

NEWS IN BRIEF

Iran, Pakistan defend mutual ties against saboteurs



International Desk

Pakistani Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari says that Tehran and Islamabad will not allow saboteurs to harm bilateral relations between the two neighboring countries. The Pakistani foreign minister made the remarks on Thursday in an interview with IRNA about a Saturday killing of five Iranian border guards by terrorists at the joint border with Pakistan.

Pakistani Ministry of Foreign Affairs had earlier issued a statement to slam the terrorist attack and said that Islamabad is committed to cooperating with Tehran in the fight against terrorism.

The border guards were martyred in Saravan, southeastern Iran, on Saturday after terrorists raided a border security checkpoint in the region. The terrorists then retreated to the Pakistani territory. Furthermore, the committee of foreign affairs of Pakistan's Senate called on Zardari on Friday to pursue bolstering ties with Iran, adding that Islamabad should not neglect Tehran's important position in the region and the world.

Zardari, in turn, noted that improved relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia would also have a positive effect on Pakistan.

Iran expects to launch two satellites this year



IRNA

National Desk

Iran's Defense Minister expressed hope that Iran would be able to "do wonders" and launch two satellites into space in the current Iranian calendar year, which ends on March 19, 2024.

Pointing out that Iran is among the top countries in the world with space programs, Mohammad Reza Ashtiani said that the capable hands of Iranian scientists have devised highly-versatile satellites, the launch of which will "hopefully bring joy to our beloved Iranians".

Iranian diplomat released from prison in Belgium



Assadollah Assadi (R), an Iranian diplomat detained in Belgium, was warmly received by Iranian officials including Secretary of the High Council for Human Rights Kazem Gharibabadi (L) in Tehran, Iran, on May 26, 2023.
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Assadollah Assadi, an Iranian diplomat detained in Belgium on false terror-related charges, was released following an Omani-brokered deal and was warmly received in his home country.

Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian confirmed the news of Assadi's return in a tweet on Friday after Oman's Foreign Ministry officially announced that Muscat had mediated a deal between Iran and Belgium to swap their prisoners,

Press TV reported. "Assadollah Assadi, the innocent diplomat of our country, who was illegally detained in Germany and Belgium for more than two years in violation of international law, is now on his way back to his homeland and will soon enter our beloved Iran," Amir-Abdollahian said Friday afternoon. "I thank the Sultanate of Oman for its positive efforts in this direction," the foreign minister added. According to legal ex-

perts, Assadi's case was based on sham and unsubstantiated charges and smacks of political propaganda against the Islamic Republic.

Belgian authorities in June 2018 said the country's police had intercepted a car carrying homemade explosives, claiming that the Iranian diplomat handed the material to two people in Belgium. He was accused of plotting an attack against the anti-Iran Mujahedin Khalq (MKO) terrorist

outfit, a claim that has been strongly rejected by Iranian authorities.

A Belgian court then sentenced the diplomat, who had served as the third counselor at Iran's Embassy in Vienna, to 20 years in prison.

Assadi taken hostage on 'Israeli plot'

Iran's Foreign Ministry Spokesman Nasser Kanaani also announced in a statement that Assadi will return to the country after "five years in captivity".

Kanaani noted that Assadi had been "taken hostage" during a plot designed by the Israeli regime and carried out with the cooperation of some European intelligence services.

"The Zionist-American 'big lie' scenario went on stage with the aim of creating a crisis in relations between Iran and Europe, and this plot happened right after the U.S. withdrew from the nuclear deal with Iran," he said. Kanaani also said that some European governments, influenced by Israel and Mojahedin Khalq Organization (MKO) terrorist group, violated international law by arresting and sentencing Assadi to 20 years in prison after a "political and sham trial". Iran had always protest-

ed and condemned the violation of Assadi's diplomatic immunity and tried hard to free him, Kanaani said, adding that an agreement was reached to release Assadi following negotiations between foreign ministers of Iran and Belgium.

The news came shortly after Oman's Foreign Ministry officially announced that the country had "successfully" managed to broker a deal between Iran and Belgium to exchange their prisoners.

"The Sultanate of Oman appreciates the positive high-level spirit that prevailed during the discussions in Muscat between the Iranian and Belgian sides, and their commitment to resolving this humanitarian issue," the statement said.

Belgium's Prime Minister Alexander de Croo confirmed that Olivier Vandecasteele had arrived in Oman. The 42-year-old had been convicted by the Iranian Judiciary of four charges including spying activities, collusion with the United States, currency smuggling, and money laundering.

The Judiciary sentenced the Belgian citizen, working under the guise of an aid worker, to a total of 40 years in prison earlier in the year.

'Azerbaijan will not allow Israel to attack Iran from its territory'

International Desk

The Republic of Azerbaijan's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Fariz Rzayev said in an interview with Israeli media that it will not permit the Tel Aviv regime to launch an attack on Iran from its territory.

"Azerbaijan does not interfere in the conflicts of other countries, therefore, it will not allow Israel to attack Iran from its territory," he said.

"Our relations with Iran

are, unfortunately, at a very low level," Rzayev also said, speaking at a conference on "Vision & Strategy in an Era of Uncertainty," which was held in the Occupied Palestinian territories, according to Tasnim news agency.

Following recent developments in bilateral relations and issues stemming from an armed attack with personal motivation on the Azeri Embassy in Tehran, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian and his Azeri counterpart

Jeyhun Bayramov held two telephone conversations in early February to discuss their ties and regional matters.

During these calls, Iran and Azerbaijan emphasized the importance of better managing the media in a way that aligns with the interests of both nations. Additionally, the foreign ministers of the two countries had their third telephone conversation within a week in February, focusing on the latest bilateral devel-



TASNIM

opments. The foreign ministers stressed the need to follow up on the agreements between their respective countries.

Abbas Mousavi, the ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the Republic of Azerbaijan, also recently

had a meeting and discussion with Hikmat Hajiyev, the assistant to the Azeri president.

Mousavi expressed hope that the ongoing bilateral talks would yield an outcome in favor of the interests of both countries and the region.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



Iran pursuing its ...

The issue of Afghanistan's lack of adherence to the 1973 water-sharing treaty and denying Iran its water rights under the pact has come back to center stage in recent months.

In 1973, the two sides agreed on a 26-cubic meter per second water flow into Iran.

Iran should receive an annual share of 820 million cubic meters from Hirmand River under the accord, which Afghanistan has grossly violated in letter and spirit, endan-



gering the lives of many Iranians who rely on the Hamoun wetlands for drinking water, agriculture, and fishing. Afghanistan has also built dams on Hirmand, which have constricted the flow of water into Iran.

At the same time, the river is an international, or cross-border, waterway in that the two neighbors are legally obliged to share the water of the river.

Referring to Iran's warnings over securing its water rights by Afghanistan, the Iranian parliamentarian said that the Taliban authorities should pay attention to Iran's vital demands.

He said that in line with its legal demand, the Islamic Republic is also pursuing the issue through international assemblies and institutions.