Tikrit.

Iraqi forces spent the operation's first days clearing outlying areas and are now closing in on Tikrit itself, as well as the towns of Al-Alam and Ad-Dawr.

Tikrit is the home town of executed dictator Saddam Hussein and Ad-Dawr that of Izzat Ibrahim al-Duri, the most senior member of his regime still at large.

"There are fierce clashes around Ad-Dawr, with army aircraft providing support against the threat of snipers and car bombs," an army lieutenant colonel told AFP.

Dempsey, speaking to reporters aboard his plane en route to Bahrain and Iraq, said it was only a matter of time before ISIL was defeated in Tikrit.

"The numbers are overwhelming,"

he said, adding that "hundreds" of ISIL terrorists were facing an estimated 23,000 government and allied forces.

The terrorists have been responding by ramping up what UNESCO has called cultural cleansing, destroying heritage treasures one after the other.

Destruction of Hatra

ISIL terrorists have destroyed ancient remains of the 2,000-year-old city of Hatra in northern Iraq, the tourism and antiquities ministry said on Saturday.

An official told Reuters that the ministry had received reports from its employees in the northern city of Mosul that the site at Hatra had been demolished on Saturday.

The official said it the ministry had not received any pictures showing the extent of the damage at Hatra, which was named a world heritage site in 1987.

But a resident in the area told Reuters he heard a powerful explosion early on Saturday and said that other people nearby had reported that ISIL militants had destroyed some of the larger buildings in Hatra and were bulldozing other parts.

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Foreign Tourism Agencies Eye Iran Windfall

BERLIN (Dispatches) — Iranian businessman Cyrus Etemadi has had a stand at Berlin's ITB travel trade fair every year for more than 20 years, even when tension with the West meant few tourists visited the former ancient kingdom of Persia.

As nuclear talks with world powers are making headway, Etemadi hopes he can rebuild his tour business, Cyrus Saha, to its former strength.

"I used to have 70 people working with me, and we had 10,000 guests a year," he told Reuters on Friday at the ITB, the world's biggest travel trade fair.

Iran made it onto the top destination lists of major publications such as The Financial Times and The Guardian last year thanks to sights that include 2,500-year-old ruins at Persepolis near Shiraz and 16th-century Islamic architectural gems in Isfahan.

"They do have some challenges, especially in rebuilding their image

and how they appeal to others," said Taleb Rifai, head of the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and recently back from Iran.

"But it's a fantastically rich country, when it comes to cultural heritage, one of the richest civilizations mankind has ever seen," he said, adding he welcomed moves to introduce visas on arrival for around 27 countries.

Rifai, Etemadi and others at the ITB said there were early positive signs for tourism and Rouhani's administration aims to double annual income from it to \$10 billion.

The number of international tourists arriving in Iran jumped 24% to about 4.8 million in 2013, according to the UNWTO. Figures for 2014 are not yet available.

Travel and tourism directly accounted for about 2.2% of Iran's GDP in 2013. The sector's contribution to the economy is expected to grow by an average 5.7% per year through 2024, according to the

World Travel and Tourism Council.

Reflecting its ambition to grow the sector, Iran booked an entire hall at the ITB for the first time this year, highlighting its cultural heritage, 17 UNESCO World Heritage sites and picturesque landscapes ranging from mountains to deserts and coastal plains.

"You can see the massive uplift in tourism that occurred in other countries such as Myanmar when they came in from the cold," said Caroline Bremner, head of tourism and travel research at Euromonitor. "But Iran is not there yet."

German tour operator Gebeco, which focuses on students and adventure tours, tripled its Iran offering this year and added a further 15% after trips sold out.

Iranian tour operator Pasargad Tours, which organizes trips for about 10,000 to 12,000 travelers per year, says it is seeing a renaissance of demand for cultural travel.

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