Iran's FM: Tehran, Manama mulling restoration of diplomatic ties

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian (L) addresses the third Iranian-Arab Dialogue Conference in Tehran on May 12, 2024.
mfa-gov.ir

International Desk

Iranian foreign minister said Iran and Bahrain are mulling further steps to restore diplomatic relations between the two countries, stressing that cooperation with the Persian Gulf Arab states is of great importance for Tehran.

Hossein Amir-Abdollahian made the remarks in an address to the third Iranian-Arab Dialogue Conference, dubbed "For Cooperation and Interaction", in Tehran on Sunday.

Back in 2016, Bahrain followed Saudi Arabia's decision by severing diplomatic relations with Iran, after Iranian protesters, enraged by the execution of prominent Shia cleric Sheikh Nimr Baqir al-Nimr by the Saudi government, stormed its diplomatic mission in Iran.

The Iranian foreign minister said on Sunday that Iran has already started to enhance its relations with the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Oman and Kuwait and welcomes Bahrain's move to release detainees on political charges.

Amir-Abdollahian reiterated Iran's determination to deepen understanding and convergence among the regional countries, saying the restoration of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia is an indication of such a policy.

Iran and Saudi Arabia enjoy ample capacities and capabilities which can be used to boost cooperation in the region and the Muslim world, he added.

Last year, Iran and Saudi Arabia clinched a chinses-brokered deal to restore diplomatic relations and reopen their embassies and missions. Amir-Abdollahian noted that Iran seriously heeds the promotion of ties with other Persian Gulf littoral states.

"We believe that today we have passed the phase of Iranian-Arab dialogue and have entered into regional dialogue…We are now in the stage of regional cooperation," Amir-Abdollahian said.

Misery deepens in Gaza as Israel intensifies strikes

International Desk

The Health Ministry in Gaza said Monday that the besieged Palestinian territory's health system is "hours away" from collapse, after fighting has blocked fuel shipments through key crossings.

"We are just hours away from the collapse of the health system in the Gaza Strip due to the lack of the necessary fuel to operate generators in hospitals, ambulances, and (for vehicles to) transport staff," the ministry said in a statement.

The director of the Kuwait Hospital, one of the last functioning medical centers in Rafah, said medical staff and residents living near the facility have been told to evacuate. Sohaib al-Hams warned that any evacuation of the hospital itself would have "catastrophic consequences."

Israel attacked several areas in Gaza on Monday, including Rafah, despite US warnings against a full-scale invasion of the crowded city and of the threat of post-war "anarchy" across the Palestinian territory.

Clashes also raged in northern and central Gaza.

AFP correspondents in Gaza reported helicopter strikes and heavy artillery shelling in the east of Rafah, as well as battles in northern Gaza's Jabalia refugee camp and Gaza City's Zeitun neighborhood.

Israel last week defied a chorus of warnings, including from top ally Washington, and sent tanks and troops into the east of Rafah, the city on the Egyptian border where some 1.4 million Palestinians had sought shelter.

This has sparked an exodus of nearly 360,000 people from Rafah so far, said the UN agency for Palestinian refugees UNRWA, which warned that "no place is safe" in the largely devastated territory.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Sunday that Washington had not seen any credible Israeli plan to protect civilians in Rafah, and that "we also haven't seen a plan for what happens the day after this war in Gaza ends".

Fighting has raged in northern Gaza where – months after Israel declared Hamas's command structure had been dismantled – an Israeli army spokesman said there were "attempts by Hamas to rebuild its military capabilities".

"The army threw leaflets and sent a message on mobile phones warning everyone to leave Jabalia" refugee camp, said one displaced Palestinian, Umm Adi Nassar, after arriving in Gaza City.

"This is not the first time we have been displaced," she said. "Every time we try to return and settle, there is an invasion operation, and the army with its airplanes and tanks bombards the houses and kills people."

Hamas's armed wing, the Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades, also said that its fighters were engaged in ground battles in Rafah and Jabalia.

Rafah residents on Monday received more evacuation orders through phone calls and text messages, prompting yet more people to leave their homes, witnesses said.

Amid the fighting, Egyptian, Qatari and US mediation efforts towards a truce appeared to have stalled.

Israel's bombardment and offensive in Gaza have killed at least 35,091 people, mostly women and children, according to the health ministry in the Hamas-run territory.

Israel's military says 272 soldiers have been killed since the start of the ground offensive in Gaza on October 27.

Palestinians carry their belongings as they prepare to flee Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on May 13, 2024.
AFP

The war has displaced most Gazans, many multiple times.

UNRWA chief Philippe Lazzarini said on Sunday that Israel's latest evacuation orders were "forcing people in Rafah to flee anywhere and everywhere".

Umm Mohammed Al-Mughayyir, who has had to move her family seven times to escape the fighting, said: "We have reached a point where we wish for death."

Residents were told to head to the Al-Mawasi "humanitarian zone" on the coast northwest of Rafah, though aid groups have warned it is not ready for an influx of people.

First group of Iranian Hajj pilgrims fly to Saudi Arabia

International Desk

First group of Iranian pilgrims left Iran for Saudi Arabia on early hours of Monday for the annual Hajj pilgrimage.

Iranian officials in charge of Hajj pilgrimage, Saudi Arabia's Ambassador to Iran Abdullah bin Saud al-Anzi and Iran's Minister of Roads and Urban Development Mehrdad Bazrpash participated in a ceremony to see off the pilgrims in Tehran's Imam Khomeini International Airport.

This year's Hajj rituals come after a last year rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Both countries reached a China-mediated agreement in March 2023 to restore their diplomatic relations and re-open embassies and missions after seven years.

Saudi Arabia severed ties with Iran in 2016 following an attack by protesters enraged by the execution of prominent Shia cleric Sheikh Nimr Baqir al-Nimr by the Saudi government, stormed its embassy in Tehran and consulate in Mashhad.

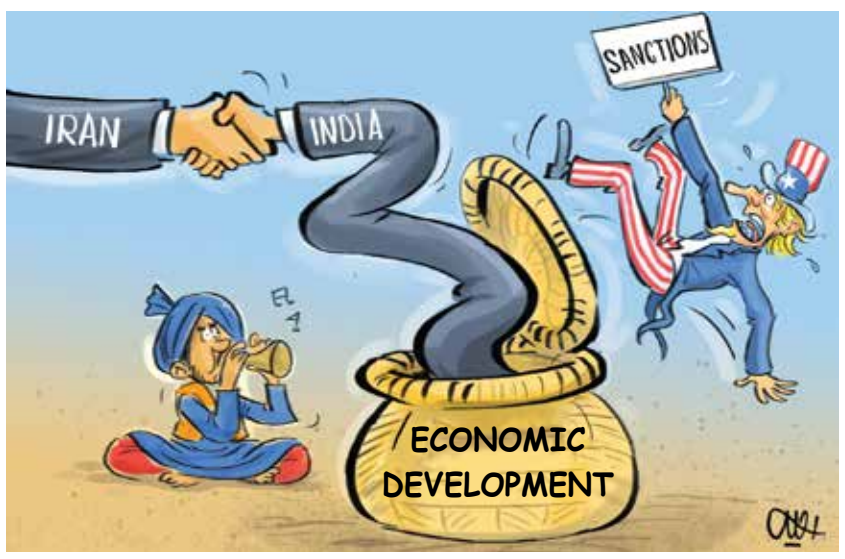
In April, the first group of Iranian pilgrims in nine years made its way to Saudi Arabia for the umrah.

Iran suspended all umrah pilgrimages to Saudi Arabia in April 2015. The decision came following reports that two Iranian youths were sexually assaulted at the airport in Jeddah by Saudi security officers while en route to the Islamic holy sites.

The umrah can be performed at any time and is not deemed compulsory for Muslims.

The Hajj pilgrimage is one of the pillars of Islam that Muslims who possess financial self-sufficiency are religiously obliged to perform at least once in their lifetime.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



Putin replaces Shoigu as Russia's defense minister

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Sunday replaced Sergei Shoigu as defense minister in a Cabinet shake-up that comes as he begins his fifth term in office.

In line with Russian law, the entire Russian Cabinet resigned Tuesday following Putin's inauguration in the Kremlin, and most members have been widely expected to keep their jobs, while Shoigu's fate had appeared uncertain, AP reported.

Putin signed a decree on Sunday appointing Shoigu as secretary of Russia's Security Council, the Kremlin said. The appointment was announced shortly after Putin proposed Andrei Belousov to become the country's defense minister in place of Shoigu.

The announcement of Shoigu's new role came as 13 people were reported dead and 20 more wounded in Russia's border city of Belgorod, where a 10-story apartment building partially collapsed after what Russian officials said was Ukrainian shelling. Ukraine hasn't commented on the incident.

Belousov's candidacy will need to be approved by Russia's upper house in parliament, the Federation Council. It reported Sunday that Putin introduced proposals for other Cabinet positions as well but Shoigu is the only minister on that list who is being replaced. Several other new candidates for federal ministers were proposed Saturday by Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin, reappointed by Putin on Friday.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Sunday that Putin had decided to give the defense minister role to a civilian because the ministry should be "open to innovation and cutting-edge ideas."