

Iran-Canada Parliamentary Friendship Group is studying a request by Canadian MPs to visit Tehran, said the spokesman for the Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee Hossein Naqavi on Wednesday.

Upside/Downside

Six dead as blast hits film shooting scene

A powerful explosion left six people dead and several others injured in the shooting scene of 'Me'rajia' (The Ascended to Heaven), the latest production by renowned filmmaker Masoud Dehnamaki.

The blast took place on Wednesday in the Sacred Defense film studio complex on the outskirts of the capital Tehran as explosives were being unloaded from a vehicle.

Dehnamaki, who shot to fame through his box office hit 'The Outcasts', told IRNA that detonators exploded and set off other explosives.

Five of the victims were among the backstage crew including visual effects supervisor Javad Sharifi Rad and his assistant.

Ali Akbar Ranjbar, the director of the film studio complex, also lost his life in the accident.

All environmental actions scrapped since 2005

A number of Majlis rapped the government of ex-president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad for what he said "abandoning all measures to protect the environment" since 2005.

Kamaleddin Pirmoazzan, a member of the Majlis Environment Faction said on Tuesday that the country is currently facing many environmental disasters due to the mismanagement of former officials, inn.ir reported.

He said the Department of the Environment has to start from scratch and take all necessary measures to save hundreds of rivers, streams, lakes and lagoons and to manage water resources.

Stranded tourists rescued near Isfahan

Four foreign tourists, who were stranded in central Iran following a snowstorm, were rescued by emergency workers on Wednesday.

The tourists lost their way in a blizzard while visiting Gavkhouni, a wetland near the city of Isfahan, IRIB reported.

But they were rescued by Red Crescent Society volunteers following hours-long search operation.

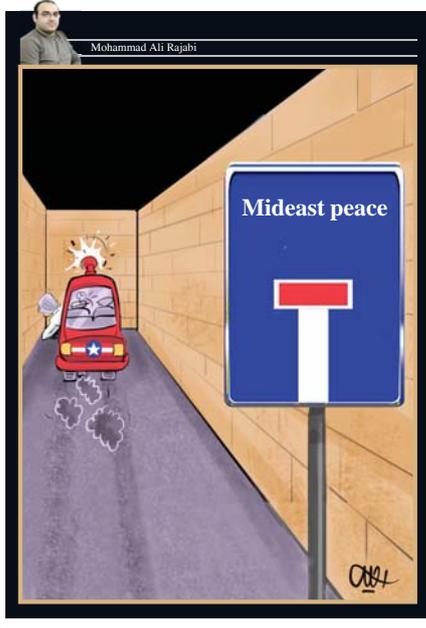
The four were Danish, Swiss and German nationals who had crossed into Iran from Turkey.

MPs seek action against media crackdown

A number of 65 lawmakers called on President Hassan Rouhani to take action against crackdown on media outlets critical of the government.

In a letter, read out during Wednesday's open session of parliament, the legislators said the government should in practice take president's remarks about respecting freedom of expression into consideration.

The reaction came after the Culture Ministry's Press Supervisory Board banned Ya Leharat, a weekly published by conservatives.



MPs hold talks with Straw

Chairman of the Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee Alaeddin Boroujerdi met the visiting British parliamentary team in Tehran on Wednesday.

Lawmaker Boroujerdi on Wednesday held talks with the four-member British delegation, headed by former foreign secretary Jack Straw on parliamentary cooperation and ways to boost ties between the two countries, ICANA reported.

Straw, a Labour Party MP for Blackburn and former foreign secretary, arrived in Tehran at the head of the delegation for a three-day visit early on Tuesday.

Straw is accompanied by Conservative former finance minister Norman Lamont, Labour MP Jeremy Corbyn and Conservative lawmaker Ben Wallace, his office said in a statement.

The British delegation also met Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade Mohammad Reza Nematzadeh.

The British MPs, who are all members of a cross-party British parliamentary group on Iran, had accepted an invitation from the British/Iran Friendship



Lawmaker Alaeddin Boroujerdi (2nd R) met the head of the visiting four-member British parliamentary delegation Jack Straw (L) in Tehran on January 8, 2014.

Group of the Iranian parliament, Straw's office said. In a statement published by Jack Straw's Office, he expressed hope that the delegation can pave the way for a reciprocal visit by members of Iran-Britain friendship group.

Iran's foreign minister, during the Tuesday meeting, said Tehran will never capitulate to the pressure exerted through imposing sanctions against the country.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran has proven that it does not succumb to pressure," Zarif said.

He said it would be "very easy" to reach an agreement over Tehran's nuclear energy program, but stressed that "mutual trust" is a prerequisite for an un-

derstanding.

Referring to a fatwa by Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei banning the use and possession of nuclear weapons, Zarif said, "Nuclear weapons have no place in Iran's defensive doctrine."

On February 22, 2012, Ayatollah Khamenei said the Islamic Republic considers the pursuit and possession of nuclear weapons "a grave sin" from every logical, religious and theoretical standpoint.

Zarif also hoped that the British delegation's visit would pave the way for improving bilateral ties based on mutual interests.



Araqchi, Russian counterpart discuss Geneva deal on phone

Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi, in a phone conversation with his Russian counterpart Sergei Ryabkov on Tuesday, discussed the Geneva deal reached between Iran and the six world powers in November.

The talks focused on Araqchi's upcoming negotiations with Helga Schmid, a deputy to EU foreign policy chief, Catherine Ashton, IRNA reported. The Iranian deputy foreign minister for legal and international affairs and Schmid will meet in Geneva on January 9-10 to discuss the remaining issues over implementing the Geneva deal, unresolved in the recent expert-level talks between Iran and the P5+1 group. Araqchi and Ryabkov further stressed the importance of working out a mechanism for implementation of Geneva agreement reached on November 24.

Berlin keen to cooperate on regional issues

A German lawmaker, Andreas Schockenhoff has expressed his country's readiness to expand cooperation with Iran on regional issues.

Andreas Schockenhoff from the co-ruling Christian Democratic Party (CDU) pointed to Iran's active and influential role in the region, adding his country is willing to forge regional cooperation with the Islamic Republic, Press TV reported.

He made the remarks in a meeting with Deputy Foreign Minister for European and American Affairs Majid Takht Ravanchi in Tehran on Tuesday.

Schockenhoff described the current juncture as very important for building confidence with Iran and said Germany is keen to expand cooperation with Tehran on regional issues.

The deputy head of Christian

Democratic Union faction in the German parliament also stressed the importance of settling the crisis in Syria through political approaches.

The German official expressed support for Iran's participation in the upcoming Geneva II Conference on Syria.

Takht Ravanchi, for his part, warned against dangers posed by extremism to the region and the international community and urged collective cooperation to seriously confront it. "Despite the US military offensive in Afghanistan and Iraq, extremism still exists in these countries and we are now witnessing its spillover to Syria," the Iranian diplomat stated.

Takht Ravanchi reassured the Islamic Republic's right to enrichment and expressed the country's readiness to allay any legitimate concerns

over its nuclear energy program.

He said that Tehran is entitled to all rights stipulated in the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

The Iranian official called for measures to foil efforts by certain sides who seek to obstruct the implementation of the nuclear deal struck between Tehran and the six powers in the Swiss city of Geneva.

Iran and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council—Russia, China, France, Britain and the US—plus Germany sealed an interim nuclear agreement in Geneva on November 24, 2013.

Under the Geneva deal, the six world powers agreed to lift some of the sanctions against the Islamic Republic in exchange for Iran agreeing to limit certain aspects of its nuclear activities during a six-month period.

Conservatives blasted for 'wrench-throwing' in nuclear talks

A senior political analyst lashed out at "conservative hardliners" for "throwing a wrench" in nuclear talks between Iran and six world powers in an attempt to "derail" the process.

In an interview with inn.ir on Monday, Sadeq Zibakalam said conservative hardliners do not want the dispute over Iran's nuclear energy program resolved within the framework of a deal agreed upon by both sides and do their best to bring talks to a gridlock.

Zibakalam accused radical members of the conservative camp of "stoking the flames of the nuclear crisis" over the past decade in order to use the issue as a leverage to advance Iran's foreign policy.

He said conservatives should be held accountable for the "heavy expenses" they incurred "directly or indirectly" as a result of hurting sanctions imposed on the country by the United Nations, the US and the European Union over the nuclear drive.

Iran and the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council—the United States, China, Russia, France and Britain—plus Germany sealed an interim deal in Geneva on November 24 to pave the way for the full resolution of the West's decade-old dispute with Iran over the country's nuclear energy program.

Under the deal, the six countries have undertaken to lift some of the sanctions against the Islamic Republic in exchange for Iran agreeing to limit certain aspects of its nuclear activities during a six-month period. It was also agreed that no more sanctions would be imposed on Iran within this timeframe.

The historic agreement, however, sparked criticism within Iran, with some politicians accusing the negotiating team of making concessions in the course of talks.

Lebanon welcomes Iran's probe proposal

Lebanon has welcomed Iran's proposal to dispatch a judiciary delegation to Beirut for investigations into the recent terrorist bombings that targeted the Iranian embassy in the Lebanese capital.

Mutual cooperation to stamp out terrorism is considered as positive in all countries, and the terrorist act outside the Iranian embassy in Beirut, in fact, amounted to an attack on Iranian soil, said Lebanese Justice Minister Shakib Qortabawi in a meeting with Iranian Ambassador in Beirut Ghazanfar Roknabadi on Tuesday, Press TV reported.

Iranian Justice Minister Mostafa Pour-Mohammadi had earlier sent a letter to his Lebanese counterpart, call-

ing for the dispatch of a judiciary delegation to Lebanon to cooperate with Beirut in pursuing the terrorist attacks. Terrorism is a dangerous phenomenon which poses a threat to Lebanon and other countries in the region, said the Lebanese minister.

The Iranian diplomat, for his part, underlined the need to share experience in combating terrorism.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran has good experience in fighting terrorism and is ready to exchange experiences by dispatching a team to see for itself the trend of following up [on the recent terrorist attack]," said Roknabadi. On Tuesday, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Marzieh Afkham reiterated that Iranian officials had con-

ducted legal and political discussions with their Lebanese counterparts following the terrorist attack in an effort to identify key elements and plotters behind the blasts.

At least 25 people, including Iran's cultural attaché in Beirut, Hojjatolislam Ebrahim Ansari, were killed and more than 150 injured on November 19 after two explosions struck near the Iranian Embassy in southern Beirut. Following the incident, the Abdullah Azzam Brigades claimed responsibility for the bombings. On January 1, the Lebanese government confirmed the arrest of Majed al-Majed, the ringleader of the Al-Qaeda-linked group. The detained Saudi terrorist was pronounced dead in a Lebanese military hospital on January 3.

German-Iranian woman set to head Social Democratic Party

A German-Iranian woman is tipped to become the next secretary general of Germany's co-governing Social Democratic Party (SPD), the Frankfurt-based daily Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung said Wednesday.

Social Democratic leader Sigmar

Gabriel has reportedly nominated 45-year-old Yasmin Fahimi to succeed Andrea Nahles who became labor minister in the new German government, the paper quoted SPD leadership and labor union circles as saying.

A top labor union official, Fahimi is to be elected to the new powerful post in the SPD during a party congress on January 26. Born in the north German city of Hannover, Fahimi's father is Iranian while her mother is German.

Majlis delegation to visit Russia

An Iranian parliamentary delegation is scheduled to visit the Russian capital of Moscow in the near future, a senior lawmaker said. Mohammad Hassan Asafari, a member of the National Security and Foreign Policy Committee of Majlis, said on Wednesday that a team comprising three members of the committee will travel to

Russia in two weeks as part of parliamentary exchanges to further develop relations between the two countries' legislatures.

During the visit, the two sides will discuss the recent developments in the Persian Gulf region as well as in the international arena.

Ramezan-Ali Sobhanifar, the head of the Iran-Russia Parliamentary Friendship Group, said in December 2013 that the Iranian delegation's trip would take place in response to an earlier visit by a Russian parliamentary group to Tehran.