

Iran voices concern over security lockdown in Kashmir

Iran expressed concern over a security lockdown in the Indian-administered part of Kashmir, urging New Delhi to bring the situation in the Muslim-majority Himalayan region back to normal.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Seyyed Abbas Mousavi said on Tuesday that Tehran is worried about the "tough security condition" for civilians in the disputed Kashmir region and restrictions imposed by New Delhi on Muslim religious rituals, according to the Foreign Ministry's official website.



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He further urged Indian officials to take measures towards returning the situation in Kashmir to normal as soon as possible and make sure that people would be able to exercise their "natural and recognized rights."

Recently, Indian authorities imposed security restrictions in Kashmir, fearing massive protests after Prime Minister Narendra Modi ended the Himalayan region's seven decades of autonomy.

Over the past few days, large parts of Kashmir have remained cut off from the rest of the world amid a communications blackout, with no regular Internet, mobile phone, or fixed-line links working.

Indian troops have also been patrolling the streets where they have set up barbed wire barricades.

Residents of Indian-administered Kashmir were running short of essentials on Tuesday as the unprecedented security lockdown kept people indoors for a ninth day, AP reported.

The reaction to India's unprecedented move has so far been largely subdued. But anti-India protests and clashes have occurred daily, mostly as soldiers withdraw from the streets at dusk. Though the scale of the lockdown is unprecedented, civil resistance to Indian rule is not uncommon in Kashmir, and young men have hurled stones and abuse at police and soldiers.

The lockdown is expected to last at least through Thursday, India's Independence Day.

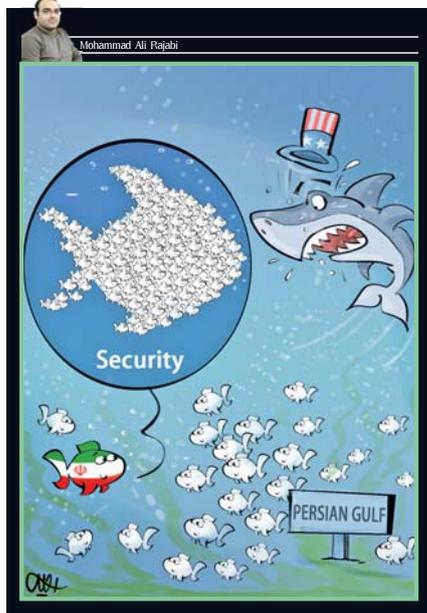
Kashmiris fear that India's move to put the region under greater New Delhi control will alter its demographics and cultural identity.

India said its decision to revoke Kashmir's special constitutional status and downgrade it from statehood to a territory would free it from separatism.

Pro-independence fighters have been fighting Indian rule for decades. Some 70,000 people have died in clashes between the fighters and civilian protesters and Indian security forces since 1989. Most Kashmiris want either independence or a merger with Pakistan.

Kashmir is split between India and Pakistan and is claimed by both in its entirety. The nuclear-armed rivals have fought two wars over it. The first ended in 1948 with the region divided and a promise of a UN-sponsored referendum on its future. It has never been held.

Pakistan has denounced the recent changes as illegal and has downgraded its diplomatic ties with New Delhi, expelled the Indian ambassador and suspended trade and train services.



Rouhani calls for enhanced ties with Azerbaijan

President Hassan Rouhani stressed the need for the promotion of bilateral relations between Iran and its northern neighbor Azerbaijan in all areas.

Rouhani made the remarks in a phone conversation with his Azeri counterpart Ilham Aliyev on Tuesday, Press TV reported.

During the conversation, the Iranian president extended congratulations to the Azeri government and nation on the occasion of Eid al-Adha (the Feast of Sacrifice), which marks the culmination of the annual Hajj pilgrimage.

He described Azerbaijan as a "friendly and brotherly" country to Iran, voicing confidence that the amicable ties would further deepen.

The Iranian chief executive highlighted the importance of exchanging visits by officials of the two countries in efforts to expand mutual cooperation.

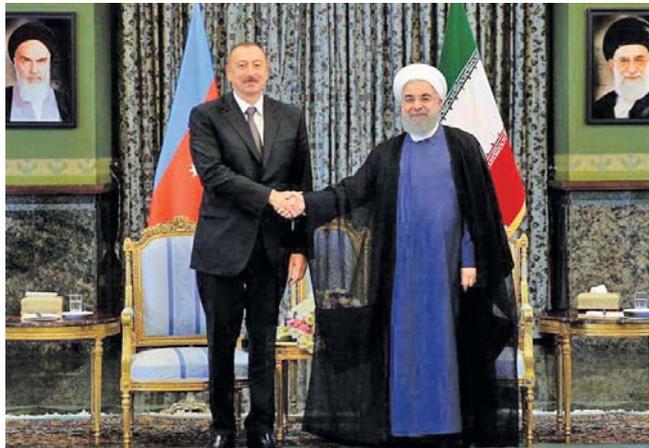
He also expressed hope for the speedy implementation of the agreements already signed between the two countries.

Aliyev, for his part, said Tehran-Baku ties were growing thanks to the efforts made by the two sides, expressing certitude that the trend would continue.

The phone conversation came shortly after the postponement of a planned trilateral meeting between the two sides and Russian President Vladimir Putin, IFP reported.

The meeting was due to be held in the Russian Black Sea resort city of Sochi today.

"Technical reasons" has been cited as the reason for the change in the plan, and the meeting is to be held at an appropriate time.



Iran unveils new multi-purpose armored vehicles

Iran unveiled new types of state-of-the-art tactical armored vehicles, which have been designed and manufactured by experts at the Defense Ministry.

The domestically-manufactured military vehicles, dubbed "Aras-2" were officially delivered to the Iranian Armed Forces during a ceremony on Tuesday in the presence of Defense Minister Brigadier General Amir Hatami and Commander of the Iranian Army's Ground Forces Brigadier General Kionars Heidari.

Speaking at the ceremony, the Iranian defense chief said the high-speed Aras-2 tactical vehicles enjoy high mobility in rugged or terrain and are capable of carrying heavy weaponry on different battlegrounds.

Compared to its older model, Aras-2 is more powerful and has a longer operational range, Hatami said.

Also, during the ceremony, an anti-mine and anti-ambush armored personnel carrier named Ra'ad was put on display.

He added that obtaining



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the technology for manufacturing the vehicles is a major step in providing for the needs of Iran's Armed Forces.

Iran has recently made major breakthroughs in its defense sector and attained self-sufficiency in producing

military equipment and hardware despite facing sanctions and Western economic pressure.

The Islamic Republic says its military power is solely for defensive purposes and does not pose any threat to other countries.

Minister urges WHO not to remain silent about US sanctions on Iran

National Desk

Iran's Health Minister Saeed Namaki urged the World Health Organization (WHO) to prevent continuation of illegal sanctions imposed by the United States against Iran and not to remain silent about the restrictions.

In a letter to the chief of WHO Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Namaki called on the international organizations, the World Health Organization in particular, not to remain silent about the "US crimes", IRNA reported.

Namaki also urged the international organizations not to allow the cruel and illegal policies of the United States to have a negative and destructive impact on



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the public health.

Last November, the Islamic Republic of Iran Medical Council (IRIMC) said illegal economic sanctions have negative impacts on the country's health sector.

The Academy of Medical Sciences of Iran also wrote to the UN to complain about the illegal sanctions imposed by the US against the Iranian nation, saying the restrictive measures have adversely affected the medical treatment of Iranian patients.

Officially, the sanctions exempt humanitarian goods, such as medicine and medicinal instruments. But in reality, the measures have restricted Iran's access to medical and health services.

Iraq slams Israel's participation in Persian Gulf naval mission

International Desk

Iraq has rejected any Israeli participation in a naval force led by the US to protect shipping in the Strait of Hormuz, stressing that its involvement will only increase tensions in the region.

Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohammed Ali al-Hakim wrote on Twitter on Monday that Iraq "rejects any participation of forces of the Zionist entity in any military force to secure passage of ships" in the Persian Gulf, aljazeera.com reported.

All of the regional states are able to ensure the safe passage of ships in the Persian Gulf, Hakiim stressed, adding that while "Iraq seeks to decrease tensions in our region through quiet negotiations, the existence of Western forces in the region will raise tensions."

His remarks came after Israeli media reported last week that Tel Aviv will join what the US



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claims an effort to boost security of navigation in the Persian Gulf.

Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz said on Wednesday that Israel is part of the US-led coalition to "protect the security of the Persian Gulf," Ynet reported.

He added that "Iraq will work to lower tensions in our region through calm negotiations", while "the presence of Western

forces in the region would raise tensions".

Iraq's rejection of any Israeli participation in the mission echoes that of Iran, which last week repeatedly slammed Katz's announcement.

Iran's Foreign Ministry's spokesman Seyyed Abbas Mousavi said on Friday that possible Israeli presence in the coalition in the Persian Gulf is a clear threat against Iran's nation-

al security, stressing that Tehran reserves the right to counter the move.

On Friday, Iran's Defense Minister Brigadier General Amir Hatami stressed that "the military coalition that America is seeking to form with the excuse of securing maritime transport will only increase insecurity in the region," adding that Israel's involvement would be "highly provocative and [could] have disastrous consequences for the region."

That Iraq has joined criticism of Israel's involvement in the region is likely also a bid to appear tough on Israel.

The US has so far failed to convince its allies to join the coalition amid its attempts to trouble Iran's foreign oil sales as part of its sanctions targeting the Islamic Republic.

Washington has called on Japan, Britain, France, Germany, South Korea, Australia and oth-

er nations to join the maritime force.

Washington was not able to convince its Asian ally to join an international maritime force to guard ships in the world's most important oil passageway with Iran ruling out joining a US-led maritime force. South Korea, however, has agreed to send a destroyer as part of a naval fleet to the strategic waterway.

The unified European approach to resolving tensions in the Persian Gulf also showed signs of strain.

Germany ruled out joining on Thursday, citing a desire to keep discussions diplomatic and avoid further escalation in the Persian Gulf, blaming the United States for the escalation by withdrawing from the nuclear deal.

Spain has also ruled itself out as a possible partner. Belgium and Norway are hesitating. France has also been reluctant to join the mission.