



IRAN TODAY & TOMORROW

WEEKLY NEWS BULLETIN

The Committee in Support of Referendum in Iran (CSRI), a 501(c)(3), non-profit and independent group, is committed to advance change in Iran through an internationally monitored referendum as the only peaceful means to bring democracy and establish a secular and representative government in Iran.

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Alternative Iran Policy

Parliamentarians Back Iran Opposition Plea

Press Association February 23, By Chris Moncrieft - Twelve United Kingdom parliamentarians today supported a call for the main Iranian opposition group, the People's Mojahedin, to be removed from the international list of terrorist groups. The plea is made in a half-page advertisement in the International Herald Tribune, in which they say: "At a time of mounting international concern over Iran, we believe it is now time to end the blacklisting of the People's Mojahedin to help open the way for democratic change in Iran." They claim they have been blacklisted at the behest of the Iranian mullahs. The parliamentarians, all Labour except where stated, and members of the British Committee for Iran Freedom, are Lord Archer of Sandwell, Lord Corbett of Castle Vale, Lord Clarke of Hampstead, Lord Alton of Liverpool (crossbencher), Baroness Gould of Potternewton, Kerry Pollard (St Albans), Dr Rudi Vis (Finchley and Golders Green), Roy Beggs (UUP Antrim East), John Cryer (Hornchurch), Harold Best (Leeds, North West), Win Griffiths (Bridgend) and Chris McCafferty (Calder Valley).

In Europe, Bush Takes Tough Stance on Iran

Reuters Feb 21, BRUSSELS - President Bush insisted on Monday that Iran cut off support



for terrorism and disavow nuclear weapons -- and stressed that no response could ever be ruled out. "In safeguarding the security of free nations no option can be taken permanently off the table," Bush said in a speech on his first trip to Europe since his re-inauguration last month. Washington and the 25-nation European Union both want Tehran to scrap uranium enrichment, a process which can be used to make fuel for nuclear power plants or bomb-grade material. But the United States has refused to join an initiative by the European Union --

represented by France, Germany and Britain -- to offer Iran incentives to curtail its nuclear program. "In Iran the free world shares a common goal for the sake of peace. The Iranian regime must end its support for terrorism and must not develop nuclear weapons," Bush said in the speech. Bush distinguished between Iran and Iraq, which his country invaded at the head of a military coalition in 2003. "Iran however is different from Iraq," he said. "We are in the early stages of diplomacy." He added: "We are working closely with Britain, France and Germany as they oppose Iran's nuclear ambitions and as they insist that Tehran comply with international law. The results of this approach now depend largely on Iran." Iran reiterated on Monday that it would not bow to U.S. and European demands that it abandon uranium enrichment, stressing that its nuclear capability was "not for sale." Tehran insists its nuclear ambitions are strictly peaceful.

Nuclear proliferation

Bush says Europeans agree with US on Iran nuke plans



DPA, Feb 24 BRATISLAVA US President George Bush focused his European tour on Thursday on new NATO member Slovakia, saying that Washington's allies, including Germany, agreed with the White House's stance on Iran. At a news conference after talks with Slovakian Prime Minister Mikulas Dzurinda, Bush said his current European tour was partly aimed at discerning whether European allies "view the Iranian problem the same way" as the Americans.

"They do," Bush said. Bush said he had learned that German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder "and others" think Iran "should not have a nuclear weapon." "Hopefully we'll be able to reach a diplomatic solution" with Iran, Bush said, adding that diplomacy can work "if we're on the same page." Bush arrived in Bratislava Wednesday night after a day in Germany where he met Schroeder and visited troops at a US military base. Later Thursday he was due to hold a summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Earthquake in Iran

Iran Quake Survivors Complain of Slow Aid Effort



Reuters Feb 23 By Parisa Hafezi ZARAND, Iran - Tired and cold survivors of a powerful earthquake in southeastern Iran begged authorities for food and shelter on Wednesday, complaining aid was slow to reach the worst-hit mountain villages. Iran has so far declined offers of foreign assistance to deal with the aftermath of Tuesday's tremor which had a magnitude of 6.4 and killed at least 420 people. Hardest hit were about a dozen villages to the north of the town of Zarand, where fragile one-storey homes collapsed into piles of mud and broken tiles. The tremor came just 14 months after a devastating quake hit the desert citadel city of Bam, in the same province, killing 31,000 people. Some 900 were injured in Tuesday's quake, about 440 miles southeast of Tehran, and the death toll was expected to rise.

Reuters journalists witnessed a few dozen angry villagers on a high mountain road, some brandishing sticks and stones, besiege a convoy of vehicles, one of which carried Interior Minister Abdolvahed Mousavi-Lari as he toured the affected area. "We spent the night in the cold. Where is the aid you're talking about on television?" shouted one middle-aged man as the villagers banged on the windows and roofs of the vehicles. "My children are freezing to death. You want to kill the survivors of the earthquake," a woman shouted hysterically, clutching a rock. Police dispersed the crowd, some of whom had tried to block the convoy's passage by lying in front of the vehicles. But aid workers acknowledged the relief effort was still slow and patchy. RAIN AND FOG "The aid which has been distributed is tents. We're trying to establish some camps here. We haven't distributed food or blankets yet," said Red Crescent medic Farhad Fathizadeh. "We're sorry we haven't been able to help people much but we're trying to prepare ourselves for tonight," he said. In the village of Houdkan, shrouded in fog about 30 km (20 miles) from Zarand, dozens of green and white tents dotted the hillside, many containing two or three families. Groups clustered around bonfires trying to warm themselves under an intermittent drizzle. Virtually no building was left standing and those that were had been deserted for fear they could come crashing down at any moment. Black banners draped on the remaining walls announced the names of the dead. Some 20 aftershocks, with a magnitude of up to 4.6, shook the area on Tuesday, the ISNA students news agency said. Locals said many of those killed in Houdkan, one of the two most badly damaged villages in the region, had died while at early morning prayers in the mosque. Kerman province Governor Mohammad Ali Karimi told local radio almost all the affected villages had received tents, blankets and food. He said search and rescue operations, hampered by poor weather and difficult terrain on Tuesday, would be wound up by noon on Wednesday. Iran's relief efforts were broadly praised on Tuesday by various U.N. agencies who said local authorities, backed by the Red Crescent, had responded quickly and effectively, employing the lessons learned from the Bam quake.

Sponsor of terrorism

Iran Continues Support of Terrorism, US Congress Told



VOA, Feb 16, By Dan Robinson- Capitol Hill Experts and other witnesses appearing before a congressional committee say Iran continues to support terrorist groups and is encouraging instability in Iraq. A hearing also included emotional testimony by individuals affected by Iranian-backed terrorism. From Israel and the Palestinian territories to Iraq and elsewhere, witnesses at Wednesday's hearing said Iran's ongoing sponsorship of terrorism is indisputable, and poses a direct and continuing threat to U.S. interests. Matthew Levitt, of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, says this support is wide ranging, but has focused on undermining efforts to achieve peace between Israelis and Palestinians: "Iran and its proxies are intent in undermining the best chance for progress toward peace since peace talks crumbled in 2000," said Mr. Levitt. "Hezbollah, Hamas, Islamic Jihad, al-Aksa Martyrs and others all at Iran's behest, are currently attempting to torpedo the nascent peace process." Most notable, in Mr. Levitt's view, is Iran's support for the radical terrorist group Hezbollah, and its targeting of Israel as well as Americans. He adds there is substantial evidence Iran is also behind terrorism in Iraq. "Iranian and Hezbollah elements are very active today in Iraq," he stated. "While Iranian ministers have asserted that Tehran has not encouraged the Iraqi insurgency or permitted suicide bombers to cross the border, their actions indicate otherwise." Republican Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen says Iran's support for Hezbollah reflects Tehran's determination to oppose U.S. interests: "Hezbollah has helped Iranian interests through continued terrorist attacks against the United States and our allies in the region," she said. Among witnesses at the hearing was an American who was one of 65 people taken hostage by militants at the U.S. Embassy in Tehran in 1979 after the fundamentalist takeover by Ayatollah Khomeini. Former hostage William Daugherty says the record of Iran's regime since then underscores a very real threat to Americans. "Convinced that it need have no fear of retribution or penalty, terrorism has been and remains a central component in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic," he said. Mr. Daugherty says Congress should press the Bush administration to, in his words, back up U.S. rhetoric with concrete action. There was also this emotional testimony from Lynn Smith Darbyshire, whose brother Vince was killed in the bombing of the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut in 1983, an attack carried out by the Iranian-sponsored Hezbollah. "The government of Iran has been perpetrating acts of terrorism and supporting terrorist organizations long enough. We need to stop them," she said. "We need to everything in our power to deter future acts of terrorism, so that other little girls will not have to watch their brothers die." The joint hearing of two House subcommittees dealing with the Middle East and terrorism followed separate testimony earlier by other experts on options the United States, European Union, and others have in dealing with Iran's nuclear development efforts.

Deteriorating conditions of human rights

Iran girl gets 100 lashes



BBC, Feb 24 - A teenage girl and two young men in Iran have been sentenced to lashes for having sex. The court dismissed the girl's claim that we was raped. It said she had sex of her own free will, the official Iran Daily newspaper reported. The girl was sentenced to 100 lashes because her accusations of rape and kidnap could have landed her partners a death penalty, the Tehran judge said. Sex outside marriage is illegal in Iran and capital punishment can be imposed. The young men in the case were sentenced to 30 and 40 lashes each.

Rights violations. The Iran paper quotes the girl, who has not been named, as confessing: "I trusted one of these young men, whom I got to know by phone, and went to his place. "But because he betrayed me, I filed the case against him and his friend out of revenge." International concerns continue to be raised about women's rights in Iran. In December the UN General Assembly voted to censure Iran for human rights violations, including discrimination against women and girls. Tehran rejected the criticism as propaganda. Under Iranian law, girls over the age of nine and boys over 16 face the death penalty for crimes such

as rape and murder, while capital punishment can be imposed in certain cases of illegal sexual relationships.

Two Young Men Sentenced to 170 Lashes in Iran



AFP, Feb 24, TEHRAN - A Tehran court sentenced a teenage girl and two young men to a total of 170 lashes for having had illicit sex, after it ruled out her claim of having been raped, Iranian newspapers reported Thursday. The court ruled that the girl, whose name was not disclosed, had sex with her partners of her own free will, although sex out of marriage is illegal in the Islamic republic. She was sentenced to 100 lashes and the men to 40 and 30 lashes each. The daily Iran explained that the girl's penalty was far higher because of her false kidnapping and rape charges which could have landed her partners with the death penalty. "I trusted one of these young men, whom I got to know by phone, and went to his place. But because he betrayed me, I filed the case against him and his friend out of revenge," the girl confessed, according to the reports.

Iran - Government Broadens its Crackdown on Freedom of Expression



Human Rights Watch, February 24, hrw.org New York -- The Iranian government sentenced the prominent blogger Arash Cigarchi to 14 years in prison for expressing his opinions on the Internet and in the international press, marking a new low for freedom of expression in Iran, Human Rights Watch said today. "The Iranian government is sending a message to its critics: keep silent or face years in prison," said Widney Brown, deputy program director of Human Rights Watch. In the northern province of Gilan, the revolutionary court issued the sentence on February 2. However, the court made its ruling public only on February 22. Charges brought against Cigarchi include espionage, "aiding and abating hostile governments and opposition groups," endangering national security and insulting Iran's leaders. The court based its decision on a report by the intelligence ministry agents who arrested Cigarchi on January 17. Cigarchi's trial violated international standards for fair trials. It was held behind closed doors and in absence of his lawyer; it is not known if Cigarchi himself was even present. Since his arrest over a month ago, he has not been allowed to meet with his lawyer. Cigarchi's lawyer, Mohammad Saifzadeh, told Human Rights Watch that his client's summons, arrest and the search and seizure of his personal documents were marked by numerous irregularities and illegal actions. Saifzadeh is planning to file a formal protest against the court's ruling. "This outrageous sentence follows the sham trial of a person who should never have been arrested in the first place," said Brown. Cigarchi's sentence comes on the heels of a systematic crackdown on freedom of speech in Iran. The Iranian authorities have targeted bloggers and internet journalists, arresting dozens in the past year. On February 5 a cleric in the city of Qom who wrote social and political commentary on his blog, Mojtaba Lotfi, was sentenced to three years and 10 months imprisonment by the Special Court for the Clergy. A widely-read political blogger, Mojtaba Saminezhad, was initially detained on November 1 and held for 88 days in solitary confinement, where he was tortured. He was released on January 27 but was detained again on February 13 after his bail was set at 1 billion Iranian rial (or \$127,000). In addition, a number of political activists have been recently detained and held without charge. On January 26, agents from the intelligence ministry detained the political activist Abass Khorsandi, who is now being held in solitary confinement in section 209 of Evin prison in Tehran. Another political activist, Nargis Adib, was seized at her house on February 8 and is also being held in Evin prison. The authorities have failed to provide any information regarding these arbitrary detentions.

Journalist and weblogger sentenced to 14 years in prison

Reporters Without Borders, Feb 23- Reporters Without Borders expressed outrage after journalist and weblogger Arash Sigarchi was sentenced to 14 years in prison on 22 February by a revolutionary tribunal in Gilan, northern Iran. The worldwide press freedom organisation called on President Mohammad Khatami to intervene on behalf of 28-year-old Sigarchi, who has been in custody since his arrest on 17 January. The organisation also called on the delegations of countries attending a preparatory meeting in Geneva ahead of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) to contact their Iranian counterparts to demand Sigarchi's release. "The authorities are trying to make an example of him. By handing down this harsh

sentence against a weblogger, their aim is to dissuade journalists and Internet-users from expressing themselves online or contacting foreign media," it said. "The Iranian president can no longer wash his hands of this by saying he is not responsible for the arrest, since Sigarchi was arrested by the intelligence ministry which in theory is answerable to the head of state. "He should therefore intervene quickly to get this weblogger out of prison. Then it should be the duty of delegations attending the UN conference to publicly condemn this sentence. We call on them to show their courage by demonstrating that freedom of expression is at stake at the WSIS," the organisation said. Sigarchi, who has been held since 17 January in Lakan Prison, Rashat, was sentenced for espionage and insulting the country's leaders but in reality he has been imprisoned for his work as a weblogger and journalist and contributing to American Radio Farda. The Iranian revolutionary tribunals are only supposed to rule on cases of high treason, espionage or counter-revolutionary activity. They should not be used to sentence journalists. Since Iranian law does not allow a citizen to be sentenced for a political offence, opponents of the regime and journalists are routinely accused of being spies or enemies of the revolution. Sigarchi, editor of the daily Gylan Emroz, has for the past three years runs a political and cultural blog, www.sigarchi.com/blog, on which he sometimes criticised the regime. The authorities had already blocked access to the site within the country. He had previously been arrested, on 27 August 2004, and held for several days for posting an article online with photos of a demonstration in Tehran by families of prisoners executed in 1989. Since then he has suffered constant police harassment. The weblogger had more recently condemned the harassment of journalists arrested in a series of "Internet File" cases (See: http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=12343), in particular the mistreatment suffered by his colleagues Shahram Rafihzadeh and Rozbeh Mir Ebrahimi. The last message on his blog related to the Southeast Asian Tsunami, in which he expressed his solidarity with the victims and said that the Iranian people could not be unmoved by the tragedy. Another weblogger, Mojtaba Saminejad, and a cyberjournalist, Mojtaba Lofti, also remain in prison (See : http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=12564).

Iran "street kids" crisis growing more acute



Iran Focus Feb. 22 Tehran,— More than 50 percent of Iran's street-children return to living on the streets after attending rehabilitation centres, according to the head of the Office for Victim Support in the Ministry of Social Affairs.

Dr. Seyyed Hadi Motamadi said, "A considerable number of such children, are secretly rented from their parents, at hardly any cost, to work illegally in the black-market despite it being illegal, and they earn inadequate salaries. Most of them suffer from physical and psychological disorders after enduring treatment by their employers". Motamadi complained of a lack of funding to cover the costs of providing for both runaway and working children. He accused the government of not having provided even "a single Rial" as part of the promised budget for combating the crisis. He said that poverty was the main factor leading to increasing levels of employed and runaway children. A recent study last December revealed that fourteen percent of all children in Iran are currently working so as to provide income for their families. The report pointed out that many of these children are forced into illegal employment such as smuggling, selling narcotics, and prostitution and have to forgo any opportunity of studying in school. Most are facing malnutrition and are prone to diseases due to lack of hygiene, according to the latest statistics. The figures showed that at present there are over a million Iranian children living in extreme poverty, with more than half a million children living under the \$2 poverty line and another half a million living under the \$1 poverty line. Iranian authorities had recently announced that the number of street children throughout the country was in the hundreds of thousands. The majority of the children rounded up are under the age of fifteen.

Feature

Iran's ayatollahs challenged

The Washington Times *The Washington Times, Feb 25, 2005 - By Alejo Vidal-Quadras Roca-* The hard-line ayatollahs ruling Iran reacted

enthusiastically to the election results in neighboring Iraq. "Certainly it is promotion of democracy, and in that respect we welcome that," said Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi. The ayatollahs' fervent calls for democratic elections in Iraq, while denying the very same choice to their own people, is the latest irony in the convoluted labyrinth of Middle Eastern politics. The political calculation behind the Iranian leaders' Orwellian doublespeak is that they see elections in Iraq as an opportunity to extend their influence in the key battleground for the future of the Middle East that Iraq has become. In his political will, Ayatollah Khomeini urged his successors to continue their efforts to bring about an Islamic revolution in Iraq, emphasizing that "the road to Jerusalem passes through Karbala." Tehran diverted massive resources to ensure the victory of its proteges in Iraq. Thousands of Shi'ite clerics were dispatched from Iranian seminaries to southern Iraq. Iranian agents offered lavish sums to buy influence among Shi'ite tribal leaders, and Tehran sought to dominate the airwaves through dozens of Arab-language radio and television stations beaming Islamist propaganda into Iraq. In the process, however, the ayatollahs may have committed one of their biggest blunders. They failed to realize that "it's democracy, stupid." If freedom-loving Iraqis overcome the odds to cement their new-found democracy in the face of serious threats from terrorists, Islamic extremists and meddling neighbors, Iran's theocratic regime will face a mortal peril: Democracy is, after all, contagious. The Iranian leadership is aware of the risky game it is playing in Iraq, and Tehran's ayatollahs are determined to derail the democratic process in Iraq through a two-track policy. Track one is to foment violence by supporting a wide range of terrorist groups operating in Iraq. Senior Iraqi ministers have publicly described Iran as a major sponsor of terrorism in Iraq. The Associated Press reported from Baghdad last month that the captured leader of Mohammed's Army, a Sunni group involved in beheadings and other bloody attacks, told Iraqi authorities that Iran provided money, weapons and "car bombs" for his group. Track two is to hijack the political process in Iraq through Iran's proxies. There are key figures on the winning Shi'ite slate whose long-standing loyalty to the ruling clerics in Iran causes profound concern among secular and democratic Iraqi politicians. Echoing such concerns, the spokesman for outgoing Prime Minister Iyad Allawi warned that Iraqi leaders "must be loyal to Iraq and not another country." The international community has too much at stake in Iraq to allow Iran's clerical leaders to quash the fledgling Mesopotamian democracy. This calls for a firm and coherent trans-Atlantic policy, but here is a first step we must take: Throw the gauntlet to the Iranian theocracy to hold free and fair elections in Iran, just as they preached for Iraq. The ayatollahs, of course, furiously reject any hint at the need for democracy in Iran. When President Bush told the Iranian people in his State of the Union speech, "As you stand for your own liberty, America stands with you," the reaction from Tehran was fast and furious". America is one of the major heads of the seven-headed dragon of arrogance," the Islamic Republic's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei blustered. "Zionist and non-Zionist capitalists who constitute the brain of this dragon have installed the incumbent U.S. president to further their interests. Bush is the fifth American president who intends to uproot the Iranian nation and the Islamic Republic, but he will be able to do so to the extent that Carter, Reagan, Bush the father and Clinton did". Ayatollah Khamenei has every reason to react viscerally to any suggestion of democratic change in Iran. He occupies an unelected office that towers above the three branches of power. Last year, his cronies in the watchdog Guardian Council arbitrarily "disqualified" more than 2,000 candidates in the run-up to the parliamentary elections, leaving the field clear for hard-liners to occupy the lion's share of seats in the new parliament. Iranians will vote for a new president on June 17. As things stand, the ayatollahs are not worried about the election: A rigorous vetting system will ensure that all but candidates deemed "loyal to the supreme leader" will be removed from the electoral slate. No matter who replaces lame-duck President Mohammed Khatami, the hard-line clerics do not see a threat to their rule. All this could change if the international community pressed Tehran to hold free presidential elections with U.N. observers monitoring the process. As in Iraq, where the Iranian leadership insisted on "free elections without manipulation," all candidates must be allowed to participate without any fear of intimidation or fraud. One such candidate could be Maryam Rajavi, a charismatic opposition leader who has a large following, particularly among Iran's oppressed youth and women. When I invited her to address members of the European Parliament in Strasbourg, Mrs. Rajavi rejected both the engagement of Iran's clerical regime and a war to topple the ayatollahs. Instead, she offered a third option: change brought about by the Iranian people, the vast majority of whom seek an end to religious tyranny. The United States went to war in Iraq with the goal of liberating the Iraqi people from the throes of a brutal dictator. President Bush has also spoken eloquently about the Iranian people's right to freedom. Preventing

Tehran's subversion of Iraqi democracy and encouraging the Iranian people to liberate themselves could result in two democracies in the most sensitive region of the world. Failure to act, however, could culminate in Islamic radicals ruling Iran and Iraq, with catastrophic consequences for the free world. If the West gets its act together, this could be a long, hot summer for Iran's ruling ayatollahs.

- *Alejo Vidal-Quadras Roca is first vice president of the European Parliament.*