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Syrian presidential election will not be delayed: minister

U.S. reportedly starts supplying rebels with anti-tank weapons

Staff & agencies

The Syrian government made clear on Tuesday it had no intention of delaying an election that is likely to give President Bashar Assad a third term, regardless of war or politics.

Syrian Information Minister Omran Zoabi said elections would not be delayed and that military operations would continue regardless of the poll, according to a statement reported on its website on Tuesday. "We will not allow security, military, or domestic or foreign political reasons to delay or cancel the presidential election."

President Bashar al-Assad's forces have advanced around the capital Damascus and the Lebanese border in recent months, helping secure the country's center under government control. **Cont'd. on P. 15**

Water in Tehran may be rationed, governor warns

Staff & agencies

The governor of Tehran announced on Tuesday that if water consumption in Tehran is not reduced by about 20 percent water will be rationed in the metropolis of Tehran.

"If Tehran citizens do not save water by about 20 percent, in summer this year we will face water rationing or water outage," Hossein Hashemi told a meeting of the Tehran City Council.

Hashemi also pointed to the dangers of air pollution as reported by the United Nations, calling on all bodies to cooperate to reduce air pollution in Tehran.

Also, on Tuesday it was reported that water in 57 dams in the country are less than 40 percent.

According to IRNA news agency, 19 dams contain between 40-50 percent, 22 between 50-70 percent, 13 between 70-90 percent, and 24 between 90-100 percent.

The deputy head of Iran's Water and Sewerage Company recently warned that "500 cities in Iran are facing a water crisis."

The private intelligence company Stratfor noted in a recent report that Iran's rainfall rate is only about one-third to one-fourth of the global average.

Standoff continues in Ukraine as eastern cities demand independence

NATO warns Moscow of "grave consequences" if it intervenes further

Staff & agencies

Standoff continued between protesters and police in eastern cities of Ukraine on Tuesday as the government in Kiev accuses Russia of orchestrating the events in its Russian-speaking regions.

According to Reuters, police detained 70 pro-Moscow protesters occupying a regional administration building in eastern Ukraine overnight, but others held out in a standoff in two frontier cities in what Kiev says is a Russian-led plan to dismember the country.

In the mining center of Donetsk, a home base of the ousted President Viktor Yanukovich's, a group of pro-Russian deputies inside the main regional authority building on Monday declared a separatist republic.

Ukraine says the seizure of public buildings in the mostly Russian-speaking industrial heartland on Sunday night is a replay of events in Crimea, the Black Sea peninsula Moscow annexed last month.

Interior Minister Arsen Avakov said protesters in the town of Kharkiv had been cleared in a lightning, 45 minute "anti-terrorist" operation, placing responsibility for the building's occupation on Russian leader Vladimir Putin and Ukraine's ousted Moscow-backed president Viktor Yanukovich.

"Viktor Yanukovich was inspired and financed by the Putin-Yanukovich group," said Avakov. NATO warned Moscow on Tuesday of "grave consequences" to its relationship with the West if it intervened further in Ukraine.

The pro-Russian protesters have been demanding that referendums be held on whether to join Russia like the vote, demanded by the Kiev and West as illegal, that endorsed Crimea's return to rule by Moscow.

Police say that in a third protest in the city of Luhansk pro-Russian activists inside the main state security building have seized weapons. **Cont'd. on P. 15**

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Iran, powers gear up for final nuclear deal



The meeting between negotiators from Iran, the United States, France, Germany, Britain, China and Russia was chaired by Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and European Union foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton in the Austrian capital of Vienna.

"We are involved in very detailed and substantial negotiations and we are trying as hard as we can to drive the process forward," said Ashton's spokesman, Michael Mann, according to Reuters.

"What matters most to us is that there is a good agreement. Clearly we want to make progress as fast as possible but the most important thing is the quality of the agreement," Mann said.

"It has to be a good agreement that everyone is happy with. So we will work as hard as we can to achieve that."

The six nations have agreed internally to have a draft text of an accord by the end of May or early June, one diplomat from the powers said.

The next round of talks, which would involve drafting the final deal, will be a "complex, difficult, and slow" process, Zarif wrote on his Facebook page prior to the meeting.

The Vienna talks are meant to build on an interim deal reached between Iran and the 5+1 group (the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany) in Geneva on November 24, 2013, according to which Iran agreed not to expand its nuclear program for six months in exchange for limited sanctions relief.

The next round of talks, which would involve drafting the final deal, will be a "complex, difficult, and slow" process, Zarif wrote on his Facebook page.

But Russian protesters have been demanding that referendums be held on whether to join Russia like the vote, demanded by the Kiev and West as illegal, that endorsed Crimea's return to rule by Moscow.

Police say that in a third protest in the city of Luhansk pro-Russian activists inside the main state security building have seized weapons. **Cont'd. on P. 15**

Iraq general says 25 ISIL terrorists killed in ambush

Staff & agencies

Security forces in Iraq said they killed 25 militants near Baghdad amid worries insurgents are encroaching on the capital weeks ahead of elections.

In Tuesday's bloodiest incident, soldiers killed 15 militants in an ambush southwest of Baghdad, the capital's security spokesman Brigadier General Saad Maan said, according to AFP.

Maan said the fighters were part of the terrorist Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL), and that they were planning to attack an army base that they had attempted to hit last week.

Elsewhere in Iraq on Tuesday, attacks north of the capital killed 12 people, security and medical officials said, including six members of the same family shot inside their home on the outskirts of the restive city of Mosul.

A car bomb set off by a suicide attacker at a checkpoint in the restive city of Tuz Khurmatu killed a policeman, while attacks also struck against Iraqi and Shiite in Salahaddin province.

German forces raid offices of "Hezbollah affiliated" charity

Staff & agencies

German authorities on Tuesday raided the offices of a charity organization that allegedly has ties to Lebanon's Hezbollah movement, according to a raising money for the group.

Around 150 police officers searched premises across six states and confiscated cash, computers and around 40 boxes of files, AFP reported.

Two bank accounts with a total of around 60,000 euros were frozen but no arrests were made, the German interior ministry said.

The ministry said it had outlawed the "Hilfsleistungsbund Libanon" (Orphan Children Project Lebanon) with immediate effect.

Ministry state secretary Erich Huber said the organization based in the western city of Essen had raised 3.5 million euros (4.5 million) in donations between 2007 and 2012 for the Lebanese Shehad Foundation, which supports families of fallen Hezbollah fighters. **Cont'd. on P. 15**

'Rouhani provided people with hope for improving economic life'

Staff & agencies

Iran defends its new UN envoy appointees

Dominant American political analyst Stephen Eric Bronner was part of an academic delegation that traveled to Iran earlier in January to hold public lectures for the Iranian journalists, students, researchers and take part in talks with the officials of Iran's Foreign Ministry.

The trip was jointly sponsored by U.S. Academies for Iran, and the Institute for Political and International Studies in Tehran and brought 10 American university professors and theologians to Iran to visit the country after it reached an interim agreement with the bloc of six world powers, including the United States, on November 24, 2013 over its nuclear program.

According to Prof. Bronner, "civic diplomacy or what has been termed 'soft diplomacy' usually has only indirect effects, but that does not invalidate its importance. The need for better understanding is more than a cliché."

"Our visits to different Islamic nations taught us how little we know about Arab public opinion and political attitudes toward the United States and, by the same token, how little mid-Eastern states know about the inner workings of American politics and the conflicting attitudes of our citizenry. This is a matter of some importance, because of such ignorance became evident in the miscalculations of especially right-wing American policymakers about the cultural climate in Iraq, Afghanistan and now Syria," said Prof. Stephen Eric Bronner in an exclusive interview with Tehran Times after he returned to the United States from Iran.

PERSPECTIVE

Iran-Turkey: Relations of old friends

Iran Nafise

It has been seen that a new era has begun in Iran with President Hassan Rouhani's election.

From the first day of his election, Rouhani stated that he wants to improve economic relations with Iran's neighbors including Turkey. In this regard, important improvements have been observed.

Turkey-Iran relations are evaluated by the public usually as if they are somehow controversial or in opposition to each other. However, this is a false opinion, although from time to time they are of different opinions in terms of regional politics, Iran and Turkey are two old friends.

When former Iranian Prime Minister Akbarrafteji performed his visit to Turkey, he made a huge impact worldwide in regard to Shari'ati friendship. He mentioned, who had previously served as a governor in a region densely populated by Turks, and is able to speak Turkish, continued with his speech in Turkish when a problem occurred in simultaneous translation during his visit to Turkey. Whatever difference of opinion there may be between two countries, the good-humored Akbarrafteji was loved by Turkish people very much. **Cont'd. on P. 15**

Türkiye ile İran arasında, yüzyıllardır süregelen köklü bir dostluk, sevgi ve kardeşlik ilişkisi var olmuştur. Her iki toplum da sanat, kültür, tarih, din, dil hatta akrabalık bağları açısından sayısız ortak paydaya sahiptir.

İki komşu ülke de bugün dünyanın, stratejik konumdaki en güçlü ve önemli İslam devleti olma özelliğine sahiptir. İran dünyanın önde gelen petrol ve doğal gaz üreticilerindedir. Türkiye ise son 10 yılda sanayi, ticaret, kalkınma, ekonomik güç ve istikrar bakımından dünyanın sayılı ülkeleri arasına girmiştir.

Dolayısıyla, gerek iki toplum arasındaki manevi bağlar, tarihi, sosyal ve kültürel değerler gerekse bölgedeki ortak siyasi ve ekonomik çıkarlar Türkiye-İran ilişkilerinin en üst düzeye taşınmasının hayati önemini göstermektedir. Güçlerini birleştirip sarsılmaz bir ittifak oluşturmaları, aynı zamanda tüm bölge, Ortadoğu ve İslam dünyasının menfaat ve faydasına olacaktır.

COMMENT
Iran-Turkey: Relations of
old friends

Contd. from P. 1

During the period after Rouhani's election, diplomatic relations improved further as at least one official visit per month has been realized between Iran and Turkey. Although they support different sides in Syrian civil war it was shown to the world that positive diplomatic relations could still be carried out between two neighboring countries. The fact that Turkish Republic is a democratic Muslim country has drawn the attention of Iranian intellectuals and Turkey's position carries vital importance for the future of Iran in the international arena.

When we look at the recent past, we see that there has never been any serious tension in Turkish-Iranian relations. During the Persian Gulf War, Turkey and Iran did not experience a significant difference of opinion. After the Persian Gulf war, the presence of U.S. forces (Poised Hammer) located on the Turkish border for the security of the Kurdish population who fled Saddam Hussein's bloody intervention troubled Iran, but this tension was calmed by Turkish diplomatic efforts. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the question of under which country's influence these newly emerged republics would be created a brief rivalry between two countries: Potential tensions that might have arisen from that rivalry came to an end with Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan's efforts when the two countries founded the Economic Cooperation Organization in 2003 and established an associate cooperation together with the Turkic States in the Middle Asia.

For two countries, the economy has certainly served as a unifying force. Turkey has become a popular tourist destination for the Iranian people. One of the only countries in the world that countries of the Islamic Republic of Iran can enter without a visa is Turkey. Although Iran is a member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the fact that Iran has such a sociological link with Turkey, even if it does not appear much in the media, shows that Turkey is enhancing its influence on Iran. Turkey shares a border of 454km with Iran and there is a growing border trade. The economic relations between Turkey and Iran have risen rapidly, especially over the last decade: Where the trade volume of the two countries was around 1 billion dollars in 2000, this figure has risen to 10 billion dollars in 2010; in 2012 it has reached 21.8 billion dollars. By the end of 2015, reaching a 30 billion dollar trade volume is among the goals of the two countries. Certainly energy takes the lead in trade agreements and Iran is the number two natural gas provider for Turkey. Another important trade matter is that Turkey gets about 40% of its crude oil needs from its old friend Iran.

Apart from trade, the PKK-PJAK problem can be considered as one of the factors that brought two countries closer to each other. Both countries are struggling against a communist state, that is tried to be legitimized under the guise of "independence of the Kurds", being founded in their lands. PJAK, which carries out activities in Iran, is well-known as a branch of the PKK. Therefore the two countries moved closer to each other during those long years when they shared intelligence for their operations against these guerrilla groups. Although the Syrian civil war, to a certain extent, has affected the sharing of intelligence about border security in a negative way, it is apparent that the risk of the foundation of a communist state keeps uniting both countries around a common cause that cannot be broken. Furthermore, the Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu's efforts allowing the issue of Iran's nuclear program to be diplomatically resolved makes Turkey an important bridge in Iran's relations with the West.

Another matter that the Turkish side gives importance to is to put an end to sectarian differences; Davutoglu's suggestion to Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif regarding putting Shia places of worship in Syria under protection of the two countries was well received. It was also highly important that Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan gave speeches with no Shia-Sunni discrimination; his foreign policy choices during his last visit to Iran referring to Tehran as "my second home" earned him positive marks from the Iranians. These approaches cannot be considered as positive steps that have been taken for the two countries not to feel distant with each other, not only in the field of cold general diplomacy but also in terms of warm human relationships.

The relations of Iran and Turkey, both of whom are very important Muslim strategic powers in terms of welfare, peace and development in the region, have been moving forward, and are improving further with every passing day.

Karun Yahya is a prominent Turkish intellectual who has authored more than 300 books translated in 73 languages on politics, religion and science.

Bölgede İslam ülkelerinin güçlenmesini ve söz sahibi olmasını küresel sömürü düzenlerine tehdit olarak gören Batılı bazı derin güçler dönem dönem fikir, görüş ve mezhep ayrılıklarını körükleyerek Türkiye ve İran'ı karşı karşıya getirmeye yönelik suni gerilim ve krizler çıkarmaya çalışmışlardır. Ancak bu sinsi planlar, temeli İslam kardeşliği üzerine kurulu iki ülke dostluğunu bozmada hiçbir zaman başarılı olmamıştır ve Allah'ın izniyle olamayacaktır.

Türkiye-İran işbirliğini yalnızca ticari, ekonomik, kültürel ve teknik alanlarla sınırlı görmek çok dar bir vizyon olacaktır. Oysa, bu iki güçlü İslam ülkesine yakışan, çok daha ileri ufukları ve büyük idealleri hedeflemeleridir. Bu ideal ise İslam Birliği'dir. İki ülkenin her alanda ittifakı ve manevi birlikteliğiyle yakın zamanda bütün İslam alemini, ardından da tüm dünyayı kapsayacak olan kutlu İslam Birliği'nin temelleri atılmış olacak ve her iki ülke bu şerefli misyonun öncüleri olmuş olacaktır.

Bugün kan, terör, şiddet, acımasızlık, sevgisizlik, cehalet ve geri kalmışlık ve sefaleti, din adına savunup uygulayan Kuran dışı bağnaz zihniyet İslam dünyasının büyük bölümünü kasıp kavurmaktadır. Müslümanların dünya çapında maruz kaldıkları acı, sıkıntı ve zorlukların temelinde de bu bağnaz İslam anlayışı yatmaktadır.

İslam'ı çağdaş medeniyetleri, modern yaşam biçimleri ve ulusal güvenlikleri karşısında ciddi bir tehdit unsuru olarak gördükleri için Müslümanlara cephe alan kimi Batı toplumlarının korku, endişe ve öfkelerinin kaynağı da hep bu Kuran dışı sapkın din anlayışı olmuştur. Oysa ki gerçek İslam ahlakı, Batı için bir tehdit unsuru değil, tam tersine medeniyeti, modernliği ve ilerlemeyi teşvik eden; güvenliği

ve barışı tesis eden bir anlayıştır. Ancak bağnazlık Dünya'nın, radikalizmi gerçek İslam sanmalarına neden olmuştur. İşte bu nedenle de bağnazlık Müslümanların kurtuluşunun, gelişmesinin ve İslam Birliği'nin önündeki en büyük engeldir. Bu fitneyi yok edecek yegane Nur ise Yüce Allah'ın Kitabı Kuran'dır.

Bağnazlık fitnessine karşı yürütülecek kararlı bir Kurani mücadele, Kuran'a dayalı modern ve akılcı İslam anlayışının yaşama geçirilmesi ve İslam Birliği'nin hızla tesisi Türkiye ve İran'ın ortak stratejileri olmalıdır. Mezhep, fırka ve görüş farklılıkları gözetilmeden, yalnızca Kuran ruhu ve ahlakı esas alınarak gerçekleştirilecek bu ittifak tüm İslam dünyası için büyük bir şevk ve heyecan kaynağı olacaktır. İki büyük İslam ülkesinin birlikte atacakları bu büyük adım Müslümanların dünya çapında maruz kaldıkları sefalet, acı, işkence, zulüm ve karanlıklardan kurtulup aydınlık, barış, huzur, mutluluk ve refaha kavuşmalarına vesile olacaktır.

Türkiye de İran da Allah aşığı iki ülkedir. Kalplerindeki bu aşk ile elele verip gayret ettiklerinde, İslam ahlakı bu iki lider ülkenin öncülüğünde tüm dünyaya hakim olacaktır.

Adnan Oktar'ın Tehran Times'da yayınlanan yazısı:

<http://tehrantimes.com/component/content/article/52-guests/114936-iran-turkey-relations-of-old-friends>

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