

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani in a message to his Kazakh counterpart Nursultan Nazarbayev on Sunday congratulated the anniversary of the Central Asian country's Independence Day.

Iranian FM, Nakhchivan Assembly speaker discuss ties

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif in a meeting with the Chairman of the Supreme Assembly of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic Vasif Talibov, announced Tehran's readiness to bolster mutual relations in all fields.



Zarif said on Sunday that Iran is ready to develop and facilitate its relations with Nakhchivan in various fields, including agriculture, railway, road construction and infrastructure projects, energy and customs service, IRNA reported.

He stressed that Iranian and Azerbaijani people feel at home in either of the countries and never feel like foreigners.

In late December 2016, Iran launched a direct passenger train service between its northeastern city of Mashhad and Azerbaijan's Nakhchivan. The train from Nakhchivan travels to Iran's northwestern city of Tabriz through Jolfa and thereon to Tehran and finally Mashhad.

Talibov said on his turn that his county is ready to expand relations with Iran in energy, tourism, and transportation fields.

IWPF chief: World in dire need of just peace

National Desk

"Honest and just peace" is required to be established in the world, said the secretary general of the Islamic World Peace Forum (IWPF).

This peace should be brought about and promoted based on justice and human dignity, Davoud Ameri said ahead of the expert-level seminar of "Reviewing Imam Khamenei's Thoughts in the Fields of Peace and Justice" in the Iranian capital of Tehran.

He stressed that peace, justice and human dignity are among the primary and intrinsic rights of human being.

"No one under no pretext can restrict human rights. Nevertheless, to recognize and protect these rights, everyone is required to arrive at a common understanding of the concepts."

Ameri added, the IWPF is holding the seminar to use the ideas and opinions of Iranian thinkers and elites in reviewing and rereading the thoughts of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei regarding peace and justice conceptually and methodologically.

He said this is to promote Islamic values in suitable formats in the world with the participation and assistance of foreign thinkers and elites, in addition to creating a theoretical structure for presenting the teachings of true Islam to the world.

The seminar will be held on Thursday at the IRIB International Conference Center.



Heavy air pollution shuts schools in Iran

Iran shut primary schools in the capital and other parts of the country on Sunday due to choking levels of air pollution.

Local authorities late Saturday announced the closure of all primary schools in the province of Tehran, which is home to 14 million residents, except in two towns.

A blanket of smog has covered neighborhoods in the capital in the past few days.

Airborne concentration of fine particles (PM2.5) hit 185 micrograms per cubic meter in the south of Tehran and 174 in its center on Sunday morning, local authorities said.

That is far above the World Health Organization recommended maximum of 25 micrograms per m3 over a 24-hour period.

Authorities also ordered mines and cement factories in Tehran Province to close and reinforced regular traffic restrictions in the capital's center.

They called on the elderly, children, pregnant women and people with heart problems to stay indoors.

In the northwestern cities of Tabriz and Orumiye, schools remained closed for the second



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day straight on Sunday, IRNA said.

Every year, Tehran suffers some of the worst pollution in the world when cool temperatures cause an effect known as

"temperature inversion".

The phenomenon creates a layer of warm air above the city that traps pollution from more than eight million cars and motorbikes.

In 2014, almost 400 people were hospitalized with heart and respiratory problems caused by pollution in Tehran. Nearly 1,500 others required treatment.

The Health Ministry estimated that pollution in 2012 contributed to the premature deaths of 4,500 people in Tehran and about 80,000 across the country.

Iran to host PUOICM emergency meeting on Palestine today

The Palestinian Committee of the Parliamentary Union of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation Member States (PUOICM) plans to hold an emergency meeting in the Iranian capital Tehran today.

Participants at the Monday meeting are scheduled to discuss the latest developments in Palestine following US President Donald Trump's decision to recognize Beit-ul-Moqaddas as Israel's "capital."

Iranian Parliament Speaker Ali Larjani will deliver a speech at the meeting, Press TV reported.

On December 6, the US president defied global warnings and said Washington formally recognized Beit-ul-Moqaddas as the "capital" of Israel and would begin the process of moving its embassy to the occupied city, breaking with decades of American policy.

Trump's declaration has sent shock waves throughout the Muslim world, and even prompted warnings from Washing-



AFP

ton's allies in the West that it would bring more chaos to the region.

The dramatic shift in Washington's policy vis-a-vis the city triggered demonstrations in the occupied Palestinian territories, Iran, Turkey, Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia, Algeria, Iraq, Morocco and other Muslim countries.

Representatives from 57 OIC members attended an urgent summit in Istanbul on December 13 on Washington's contentious declaration on Beit-ul-Moqaddas.

Beit-ul-Moqaddas is under Israel's control. The international community views the regime's grip on the eastern part of the city, which came after the Six-Day War of 1967, as illegal, and urges talks to decide the fate of the entire city in any future peace deal.

Beit-ul-Moqaddas remains at the core of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with Palestinians hoping that the eastern part of the city would eventually serve as the capital of a future independent Palestinian state.

Velayati: US envoy's Iran missile claim ridiculous

A senior Iranian official dismissed as "baseless and ridiculous" the recent US claim about Iran providing weapons to Yemen's Houthi movement, saying even international experts mock the accusation.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran has never given missiles to Yemen at all," Ali Akbar Velayati, senior advisor to Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei on international affairs, said on Sunday, Press TV reported.

He added that the US diplomat lacks the least information required to comment on international issues and said, "She is similar to her boss (US President Donald Trump) who makes baseless remarks with absurd information."

US Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley went on live television Thursday to display debris purportedly from a ballistic missile that had been fired from Yemen at an airport in the Saudi capital Riyadh.

On November 4, a missile fired from Yemen targeted King Khalid International



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Airport near Riyadh, reaching the Saudi capital for the first time.

Tehran rejected the allegations as "provocative and baseless," saying the Yemenis had shown an "independent" reaction to the Saudi bombing campaign on their country.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad

Javad Zarif once again on Saturday dismissed as "baseless" Haley's allegation and said it is an attempt by Washington to whitewash its war crimes in the Middle East.

"In an attempt to cover up its presence in the region and measures which can mostly amount to war crimes, the US lev-

els baseless allegations against the Islamic Republic of Iran by displaying a piece of metal," Zarif told reporters.

A commander of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) also said on Sunday that the United States and Europe provided bombs to Saudi Arabia to kill civilians in Yemen over the past three years.

"The US envoy showed a pipe and said the Iranians' fingerprints were on it," the IRGC spokesman, Brigadier General Ramezan Sharif, said on Sunday.

He added that the former Soviet Union and North Korea had given large stockpiles of missiles to Yemen.

Saudi Arabia and its allies launched the war on Yemen in March 2015 in a bid to crush the Houthi movement and reinstate the former Riyadh-friendly regime, but they have achieved neither of their goals.

The Saudi-led war, which has been accompanied by a naval and aerial blockade on Yemen, has so far killed over 12,000 people and led to a humanitarian crisis as well as a deadly cholera outbreak.