

New IAEA Talks Begin

Iran and the UN nuclear watchdog held a new round of talks on Monday on Tehran's nuclear drive.

An unnamed source quoted by IRNA said the talks, which were earlier held between Iranian officials and representatives of the International Atomic Energy Agency in



April, would last three days.

The Iranian delegation is headed by Iran's ambassador to the UN agency, Ali Asghar Soltanieh, while the agency's director for safeguard operations, Herman Nackaerts, is heading the IAEA team, the source said.

IAEA Chief Mohamed ElBaradei is due to report in June on Iran's nuclear program to the agency's Board of Governors and the UN Security Council, which has imposed three sets of sanctions on Tehran over its nuclear program.

In April, Iran and the IAEA held two rounds of talks concentrating on the "alleged studies".

Iran insists that the talks are merely routine cooperation between the authorities and the agency.

Iran has refused to heed international demands to halt uranium enrichment, insisting that it has a right to the process to make nuclear fuel for meeting its increasing energy needs as a signatory to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

The IAEA delegation did not carry out any inspections of Iran's nuclear facilities and left Tehran after talks with Iranian officials.

ElBaradei says these talks have let to good progress in verifying Iran's past and present activities.

Afghanistan Appreciates Iran Role

Afghanistan's ambassador in Tehran has thanked Iran for helping restore peace and security to his country.

"Iran has been very helpful in rebuilding Afghanistan and establishing security in the country," said Mohammad Yahya Maroufi, calling for greater cooperation between the two countries, PressTV reported.

"Iran and Afghanistan must continue and enhance their cooperation to overcome problems such as terrorism and drug trafficking, which have caused both nations great suffering," he added.

Maroufi also said that a special police force, organized by the Afghan government for combating narcotics, was cooperating with the Iranian law-enforcement forces along the two countries' common border.

Tehran and Kabul have also launched a project to reconstruct important frontier regions on both sides, added the Afghan ambassador.

Maroufi said in conclusion that the regional states face many challenges, which must be overcome through collective understanding and cooperation.

Mohammad Yahya Maroufi



US Backs Off On Arms Allegations



Explosives used by Iraqi militants are seen in this file photo in Baghdad.

There is no evidence to support claims that weapons used by Iraqi insurgents are provided by Iran and the US is paddling back on the allegation, the Los Angeles Times has reported.

The US military spokesman in Baghdad, Maj. Gen. Kevin Bergner, held a press briefing on Wednesday on the discovery of a new cache of weapons and munitions in Iraq but the word "Iran"—or any form of it—was not heard in the conference, the Time's Tina Susman noted.

Bergner announced the extraordinary list of weapons and munitions that have been uncovered in recent weeks since fighting erupted between the US and Iraqi forces and armed militiamen.

Among other things, Bergner cited 20,000 "items of ammunition, explosives and weapons" discovered by Iraqi forces in the central holy city of Karbala.

The items in Karbala include caches containing 570 explosive devices, nine mortars, four anti-aircraft missiles, and 45 RPGs; and in the southern city of Basra alone, 39 mortar tubes, 1,800 mortars and artillery rounds, 600 rockets, and 387 roadside bombs, the report said.

The US accuses Iran of supporting terrorist groups in war-ravaged Iraq, claiming such weaponry has its roots in the Islamic Republic.

However, "not once did Bergner point the finger at Iran" for any of the weapons and munitions, the Times said.

It is a striking change from just a couple of weeks ago when US military officials in the Iraqi capital and at the Pentagon were alleging that caches found in

Basra in particular had revealed Iranian-made arms manufactured as recently as this year.

The US claims the majority of rockets being fired at the US bases, including Baghdad's Green Zone, are launched by militiamen receiving training, arms and other aid from Iran.

Some Iraqi officials also have accused Iran of meddling in violence and had echoed the US accusations of new Iranian-made arms being found in Basra.

But "neither the US nor Iraq has displayed any of the alleged arms to the public or press, and lately it is looking less likely they will," with US military officials saying it was up to the Iraqis to show the items. Iraqi officials lately have backed off the accusations against Iran.

A plan to show some alleged Iranian-supplied explosives to journalists last week in Karbala and then destroy them was canceled after the US realized none of them was from Iran.

A US military spokesman attributed the confusion to a misunderstanding that emerged after an Iraqi Army general in Karbala erroneously reported the items were of Iranian origin.

When US explosives experts went to investigate, they discovered they were not Iranian after all.

Iran, meanwhile, has categorically denied the accusations, and it says as long as the US troops continue to take part in military action in Iraq's Shiite strongholds, it won't consider holding further talks with Washington on how to stabilize Iraq.

Iranians Support Interactions

Iranians are, based on their religious and cultural teachings, highly receptive to interactions with other nations, a senior cultural official said.

Head of the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization (ICRO) Mehdi Mostafavi made the remark in a meeting with a group of visiting members of the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), IRNA reported.

The 20-member group is currently in Iran to hold talks with the country's religious and cultural figures and become more familiar with the Iranian and Islamic culture.

Established in 1984, the USIP is an independent body for strengthening the peace-making capacity of religious leaders.



Mehdi Mostafavi

Referring to the significance of interaction and holding dialogue among leaders of different religions, Mostafavi said Iran followed two major rules in its relations with other parties.

"In our dialogues with other nations, we consider two major principles: strengthening of rationalism and promotion of belief and religion," he said.

Mostafavi noted that Iran has conducted dialogues with other religions, referring to Tehran's talks with the leaders of other religions, including Christianity, Judaism, Zoroastrianism and Buddhism.

Persian Press Watch

The End

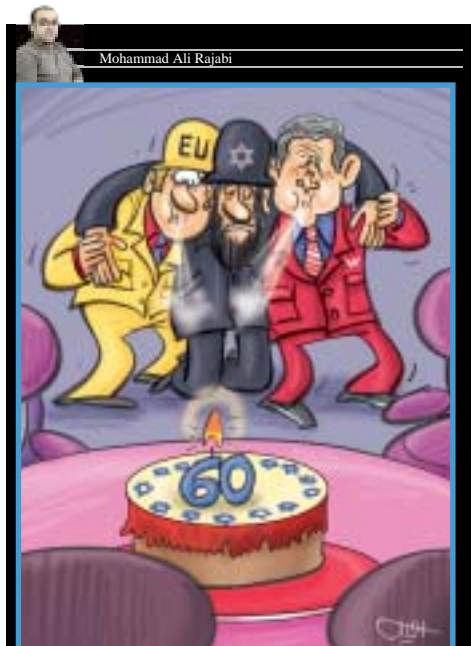
KAYHAN: The power struggle in the Middle East has two main players: the United States and the Islamic Republic. In the past two years, Washington has been trying to bring other players in order to overwhelm Iran. However, such efforts have failed because of the misplaced US policies in the Middle East. The warmongering neocons also misused the United Nations Security Council as an axis of pressure against Iran. However, their anti-Iran sanctions have been fruitless. Americans know that George Bush's term in office is ending and he has failed to achieve the avowed goal of bringing democracy to the Middle East in the past eight years. In fact, the Bush administration has made the region a terrorist base, bringing in its wake more insecurity, violence and bloodshed. The neocons are also aware that the Islamic Republic has now turned into a regional powerhouse. This is the end of neocon game in the Middle East.

Prelude to Destruction

JOMHOURI-YE ESLAMI: Zionist leaders are preparing for celebrations to mark the 60th anniversary of the illegitimate formation of the Zionist regime. It is, in fact, the 60th anniversary of occupying the Palestinian lands. Israeli officials have organized elaborate celebrations. Many world leaders have also been invited. These celebrations are an attempt to conceal their failures in the 33-day war against Lebanon and attempts to assassinate Hezbollah leader Seyyed Hassan Nasrallah. Moreover, Israeli officials are facing the heat as a result of the Winograd report. It's a fact that thousands of Jews across the world do not recognize Israel. These anniversary celebrations are nothing but a prelude to the destruction of the Zionist regime, as it is weakening day by day at the hands of the Lebanese resistance movement.

High Inflation

DONYA-YE EQTESAD: Inflation is one of the most important macroeconomic indices. The inflation rate currently stands at about 19 percent, which has become a hot topic in the economic circles. Although the inflation rate in Iran has shown a rising trend in the past decade, the 19-percent inflation in the current Iranian year, which started March 20, has given rise to many analyses in the media and even among the religious circles. Some critics say the high inflation rate has its roots in the misplaced policies of the government. Apart from such analyses, rising inflation in Iran is turning into a "bitter incident", as the government devises schemes to control the high inflation rate while blaming it on high global prices.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi