

Iran chopper crash kills one, injures sports minister

National Desk

Iran's sports minister was injured and his advisor died after their helicopter crashed in southern province of Ker- man on Thursday.

The minister, Hamid Sajjadi, a team of Iranian Sports Ministry officials, two local journalists and four crew members were onboard the helicopter when it crashed just before landing at a stadium in the city of Baft around midday local time, according to IRNA.

Esmail Ahmadi, a senior advisor to Sajjadi, died in the incident because of the severity of his injuries. The minister himself suffered minor brain hemorrhage but his condition was described as stable by local health officials.

Sixteen others, including four crew members, were injured in the incident.

The officials were on the visit to Baft to inaugurate new sports facilities in the region. Iran's civil aviation authority said an investigation into the causes of the crash would be carried out by the Iranian Red Crescent Society (IRCS) which operated the chopper.

Another chance to resuscitate JCPOA

But in the current situation, the main obstacle to the resumption of nuclear talks is the claim of Iran's military cooperation with Russia in the Ukraine war. The Americans have openly announced that countries are either with us or with Russia, and any nation that cooperates militarily with Russia will definitely face pressure.

On Wednesday, a Western media outlet reported that Russia was running out of drones. If the West's claim that Iran has supplied drones to Russia is true, this media report could be another positive sign indicating that Tehran and Moscow have probably agreed to put on hold their military cooperation for the time being. On the other hand, Iran and Ukraine have held talks on the drone issue in Oman. They are all sparks of hope that if a deal could possibly be reached during Grossi's upcoming visit to Iran over safeguards disputes, all parties involved in the JCPOA revival talks can come together to conclude their negotiations.

Moreover, Omani Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, whose country, along with Qatar, has acted as mediator between Iran and the U.S., is reportedly set to pay an official visit to Tehran. Tariq's trip also offers hopes that the JCPOA talks could restart, giving a new chance to bring the tattered deal back to life.

Leader: Enemies seeking to create despair in Iran

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei said creating despair in Iran is among the main policies of the country's enemies.

The Leader made the remarks in a meeting with the chairman and members of the Assembly of Experts in Tehran on Thursday, Press TV reported. Ayatollah Khamenei said some enmities toward the Islamic Republic are "political enmity," adding, "For example, the Islamic Republic pursues a stance on the Palestinian issue and [world] powers have another position. [This] creates enmity."

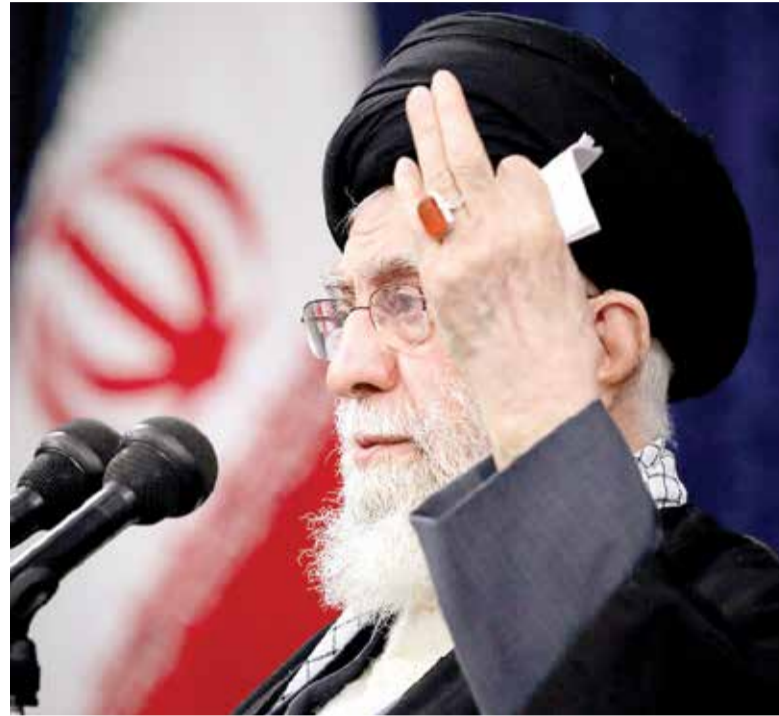
"These are not very important. The one that is more important is intrinsic enmity. The nature of the Islamic Republic creates this enmity," the Leader added.

The Islamic establishment "op-

poses those who believe in the Western prescription, which is against any kind of religious interference in social affairs, or opposes the leaders of liberal democracy, who have hatched a plot to dominate over and plunder the world's resources behind the false flag of freedom and democracy," he said. The Islamic Republic, according to the Leader, has disrupted such a plot by putting "democracy and freedom" next to "religion".

The Leader warned that some Western countries use liberal democracy to dominate the world, emphasizing, however, that the Islamic Republic brings democracy and freedom along with religion.

Ayatollah Khamenei stated that a democracy based on religion leads to hostility because it foils the enemies' conspiracies.



Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei speaks in a meeting with the members of the Assembly of Experts in Tehran on February 23, 2023. khamenei.ir

Iran offers forming int'l group to end Ukraine war



REUTERS

Iran's ambassador and permanent representative to the United Nations (UN) expressed his country's readiness to establish a group of cross-regional countries to help end the conflict in Ukraine which marked its first anniversary on Friday.

Amir Saeed Iravani made the remarks while addressing the UN General Assembly's 11th emergency special session on the Ukraine conflict on Thursday. He said that Tehran "supports the idea of leveraging the Secretary General's capacity, as mandated by the UN Charter, to establish a cross-regional group of independent, competent, impartial countries. The Islamic Republic of Iran is ready to contribute to this process".

This can facilitate dialogue and help find a way out of the current "impasse", he added.

Iravani stressed that Iran's position with regard to the war in Ukraine has not

changed. "We are steadfast in our commitment to upholding the principles and purposes enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, including the principles of sovereign equality and territorial integrity of States."

Iravani also pointed to the need to solve the root causes of the conflict. "By prioritizing dialogue and diplomacy and addressing the underlying cause of the conflict, we can take a crucial step toward achieving a solution that not only mitigates the devastating humanitarian part, but also restores regional stability and security," he said.

The diplomat also criti-

cized the draft of a proposed resolution, saying, "Unfortunately, the proposed text falls short of comprehensively and impartially addressing all aspects of the issue and fails to acknowledge the conditions and provocations that have contributed to the crisis."

He noted that the actions and policies of certain sponsors of this resolution raise doubts about the political will to resolve the dispute peacefully. The resolution was adopted with 141 member states in favor and seven against while 32 countries, including China, Iran, and India, abstained.

China has also called for a

cease-fire and peace talks between Ukraine and Russia, in a worded proposal released on Friday, according to AP.

Beijing has accused the West of provoking the conflict and "fanning the flames" by providing Ukraine with arms.

The plan released by China's Foreign Ministry mainly reiterated long-held positions.

It calls for the "sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of all countries" to be respected. It also calls for an end to "unilateral" sanctions on Russia, indirectly criticizes the expansion of the NATO alliance, and condemns threats of nuclear force.

Iran-Russia defense cooperation not against any third party: Spox

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman said defense cooperation between Tehran and Moscow dates back to years before the start of the war in Ukraine, stressing that this cooperation is not against any third country. "Military and defense ties between the Islamic

Republic of Iran and the Russian Federation sit in the framework of mutual interests of the two states and are not against any third country," Nasser Kanaani told Sputnik on Friday.

Iran and Russia have a long history of military cooperation which did

not start since the eruption of conflict in Ukraine, he said.

The remarks come as exactly one year has passed since Russia started what it calls a special military operation against Ukraine which according to Moscow aims to stop Kyiv's persecution of pro-Rus-

sian population in eastern Ukraine and to "de-Nazify" the ex-Soviet republic. Western countries have also accused Iran of sending military drones to Russia. Tehran has strongly rejected the allegations, noting that it has not sent any drones to Russia for use in the Ukraine war. Those who are regularly waging propaganda against Iran and wrongly accuse it of supporting Russia during the Ukraine conflict should "take a look at the volume

of their arms shipments" to the one side of the conflict, highlighted Kanaani. Measures of the countries that are exporting arms worth tens of billions of dollars to the one side of the conflict are not helping end the war, he said, adding, these states do not seek a "political approach" to put an end to the war.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has put efforts since the start of the conflict to find a political solution to end the war, he added.

Tracks of highly-enriched uranium in pipes connecting centrifuges a 'normal issue': AEOI

He criticized the IAEA for allowing the correspondence between Tehran and the agency to leak to the press, holding the agency "100 percent guilty" in the case. Kamalvandi said Iran has still

consistently "complied" with the safeguards, adding that "15 reports of the agency itself are proof of our honesty and that Iran has fully fulfilled its obligations".

"There is no logical reason for

the action of the agency unless there is a political purpose behind this case which is aimed at distorting the image of the Islamic Republic of Iran," he remarked.

The never-ending reports by the

UN nuclear agency making false, baseless accusations against Iran's nuclear program are "politically motivated" to put maximum pressure on Iran, Kamalvandi said.

Kamalvandi said the IAEA publi-

cizes confidential reports about Iran's nuclear activities even before the investigations are complete in order to prepare the ground for fabrications against the country's peaceful atomic energy program.