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South African delegation in Tehran

TEHRAN - A South African delegation led by Foreign Ministry Under-Secretary for Asia and the Middle East Mrs. T. Mazibuko arrived in Tehran on Sunday.

Representatives from South African ministries of health, agriculture, education, mines, energy and railway and geology organization are accompanying Mrs. Mazibuko.

The South African officials are scheduled to hold negotiations with their Iranian counterparts to develop economic cooperation between the two countries.

Khatami receives message from President Assad:

Middle East agreement not to bring region nearer to peace

TEHRAN - Visiting Syrian Foreign Minister Farouq al-Shara handed over a message from Syrian President Hafiz al-Assad to President Mohammad Khatami in a meeting here Sunday.

In the meeting, President Khatami expressed hope for further expansion of bilateral relations, IRNA reported.

The chairman of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) then lauded the policy of the Syrian government in resolving recent tension between Damascus and Ankara. He also referred to the sensitive situation of the region and said that such minor problems between two Muslim countries can be eliminated through the prudence of the governments.

On the recent agreement between Arafat and the Zionist regime, the Iranian president said "we believe the recent decision was against the interests of the Palestinian people as well as against the independent Arab nations and that such agreements will not bring peace to the region."

The OIC chief then stated "we will not allow the legitimate rights of Palestinians be ignored but rather we will try to safeguard their independence and rights."

Al-Shara said on his part that cordial ties between Tehran and Damascus is based on mutual respect and has its roots in the history of the two countries.

The Syrian foreign minister then briefed President Khatami on a report on Ankara-Damascus recent crisis and appreciated the Islamic Republic of Iran for making efforts to solve the problem.

On the principled stance

of the Islamic Republic of Iran towards the Zionist regime, al-Shara noted that the Syrian government and people have confirmed the Iranian position.

In a separate meeting here Sunday, al-Shara and his Iranian counterpart Kamal Kharrazi reviewed ways to defuse Ankara-Damascus tension and discussed latest developments in the Middle East as well as the Iran-Syria bilateral relations.

Al-Shara in his talks termed Damascus-Tehran relations as "friendly" and appreciated the Iranian president and OIC chairman for his initiatives aimed at defusing tension between the two significant members of the 55-nation Islamic organization.

Noting that Syria has always tried to preserve stability and security in the region, al-Shara said that his government is for a good neighborly relation with Turkey.

The Syrian minister added that any conflict in the region would also harm other countries and that it would be in the interest of the enemies of the Muslim nations.

Kharrazi expressed satisfaction over the recent agreement between the two Muslim nations and stated that the objective behind mediation of the Islamic Republic of Iran was to help further strengthen cordial relations between the Muslim nations and stability in the region.

He also hoped that the two countries of Turkey and Syria would continue their constructive negotiations in order to settle other differences.

Kharrazi and al-Shara in

ETTELA'AT

INTERNATIONAL

The Only International Persian Daily Newspaper

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Iran's defense budget constant over last four years

TEHRAN - Iran's defense budget has remained unchanged over the past four years, and (considering the inflation) this actually translates to a drop in the country's defense budget.

The remark was made by the Defense Ministry's press advisor, Keyvan Khosravi, in an interview with IRNA.

Iran's defense spending is driven by needs, which makes for very efficient use of the defense budget, Khosravi added.

Khosravi further stated that Iran has been able to maintain a proper defensive capability in spite of the low spending in the sector thanks in part to the country's reliance on domestic resources for its defense needs.

He further rejected some foreign reporters claiming a 20 percent increase in Iran's defense budget, adding "undoubtedly, Iran has the lowest defense budget amongst Middle Eastern countries."

Commenting on the statement by a U.S. naval commander terming as threatening the Iranian defensive measures, Khosravi said "by publishing unfounded and biased reports, Washington intends to justify its defense minister's unsuccessful mission to the southern Persian Gulf states."

Khosravi referred to recent exchange visits and talks amongst the defense officials of the regional states as a sign of the countries' desire to expand relations, stressing that the trend of building confidence amongst the Persian Gulf states would not be adversely affected by false reports from countries outside of the region.

On Iran's nuclear program, the defense official said that the International Atomic Energy Agency has consistently confirmed the peaceful nature of the programs.

Highlighting that Iran is a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), Khosravi said that the Islamic Republic of Iran based on its convictions, regards as inhuman the development of nuclear energy for non-peaceful purposes.

Giant sturgeon caught in Bandar Anzali

BANDAR ANZALI, Gilan - A giant sturgeon weighing 360 kg was caught in waters off Bandar Anzali port city in this northern province, on Sunday.

According to Khosrow Tahiri, head of public relations office of the provincial Fisheries Organization, some 24 kg of caviar were extracted from the three-meter sturgeon.

The fish meat is worth over RIs 3.6 million, he said. Iran is one of the world's major exporters of caviar. It earned around Dlr 34 million in international sales last Iranian year.

Iran, Croatia sign agreement for expansion of cultural cooperation

TEHRAN - Croatian Culture Minister Bozo Biskupic and his Iranian counterpart Ataollah Mohajerani signed an agreement here Sunday for cooperation in the fields of culture, education and science.

The agreement calls for exchange of researchers, authors, artists and experts, setting up cultural and arts exhibitions, performance of music programs, theater shows, radio and TV programs and organizing film festivals, IRNA reported.

It also calls for exchange of periodicals and films, books, audio-visual cassettes and computer software on cultural, arts, scientific, educational, tourist and sports subjects.

Cooperation between Iranian and Croatian movie houses, preparation of the ground for education of language and literature and translation of important literary works are among other provisions of the agreement.

Iran and Croatia are committed under the agreement to support activities for preserving and reconstructing the cultural

monuments, and cooperation among academic centers, scientific and educational institutions and libraries.

The two countries are also to offer scholarships to each other's nationals, build cooperation among their parliamentarians and representative delegations in the UNESCO and other international organizations, set the stage for cooperation among their mass media sources and radio and TV and facilitate exchange of visits by delegations and the sports teams and coaches.

The visiting official earlier met with First Vice-President Hassan Habibi and Vice-Speaker of Parliament Hassan Rowhani.

Calling outcome of his talks with Iranian officials as "fruitful", Biskupic called on the Iranian government and parliament to support provisions of the agreement signed between his country and Iran.

He invited Iranian arts groups to attend a music festival, which is to be held in his country.

He also called on Mohajerani to pay an official visit to Croatia.

Mohajerani for his part said that conclusion of the agreement for bilateral cultural and scientific cooperation is a positive step towards expansion of bilateral cultural relations.

Referring to Croatia's request for Iran's cooperation with the country to repair its cultural monuments, Mohajerani said that a group of experts are to be dispatched to Croatia for the purpose by the year end by the Cultural Heritage Organization.

The first vice-president told the visiting Croatian culture minister that Iran and Croatia have enjoyed "good" relations since the latter's independence, adding that bilateral ties were taking an upward trend.

Habibi said that all through history Iran and countries in the Balkans, including Croatia, enjoyed expanded relations in light of multiple historical and cultural commonalities.

Habibi pointed to joint efforts for the repair of historical monuments, cultural research works and exchange of visits of artists of both the countries as other areas of bilateral cooperation.

In reply the Croatian culture minister said promotion of cultural relations with Iran is "highly important" for Croatia. Through bilateral cultural cooperation, Iran and Croatia can expand cooperation in other areas, said the minister.

He said that further expansion of all-out relations with Iran is Croatia's prime policy.

Iranian professor wins IBC's Intl. man of year award

TEHRAN - Abbas Shafiee, a faculty of Tehran University's college of pharmacy, has been selected 'the international man of the year' for 1997/98 by England's International Biographical Center (IBC), and thus awarded the IBC's medal of honor.

"The prestigious award will be made available to only a few illustrious individuals whose achievements and leadership stand out in the international community," Shafiee's nomination letter by the IBC read.

Shafiee, 61, has a Ph.D. in pharmacy from Tehran University and also a post-doctorate degree in chemistry from the U.S. Besides being the author of nine books in chemistry and pharmacy, he has so far published 154 articles in prestigious international chemistry and pharmacy publications, and also has presented 54 papers in international conferences.

Shafiee won the U.S. student research first prize in 1967 and also awards for research from Iran's minister of culture and higher education.

He was selected as Tehran University's

professor of the year in 1989, and won the top book award in 1995.

The award winner was selected as a member of the scientific advising board of the U.N. program 'banning the use of chemical weapons' and took part in the relevant meets in Holland.

Amongst his researches are those on cardiovascular system medicine, angiotensin-2 formula and also herbal medicine.

He is due to present a paper titled 'the prospective of research on medicinal plant in Iran' in a medical conference in Sri Lanka to be held October 27-November 2.

The very dedicated and humble Shafiee told reporters on Sunday, "whatever I did was to serve my country and people, and do not expect a thing in return."

Touching on research activities in Iran, he said "while having the right resources can be helpful in research, it is not the whole story and there has to be a passion and drive in the researcher which would propel him toward his goal with least of resources."

Women can play major role in dialog among civilizations

TEHRAN - Presidential advisor and head of Women's Contribution Center Zahra Shojaei said here on Sunday that women can play the most important role in the field of dialog among civilizations because they are conveyors of cultures.

Shojaei in a meeting with a nine-member Senegalese delegation here on Sunday hoped that the gap between the north and south would be narrowed and the ground would be prepared for progress and development of all countries, IRNA reported.

Briefing the delegation on her center's activities, Shojaei said the center has opened a women exclusive library following establishment of a data dissemination network and a data bank.

Head of the delegation said that they are visiting Iran to build a link between Iranian and Senegalese women and gain expertise in various fields.

Rafsanjani:

Support for sports, talented individuals among Iran's policies

TEHRAN - The great victory of Iranian junior volleyball team in the 9th Asian championship contests proves that supporting sports and making efforts to identify talented individuals are among the policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran, a senior official said Sunday.

Chairman of the Expediency Council Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani told coaches and members of the national Iranian volleyball team that winning victory is

the main goal of any activity and overpowering a rival in any contest plays an important role in boosting man's morale, IRNA reported.

Faith and ethics are important assets of an Iranian athlete, he said, adding that in all athletic contests, besides technical issues, ethics and sportsmanship occupy an important position.

He said that brilliant victory of the Iranian team in Asian contests should be

taken as an auspicious move. This, he added, demands that necessary investments be made in sports in order to guarantee further successes in athletic fields in the future.

Hailing the move to construct 1,100 gymnasiums throughout the country in the course of the Second Five-Year Economic, Cultural and Social Development Plan (1995-1999), Rafsanjani expressed the hope that all all sports-related plans would have been realized by the end of the plan.

Rafsanjani also awarded the manager, coaches and members of the Iranian volleyball team, after his remarks.

Meanwhile, Jordanian

ment's readiness to attend the first meeting of Muslim parliamentarians to be held in Tehran in December this year.

Rahimi briefed the Yemeni vice-speaker on the preparations made so far by Tehran to host the meeting.

and regional issues and stressed the importance of expanding parliamentary cooperation between the two countries.

Abdolavahab, who is also head of Iran-Yemen parliamentary friendship group, voiced his parlia-

Iran-Azerbaijan ties historically rooted

TEHRAN - Iran's Ambassador to Baku Ali-Reza Bigdeli said in an interview with the daily 'Express' that Iran-Azerbaijan relations have their roots in history.

Bigdeli said that Iran and Azerbaijan enjoy exceptional geographical status in the region and this can prompt further expansion of bilateral ties, IRNA reported from Baku.

He said the certain foreign elements are trying to prevent expansion of relations between the friendly and Muslim countries of Iran and Azerbaijan.

Coordinated efforts are required to clear the hurdles caused by enemies on the way of strengthening the ties between the two countries, Bigdeli said.

On Gaidar Aliev's reelection to the presidential post in Azerbaijan, the Ira-

nian ambassador said that Aliyev has given the priority in his programs to the principle of maintaining closer links with Azerbaijan's neighbors.

As for transfer of Azerbaijan's oil to the world markets via Iran's territory, Bigdeli said that Iran is widely believed to be the best, the safest and the most economical route for the purpose.

Iran has high potential for transfer of Azeri oil to the world markets via its soil by the year 2015, the Iranian diplomat said.

On an American official's protest at export of oil to the world markets via Iran, Bigdeli said the projects to lay oil pipelines in other countries require much more investments, something that the West does not seem ready to do.

High degree of pollutants threatening Caspian Sea environment

TEHRAN - Academic researchers of five Caspian Sea littoral states who participated in a gathering in Kazakhstan, warned against high degree of industrial and household pollutants flowing into the Caspian Sea.

The Almaty-based daily 'Panorama' wrote that the participants in the gathering also expressed concern over critical environmental situation in the Caspian Sea caused by oil pollutants.

The experts said that pollutants in Caspian Sea have resulted in the extinction of thousands of fish on Kazakhstan coasts, IRNA reported.

They believed that if continued, the situation will result in emergence of

seriously dangerous environmental consequences in the Caspian Sea region.

A U.N.-sponsored gathering which was held in Almaty October 13, expressed deep concern over the present condition of the Caspian Sea environment.

The participants said that parts of the Caspian Sea is polluted with oil substances up to over 11 times more than the limit.

Yemen to participate in Muslim parliamentarians Tehran meeting

TEHRAN - Iranian Ambassador to Yemen Morteza Rahimi, met with Vice-Speaker of Yemeni Parliament Abdolvahab Mahmoud in San'a.

The Yemeni parliamentarian hailed Iran's stands on the Islamic world

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