

'Muslims Must Counter West's Mudslinging'

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – A top Iranian cleric on Friday called on Muslims to try to present the true image of Islam to the world in order to thwart Western plots trying depict Islam as violent. Tehran Friday Prayers Leader Ayatollah Muhammad Enami Kashani said Muslim teachers, students, merchants and all others have an obligation to deliver Islamic books to the young people of America and Europe. He said a recent letter by Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei to youths in Europe and North America was an example of the duty which every Muslim has to introduce Islam.

Hamas: Meshaal to Visit Tehran Soon

TEHRAN (Press TV) -- Khaled Meshaal, a senior leader of the Palestinian resistance movement Hamas, is to travel to the Iranian capital of Tehran soon, a senior Hamas member says. Ahmed Yousef confirmed on Friday that Meshaal will travel to Tehran in less than a month, according to the Palestinian news agency Felestin al Yaum. The official, who serves as a senior adviser to the Hamas government in Gaza, said that the trip is mainly aimed at improving the ties between Iran and Hamas.

Viewpoint
By: Kayhan Int'l Staff Writer
Foreign Firms Size Up Iran Market

UK Tribunal Says Intelligence-Sharing With U.S. Was Unlawful

Iraqi Army Kills 70 ISIL Terrorists in Baiji Operation

Kurdish Fighters Recapture 101 Villages Near Kobani

Oil Minister: Iran to Export Gasoline

TEHRAN (Press TV) -- Minister of Petroleum Bijan Namdar Zangeneh says Iran will need no more gasoline imports next year when a major refinery being built in the Persian Gulf becomes operational. Zangeneh said Iran will even turn to an exporter of gasoline and diesel once the Persian Gulf Star Refinery comes on stream. The next Iranian year, meant by Zangeneh, begins in March.

Gasoline stood out as the handiest lever when the United States first started its economic strangulation of Iran over the country's nuclear energy program.

The measure forced Iran to convert some petrochemical plants to produce gasoline which is highly polluting.

The production of petrochemical gasoline was halted after President Hassan Rouhani came to office and imports resumed after Iran clinched a temporary nuclear agreement.

Iranians burn less than 70 million liters of gasoline a day, of which five million liters is imported, the minister said.

Zangeneh said he was "not worried" about gasoline and diesel supplies next year.

"With the completion of the Persian Gulf Star Refinery, 36 million liters (a day) will be added to the country's gasoline and diesel production," he said.

"And with the entry of one train of the refinery into generation, 12 million liters per day will be added to the country's gasoline and diesel production. Half of this capacity is enough to dispense with gasoline imports next year," Zangeneh added.

The minister said, "With the operation of one train of the refinery, we will turn to an exporter of these two oil products."

Iran is building the Persian Gulf Star Refinery in Assalouyeh at an estimated cost of 2.5 billion euros. The plant is further expected to produce 360,000 barrels per day of gas condensates on top of jet fuel and other products.

The country is building another oil refinery in Kermanshah in western Iran. Zangeneh said the project faces financing problems, but efforts are being made to work them out.

Foreign Firms Biding Time

Zangeneh says foreign energy companies are waiting to pounce on Iran's oil and gas projects once sanctions are lifted.

The Islamic Republic is in talks with the U.S. and the Europeans and they hope to put decades of their standoff over Tehran's nucle-

ar energy program to rest. Zangeneh says numerous negotiations have been held with international entities over the past one and half years over their participation in Iran's oil industry projects. "These companies are waiting for the sanctions against Iran to be lifted so that they can swiftly sign deals," the minister told the national television during a live program.

"America and its allies however are trying with all their power to impede our work," he said.

Zangeneh said the Americans even oppose a conference in London to present Iran's oil development projects to multinational companies.

The conference was due to be held this month but it was delayed until later in the year without explanation.

Zangeneh says Iran has put forth its energy projects up for foreign investment both in the upstream and downstream sectors.

Sanctions, however, prevent foreign companies from participating in Iran's massive oil and gas development schemes. U.S. companies face the most inextricable legal hurdles to dig in.

Western oil executives have already met Zangeneh during OPEC's meetings in Vienna, including Italy's Eni, Royal Dutch Shell and Austria's OMV.

Zangeneh says Iran is making all its efforts to develop its fields even under sanctions.

"Right now, there is good work going on in the South Pars and western fields for gas and oil production. It's not such that we should wait for the sanctions to be lifted. We are continuing our work in line with the resistance economy policies."

Resistance economy is Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei's recipe for Iran to mobilize the country's resources to maintain development and withstand Western pressures.

Oil Glut Behind Price Declines

Zangeneh says market fundamentals are mainly to blame for crude oil price slumps even though political factors cannot be ruled out.

"The surplus oil in the market has been the main cause of price declines in recent months," he told national television.

He said there is 2 million bpd of excess oil in the market which is expected to endure in the first six months of 2015.

"This has pushed down prices in the global market, not to mention the

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Houthis Assume Power in Yemen



Members of the Houthi movement and their allies attend a meeting in Sanaa.

SANAA, Yemen (Dispatches) – Yemen's dominant Houthi movement on Friday dissolved parliament and said a new interim assembly would be formed, a move that could ease a power struggle that forced the president to step down last month.

The new assembly will elect a five-member interim presidential council to manage the country's affairs in a transitional period of up to two years, according to a televised statement.

Some political leaders attended the

announcement which took place at the Presidential Palace. Former interior and defense ministers were also there, indicating that the announcement has the blessing of some other political factions.

Yemen has been in political limbo

since President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi and the government of Prime Minister Khaled Bahah resigned after the Houthis seized the presidential palace and confined the head of state to his residence.

The Houthis, who became power brokers when they overran Sanaa in September, had been holding talks with main political factions trying to agree on a way out of the standoff.

The Shia Muslim movement had set a Wednesday deadline for political factions to agree a way out of the crisis, otherwise, the group said, it would impose its own solution.

The Arabian Peninsula country is fighting one of the most formidable branches of Al-Qaeda.

In a televised announcement from the Republican Palace in Sanaa, the Houthi fighters said they are forming a five-member presidential council that will replace President Hadi for an interim two-year period.

The Houthis also said that "Revolutionary Committee" would be in charge of forming a new parliament with 551 members.

The statement in Sanaa, read by an unidentified announcer, said that it marked "a new era that will take Yemen to safe shores".

It comes after political parties failed to meet a Houthi-imposed deadline on Wednesday to agree on an acceptable way forward.

Europeans Warn U.S. Against Arming Ukraine

BRUSSELS (Reuters/AFP) -- European defense ministers spoke out on Thursday against sending weapons to the Ukrainian army, pointing to a potential transatlantic split if Washington decides to supply arms.

The United States is considering whether to provide weapons to Ukraine in its fight against Russian-backed separatists, although no decision has been made, senior admin-

istration officials said on Monday.

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko has also called on NATO states to send weapons to his country.

Several European defense ministers attending a NATO meeting in Brussels voiced opposition to sending weapons to Ukraine, fearing it could fuel the conflict.

"More weapons in this area will not bring us closer to a solution,

and will not end the suffering of the population," German Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyen told reporters.

"We need to put a lot of pressure on the separatists and Russia in an economic and political way to find a solution at the table and not on the (battle)field because to give input to a potential escalation is not a good solution," she said.

Dutch Defense Minister Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert said she believed most allies, "but in particular the Netherlands, will insist on non-lethal support to Ukraine. Political dialogue is the only way out of the crisis."

Italian Defense Minister Roberta Pinotti said Rome opposed the supply of lethal weapons to Ukraine.

"We need to lower the temperature of the crisis, not to raise it," she told a news conference.

British Defense Secretary Michael Fallon said London would "see what more we can do in the way of training and equipment that is non-lethal".

Lithuanian Defense Minister Juozas Olekas said his country supported Ukraine with "some elements" for the military requested by Poroshenko but declined to give details.

U.S. Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel refused to be drawn on whether

he backed sending defensive weapons to Ukraine during a press conference in Brussels, but said: "We shouldn't forget ... what President Obama has said, what leaders of European nations have said ... This issue is not going to be resolved militarily."

U.S. Air Force General Philip Breedlove, NATO's top military commander, said Russian supply of heavy weaponry and assistance to rebels in eastern Ukraine caused "much concern" and the Ukrainian people had a right to defend themselves.

But he cautioned that the situation in Ukraine had no military solution and any action by Western nations should be aimed at creating "conditions that support all parties to come to the table" to resolve the problem. "Arms will not change that," Breedlove told reporters.

But he declined to be drawn specifically on whether he supported providing defensive lethal weapons to Ukraine, as has been reported in some media.

"I've made my specific advice to ... both my U.S. chain of command and my NATO chain of command. They are taking my advice under consideration," he said, declining further comment.

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