

Iran Offers Condolences to Nepal

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Iran’s foreign ministry spokeswoman on Saturday expressed sympathy with the Nepalese nation and government over the death of scores of people in a massive earthquake in the Himalayan country. Marziyeh Afkham offered the sympathy of the Iranian nation and administration over the tragedy and extended her condolences to the people and government of Nepal and the families of the victims. She also prayed for the quick recovery of those injured in the natural disaster.

Zarif: India a Major Economic Partner

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Iran’s Foreign Minister Muhammad Javad Zarif on Saturday hailed India as a major economic partner, emphasizing the need for the Indian companies’ closer partnership in Iran’s development projects. Zarif expressed hope that bilateral relations would increase in all spheres given the age-old relations between Tehran and New Delhi. He also highlighted the grounds for India’s partnership in the Iranian projects, such as development of the southeastern port of Chabahar, noting that development of the port will promote cooperation among Iran, India and Afghanistan.

Viewpoint
By: Kayhan Int'l Staff Writer
U.S. Drone War: Clear and Troubling

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President: Oil Dependence at Record Low

TEHRAN (Press TV) – President Hassan Rouhani said on Saturday Iran’s dependence on oil revenues will drop to its lowest level ever in the current Iranian year which began on March 21.

Addressing military top brass here, Rouhani added that his administration succeeded in fulfilling its commitments over the past two years despite financial problems caused as a result of sanctions imposed on the country over its nuclear program and a slash in oil prices.

He added that some neighboring countries have hatched a plot to reduce oil prices, but their move has backfired on them.

The president noted that his administration also managed to increase the budget for the country’s development over the past two years.

Iran holds the world’s fourth largest proven crude oil reserves and the first largest natural gas reserves.

Oil prices have nearly halved since the summer of 2014, and currently stand slightly above \$60 per barrel.

Rouhani further said poverty and unemployment are major causes of insecurity in the society and called for eradicating them.

He added that all Iranian citizens are equal before the law, saying, “Civil rights are the same for all. All are Iranians and equal to the law.”

Rouhani emphasized that all those who are residing in Iran, including tourists, enjoy safety thanks to efforts by the Iranian police personnel.

He called on the police to cooperate with the administration in achieving economic prosperity and progress.

Governor of the Central Bank of Iran has said the country’s economy will continue to improve no matter what happens in the nuclear negotiations.

“Regardless of what the outcome of the negotiations will be, we have planned our economy in such a way that its gradual improvement will continue,” Valiollah Seif has told China Central Television (CCTV).

The governor, who is in Washington to take part in the seasonal meetings of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, said Iran’s economy is “on the right track”.

“We have a highly-educated young population. We are sure that we can create capacities in the economy which will make the situation much better than it is,” he said.

Seif touted the “big achievements” under President Hassan Rouhani, saying the government had managed to bring the inflation rate down to 15% from 40% at the beginning of his term by applying “appropriate monetary policies and fiscal discipline”.

The administration is now working to bring the inflation further down to single digits.

“This may not be achieved next year but we are pretty confident that we will be able to bring it down to single digits in two years,” Seif said.

Iran’s economy turned a corner in 2013 and started to experience a modest growth after two years of recession and runaway inflation.

The government, Seif said, has planned for the scenario of the economy under sanctions as the fate of the ongoing negotiations between Iran and the P5+1 remains unclear.

The two sides hope to reach a final agreement by the end of June but the pace of lifting sanctions on the Islamic Republic remains a bone of contention.

“Of course, we have to admit if we have a successful conclusion to these negotiations, we would see more of a positive impact in terms of higher growth, lower inflation and lower unemployment,” Seif said.

Lifting sanctions will also benefit others, including the Middle East, helping return stability to the highly volatile region.

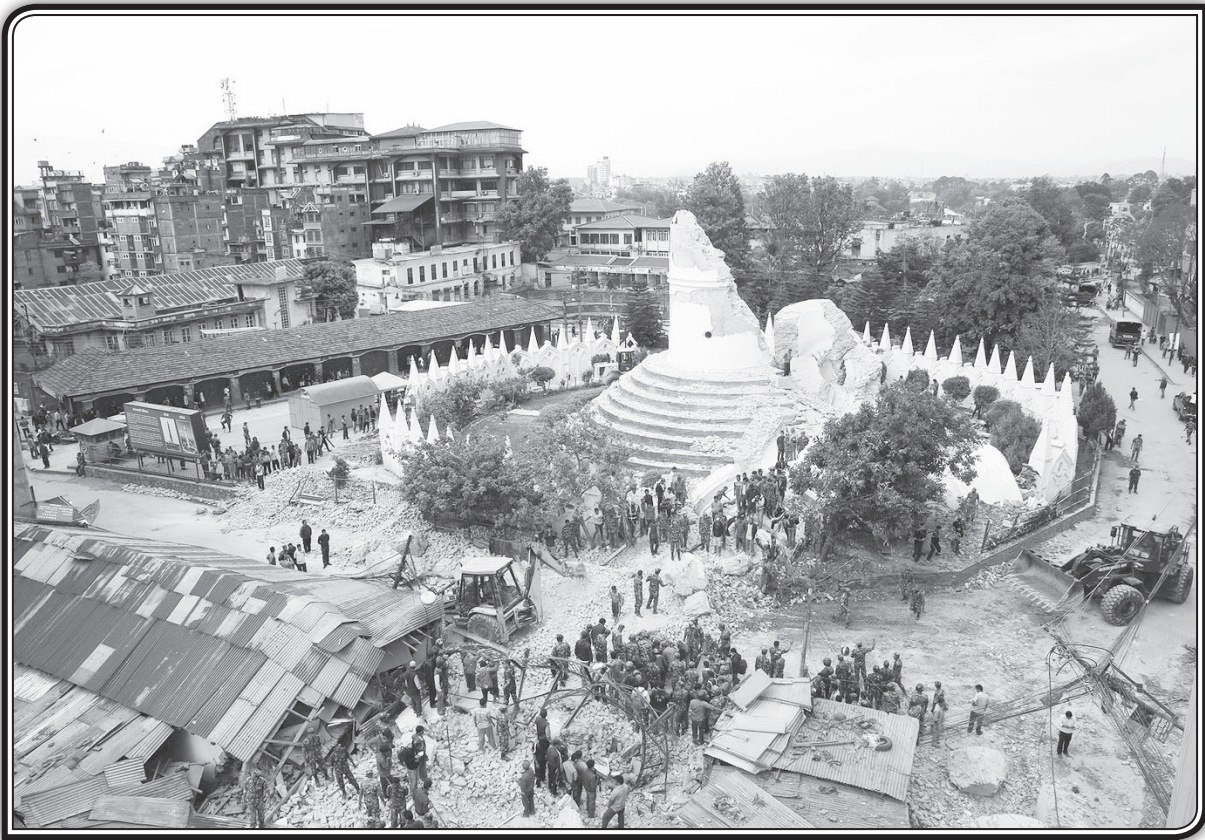
“Iran has a high capacity to interact with its neighbors. Lifting of sanctions could bring stability to the region. Any delay will have negative consequences for the region as a whole,” Seif said.

The central bank governor also invited Iranians abroad to bring home their investments and expertise.

“I want to give the assurance that we have potentials to encourage Iranians abroad to return to their country.

“It’s good to have these people in our country so that they could put their capacities at the service of their country,” Seif said.

Powerful Quake Kills Hundreds in Nepal



Nepal’s rescue workers gather at the collapsed Dharahara Tower in Kathmandu.

KATHMANDU, Nepal (AP) – A powerful earthquake struck Nepal Saturday, killing at least 926 people across a swath of four countries as the violently shaking earth collapsed houses, leveled centuries-old temples and triggered avalanches on Mt. Everest. It was the worst tremor to hit the poor South Asian nation in over 80 years.

At least 876 people were confirmed dead in Nepal, according to the police. Another 34 were killed in India, 12 in Tibet and two in Bangladesh. Two Chinese citizens died in the Nepal-China border. The death toll is almost certain to rise, said deputy Inspector General of

Police Komal Singh Bam.

It was a few minutes before noon when the quake, with a preliminary magnitude of 7.9, began to rumble across the densely populated Kathmandu Valley, rippling through the capital Kathmandu and spreading in all directions -- north toward the Himalayas and Tibet, south to the Indo-Gangetic plains, east toward the Brahmaputra delta of Bangladesh and west toward the historical city of Lahore in Pakistan.

Shrish Vaidya, a businessman, was with his family in his two-story house on the outskirts of Kathmandu, when the quake struck.

“It is hard to describe. The house

was shaking like crazy. We ran out and it seemed like the road was heaving up and down,” he told The Associated Press. “I don’t remember anything like this before. Even my parents can’t remember anything this bad.”

A magnitude-6.6 aftershock hit about an hour later, and smaller aftershocks continued to jolt the region for hours. Residents ran out of homes and buildings in panic. Walls tumbled, trees swayed, power lines came crashing down and large cracks opened up on streets and walls. And clouds of dust began to swirl all around.

“Our village has been almost

wiped out. Most of the houses are either buried by landslide or damaged by shaking,” said Vim Tamang, a resident of Manglung village near the epicenter. He said half of the village folks are either missing or dead. “All the villagers have gathered in the open area. We don’t know what to do. We are feeling helpless,” he said when contacted by telephone.

Within hours of the quake, hospitals began to fill up with dozens of injured people. With organized relief largely absent, many of the injured were brought to hospitals by friends and relatives in motorized rickshaws, flatbed trucks and cars.

In Kathmandu, dozens of people gathered in the parking lot of Norvic International Hospital, where thin mattresses were spread on the ground for patients rushed outside, some wearing hospital pajamas. A woman with a bandage on her head sat in a set of chairs pulled from the hospital waiting room.

Doctors and nurses hooked up some patients to intravenous drips in the parking lot, or gave people oxygen.

As night fell, thousands of scared residents continued to camp out in parks and compounds, too scared to return to their homes. Meteorologists forecast rain and thunderstorms for Saturday night and Sunday.

Prime Minister Sushil Koirala, who was attending a summit in Jakarta, tried to rush back home but made it as far as Bangkok where his connecting flight to Kathmandu was canceled because the capital’s international airport was shut down.

While the extent of the damage and the scale of the disaster are yet

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Navy Commander: Flotilla Continues Mission in Gulf of Aden

TEHRAN (Dispatches) – Navy commander Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari on Saturday dismissed reports about a warning to Iranian ships in the Gulf of Aden, saying the flotilla is currently carrying out its mission in the strategic region.

“The 34th fleet of the Iranian Navy is currently in the Gulf of Aden at the entrance to the Bab al-Mandab Strait and is patrolling the area and conducting its mission,” Sayyari said.

The statements came after a Pentagon spokesman claimed that the flotilla of nine Iranian naval and cargo ships was sailing in the direction of Iran.

“The (Iranian) ships have turned around ... Obviously what their on-

ward plans are, we don’t know,” U.S. Defence Secretary Ash Carter said.

“It is a welcome event because it does contribute to de-escalation and that’s what we’re trying to suggest to all the parties there, is the best course, and those parties include the Iranians,” Carter said.

Army Colonel Steve Warren, a Pentagon spokesman, said earlier the flotilla was in international waters about midway along the coast of Oman on Friday and still headed northeast.

Warren declined to say the ships were going back to Iran or headed toward Iran. Warren said the U.S. military did not know their intent and the vessels could turn around at

any point.

The 34th fleet of the Iranian navy, which comprises the Bushehr logistic vessel and Alborz destroyer, left the country’s southern port city of Bandar Abbas for the Gulf of Aden and the Bab al-Mandab Strait on April 8 in line with the Islamic Republic’s policy of safeguarding naval routes for vessels in the region.

Sayyari said improving security along Iran’s sea communications routes is one of the objectives of the country’s naval forces.

U.S. defense officials have claimed that the Iranian flotilla was suspected of carrying weapons bound for Yemen.

Saudi officials had said their sailors would attempt to search the

ships if they tried to dock in Yemen.

When the ships were first deployed earlier this month, Sayyari said that they were on a routine anti-piracy mission to protect shipping.

On Friday, Iran’s foreign ministry summoned the Saudi charge d’affaires to protest Riyadh’s interception of two Iranian planes carrying humanitarian aid to Yemen, the Students News Agency ISNA reported.

ISNA said two Iranian cargo planes carrying food and medicine to Yemen had been forced by Saudi jets to leave Yemeni airspace, one on Thursday and another on Friday.

“Unfortunately, Saudi fighter jets have blocked two Iranian planes,

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