

Iran, Japan to hold talks next week

TEHRAN - The sixth round of talks between deputy foreign ministers of Iran and Japan to promote mutual understanding will be held in Tehran next Monday.

Japanese Deputy Foreign Minister Minoru Tamba, Japanese Ambassador to Tehran Takaya Suto and officials from Japanese Foreign Ministry will take part in the talks.

Iran will be represented by Deputy Minister for Asia-Pacific Affairs Mohsen Amin-Zadeh.

During the 2-day talks, the officials will exchange views on issues of mutual interest, the international situation and bilateral relations.

The past round of talks was held in Tokyo in November 1997.

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Leader regrets bloodshed in Afghanistan

TEHRAN - The Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, here on Tuesday expressed regret about the bloodshed in Afghanistan and the mischief by the Taliban militia.

"The Taliban must make up for the ugly act of seizing the Iranian citizens and very respectfully return them home," IRNA quoted the Leader as saying.

Speaking on the occasion of the anniversary of return of the former POWs to the Islamic motherland, Ayatollah Khamenei referred to the Taliban as a group of ignorant and immature people, adding "the Iranian nation, government and armed forces do not tolerate the acts of mischief by the U.S., let alone those of this bunch of lowly people."

It's a pity that the fate of the Muslim nation of the noble country of Afghanistan

Rafsanjani:

Taliban playing with fire

TEHRAN - Chairman of the Expediency Council Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani said on Tuesday that the Taliban are playing with fire.

Addressing a group of former prisoners of war (POWs) on the anniversary of their return home, Ayatollah Rafsanjani said it is regrettable that a group of Iranian children have been taken captive by an immature and unwise group of people in Afghanistan, IRNA reported.

"It should have been known to our neighbors that Iran overlooks no tyranny or mischief," the chairman of the Expediency Council said.

"Those who have seen the power of the Islamic Republic of Iran know that the Iranian nation is strong enough to forcibly free its children from captivity without any negative effect," Rafsanjani said.

He said patience has its own limits and the Taliban should not misuse it.

Rafsanjani said, "we hope the Taliban by understanding the power of the Islamic Republic of Iran would seize the opportunity given by Iran to release the children of the Iranian nation who had been serving the oppressed people of Afghanistan."

"The enemy should not forget that the country of martyrs, the war disabled and the POWs cannot be infiltrated," Rafsanjani said.

Iran U.N. mission:

Delay in release of abducted Iranians unacceptable

TEHRAN - Iran's permanent representative to the U.N. Mohammad Hadi Nejad-Husseini, said on Tuesday that the Iranian government considers as unacceptable Taliban's delay in release of Iranian nationals abducted in Mazar-i-Sharif on August 8.

The Taliban militia abducted 11 Iranian diplomats and bureau chief of the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) after invading Mazar-i-Sharif, in north Afghanistan. They also captured 36 Iranian relief workers who were carrying foodstuffs. According to reports, the kidnapped Iranians have been transferred to Qandahar.

Nejad-Husseini made the remark in a letter to U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan, a copy of which was handed over to President of the U.N. Security Council Danilo Turk, IRNA reported from New York.

He also thanked the Security Council for its stance on Afghanistan.

The U.N. Security Council in a strongly worded statement last Thursday severely condemned the Taliban militia for not complying with the demands of the world community and asked for an immediate release of Iranian diplomats and the IRNA correspondent.

The statement also named the Taliban as the occupier of the Iranian consulate in Mazar-i-Sharif and emphasized that the move was a flagrant violation of internationally recognized norms and principles.

Nejad-Husseini added that the Islamic Republic hopes the Iranian nationals would be released through negotiations and peaceful means immediately and without further delay.

He said he was concerned that the Taliban has so far refrained from talking about release of Iranian nationals and that there has been no progress in settlement of the issue.

The Iranian envoy called on Annan and the Security Council to exert pressure on the Taliban and countries supporting it to immediately release the abducted Iranians.

to fall in the hands of a bunch of ignorant people who don't know their own interest, don't understand Islam and politics and have little understanding of foreign conspiracies, Ayatollah Khamenei added.

Expressing sorrow about the Afghan situation, the Leader wished that by the grace of Allah the people of the war-torn country duplicate its victories over the Soviet army, this time against the ignorant and immature elements.

Therefore, the Leader stated, "the Iranian nation should always be grateful and express its gratitude to these devoted elements."

Blasting those inspired or fascinated by the West, the Leader said that "the group who still reminisces the former corrupt regime and seeks friendly relations with the U.S. are the same people who scorn the IRGC, army, war-disabled, former POWs, martyrs and their families, the Basij and Hezbollah forces.

"These are self-centered people who seek only their own interest and have not thought of anything but their own interest throughout their lives." They are absent when there is danger and war and are the most vocal at the peace time."

The Leader further praised the faithful youth and the Basij as real guardians of the Islamic motherland, adding "those willing to defend against dangers and threats and to safeguard the revolution, its values and the good name of the late Imam, are the same

people who have a spirit of faith and devotion," the Leader added.

Ayatollah Khamenei referred to the Basij (volunteer forces), armed forces, Islamic Revolution's Guards Corps (IRGC) and other religious faiths as the real source of the country's power, adding "a country and a nation which possesses such youth, will enjoy great honor because no world power can impose its might on it or can control its fate."

Stating that the enemies are "as usual gripped with an illusion," the Leader added that the nation's enemies who do not see the devotion of the people including the youth to Islam and the late Imam, are sure facing defeat and disappointment. "I call on the beloved and faithful youth to maintain its presence at the scenes," Ayatollah Khamenei said.

The Leader further referred to the people as the source of the government's power, adding that the three branches of the government all belong to the people. This is what has brought greatness to the Iranian nation which is taking full advantage of its resources to reduce the country's reliance on sources outside of its borders, Ayatollah Khamenei concluded.

Prior to the Leader's speech, his representative for former POWs affairs Abu-Torabi commemorated the victorious return of the POWs to the Islamic motherland. Abu-Torabi, himself a former POW, said that the prisoners' perseverance during their captivity in the Iraqi prisons is a source of honor for the Iranian nation.

The thousand-strong audience hearing the Leader's speech included families of the martyrs and war veterans from all regions of the country.

Reviewing Iran's Afghan policy, ten deputies had criticized Iran's foreign policy in the session, he said, adding that

Iran's Afghan policy reviewed

TEHRAN - In the closed session of the parliament here Tuesday, attended by Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi and Information Minister Qorbani Dorri Najaf-Abadi, parliament deputies discussed the latest developments in Afghanistan and the necessary measures Iran should take in this respect.

Speaking on the side-line of the parliament session, Mohammad Baqer Nobakht, told IRNA that conditions of the Iranian diplomats taken captive by the Taliban, Afghan refugees, security along eastern border, Tehran-Islamabad ties, and prediction of future developments in Afghanistan figured prominently in the session.

In an exclusive interview with IRNA after attending the closed-door session of the parliament Tuesday, the foreign minister said that all available information point to the fact that the Iranian diplomats and IRNA correspondent, kidnapped by the Taliban, are all alive and in good health condition.

Kharrazi said the session was a good opportunity to speak to parliament representatives and answer their questions on various issues, especially those concerning Afghanistan.

The session held "helpful" discussions on the root causes of Afghan problems and on the plans pursued by the Foreign Ministry and the Supreme National Security Council in this regard, Kharrazi said.

Iran has taken various diplomatic initiatives for freedom of its nationals from clutches of the Taliban and talks are underway with Pakistan, regional states and the U.N. in this respect, he added.

He said that many countries, the U.N. Security Council and the European Union have condemned such an act committed by the Taliban and extensive efforts have been made so far to con-

cerning the expansion of joint cooperation in science and higher education, Bulgak said that his country is looking forward to the visit by Iran's Minister of Culture and Higher Education Mostafa Moin during which he will sign an agreement on scientific and technical fields, IRNA reported from Moscow.

It was agreed that the trip should be made in the end of the current Christian year allowing adequate time for preparation.

Bulgak also expressed Russia's readiness to welcome the head of the Scientific and Industrial Research Organization of Iran Ahmad Motamedani on an official visit to Russia.

He also said that Russia will hold its third exhibition of scientific and technological products in Tehran in 1999.

Customs facilities at carpet exhibition

TEHRAN - The Customs Administration will set up shop at the permanent exhibit grounds in Tehran during the upcoming carpet exhibit at the site, the Director General of Customs Administration, Mehdi Karbasian, said here on Tues-

day.

Speaking to IRNA, Karbasian said the move aims to speed up appraisal and other customs procedures for export of carpets.

After going through the customs procedures at the exhibit site, the buyers can export their purchases by land or air without further procedures at other customs locations, the official said.

He further explained that the new facilities would be available to both domestic and foreign buyers.

Tehran carpet exhibit will be held August 23-29.

Karbasian also said that the Customs Administration is to facilitate import of raw materials and packaging equipment required for pro-

duction of export oriented goods.

He said all customs and commercial duties levied on such equipment and raw materials would be paid back to the importers within 48 hours.

Karbasian said that the move is in line with the administration's policy of encouraging export of non-oil commodities.

He said that reimbursement of customs duties, which used to be sometimes as much as half of the value of the imported com-

modities, would raise the purchasing power of producers of such goods for import of their needed raw ma-

terials.

He added that the Customs Administration has also facilitated temporary import of goods required for production of their export oriented commodities.

The Customs Adminis-

tration has removed unnecessary regulations for temporary import of such

Iranian delegations in Turkmenistan to follow up agreements

TEHRAN - Several delegations from various Iranian ministries and organizations are now in Ashkhabad to follow up and accelerate the implementation of agreements reached between Iran and Turkmenistan.

The Iranian delegations consist of representatives from the Ministry of Road and Transportation headed by chief of Iran's flag carrier (Iran Air) Shahcheragh, Physical Education Organization, Iran Khodro company and Iran's Oil Drilling Company who are scheduled to meet and exchange views with Turkmen officials on the aforesaid subjects.

It is expected direct flights between Tehran and Ashkhabad which have stopped for the past two months due to lack of enough passengers, would resume soon.

sure emergence of good and formation of a broad-based government in Afghanistan.

Also speaking at the end of the parliament session, the information minister warned the Taliban against any aggression along Iran's eastern border and stressed Iran's powerful presence along its frontiers.

Najaf-Abadi said that "we are present along the border and will not allow corrupt elements to abuse our borders."

He warned the Taliban that any act of hooliganism will be detrimental to themselves and stressed that they should immediately release Iranian hostages.

"We are against the Taliban's behavior and moves as well as the dangers it has posed to the region. As a tribe, mainly made up of Pashtuns, the Taliban is entitled to play a role in the future government of Afghanistan," announced Kharrazi.

The session held "helpful" discussions on the root causes of Afghan problems and on the plans pursued by the Foreign Ministry and the Supreme National Security Council in this regard, Kharrazi said.

Iran has taken various diplomatic initiatives for freedom of its nationals from clutches of the Taliban and talks are underway with Pakistan, regional states and the U.N. in this respect, he added.

Kharrazi also ruled out the possibility of a war breaking out in eastern parts of the country and said: "I do not predict that any conflict could break out in the region."

He stressed that this is an issue which concerns Afghanistan but all the neighboring countries should make efforts to in-

Cabinet, Parliament hold second joint session

TEHRAN - President Mohammad Khatami here Tuesday night said both the president and Majlis (parliament) deputies share a common feature as they are elected through people's vote.

Addressing the second joint session of the cabinet ministers and Majlis deputies, the president said through convergence many problems of the society will be solved, IRNA reported.

Pointing to the difference of preferences and tendencies in the society, Khatami said consolidation of the Islamic system requires that people feel their rights are guaranteed "even those who do not believe in our

faith."

In the absence of freedom, the society will be more exposed to harms, the president said, adding that a nation with greater sense of dignity and involvement in state affairs is resistant to plots and threats.

Underlining re-

inforcement of national consolidation, especially in the past year, the president admired tendency of the youth towards the system and the revolution.

"We should believe in youth, recognize their situation and respect their right of expression in the society," Khatami said.

Elsewhere in his speech, President Khatami termed

The Majlis speaker said foreign enemies and their agents are trying to sow discord and create tension in the society and warned that any move in this direction will displease the Almighty God.

He said in an effort to prepare the ground for the approval of the Third Five-Year Development Plan, the Majlis has formed a commission to make relevant studies.

He stressed that by analyzing the first and second development plans and their legal and executive shortcomings, more realism will be practiced in formulation and approval of the third plan so that its objectives will be realized.

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