



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.

March 18, 2005

No. 147

Traditional Persian celebration turns into nationwide anti-government protests

Uprising blazes throughout Iran capital

Iran Focus, March 15, 2005 – Tehran was left in a standstill this evening as the population poured into the streets to mark the national 'fire' festival of Chahar-shanbeh Souri despite intense pressures by the Iranian regime to prevent a possible uprising.

Eye-witnesses reported that full-size puppets of high-ranking officials, such as the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and the regime's president Mohammad Khatami, were set on fire by youths at numerous locations throughout the Iranian capital. Trucks belonging to Iran's security forces were also set ablaze.

"Guns, tanks, the Bassij (Para-military security forces) no longer have an affect", large crowds shouted in central Tehran, as they took part in the traditional celebrations where Iranians jump over fires ablaze on the streets.

Despite a general ban on the festival by the regime and repeated demands by the Iranian authorities that people avoid leaving their houses on the day, the main Iranian opposition group, the People's Mojahedin Organisation of Iran (PMOI) issued a call urging the nation to take part in the event and call for the overthrow of the clerical regime...

"Khamenei resign! Get off your throne", youths shouted, as the government unleashed its Revolutionary Guards to crack down on the demonstrators.

Residents reported that pictures of Maryam Rajavi and Massoud Rajavi, leaders of the Iranian opposition, were being distributed throughout Tehran and other major cities, including Mashad, Tabriz, Isfahan, Rasht, Lahijan, Hamedan, Arak, Sanandaj, Babol, Boukan, Saqqez, Mahabad, and Baneh, as SSF agents attempted to contain the demonstrators.

Anti-government protestors defied the government ban also chanted slogans in support of the National Liberation Army of Iran (NLA), according to local Tehran residents.

In Isfahan, youths clashed with SSF and Bassij agents, as authorities tried to prevent protesters from lighting up bonfires. Hit-and-run clashes continued until midnight, eye-witnesses reported.

Thousands of people gathered in Vali-Asr Square in the city of Tabriz to celebrate the fire festival. Young people set off smoke bombs and sonic booms. Clashes were reported at Abressan Junction, where a huge crowd assembled.

A number of districts of the city of Karaj were turned into hubs of anti-government protests by young people, who set fire to several patrol cars of security forces. In some districts, young people chanted "down with the dictator" and "down with Khamenei".



Among the displays in the capital, residents reportedly placed miniature banners on dogs in the streets of Tehran, mocking Iran's lame-duck president, reading, "Khatami, we love you! Signed: Iranian Dogs Association".

Iranian regime keeps lid on ancient Fire Festival

Reuters, Mar. 16 - Iranian authorities beat up and tear gassed exuberant young revelers as they breathed new life into a pre-Islamic fire festival with a night of dancing and fireworks...

The IRNA news agency said police used tear gas in more than four places in Tehran. Vigilantes were also seen beating up a group of boys in the central city of Isfahan...

Some 50 people were arrested in the capital, according to the semi-official ISNA students' news agency...

"Hundreds of young people are celebrating and dancing on the streets... while letting off firecrackers," IRNA reported from Tehran...

Islamists see the ceremonies as a pagan relic.

In Isfahan, a Reuters witness saw men in black leather jackets seize a group of nine boys and young men playing with fire-crackers, ram them against a wall and smash their faces and shoulders with batons.

A woman screamed hysterically as one of the religious vigilantes in a motorcycle-helmet dragged a battered teenager into an unmarked car. A regular policeman drove by without stopping.



Nuclear proliferation

EU and Iran flatly disagree as they meet on Iranian nuclear program



AFP, Mar. 9, Geneva - Negotiators from Iran and the European Union met Wednesday in Geneva on Tehran's nuclear program, with Iran flatly refusing to accede to the Europeans' key demand that it abandon uranium enrichment, a fuel process which can also make atom bombs.

Iran said Tuesday it had already gone far enough in providing "objective guarantees" that its nuclear intentions are peaceful and warned that a refusal by the European Union to accept this would bring negotiations to a dead-end.

US seeks action against Iran after nuclear talks impasse

Xinhua news agency, Mar. 9, Washington -- The United States has said it will consider possible actions against Iran if Tehran does not co-operate with the European Union on ending its nuclear activities. "Iran has an obligation right now to reassure the international community that its statements about not seeking nuclear weapons are true," the state department spokesman, Mr. Richard Boucher said at a press briefing on Tuesday. Iran needed to turn temporary suspension into permanent cessation of uranium enrichment activity, Mr. Boucher said, noting "Refusal by Iran to do this, that and the other is not going to get them anywhere." "The only way Iran is going to get anywhere with the Europeans or with the rest of the world is by accepting freely its obligations and undertaking to fulfill them," he added. "Unfortunately, we've not seen that kind of attitude from Iran, and we may have to consider what other action to take if Iran does not fulfill its obligations," Mr. Boucher said.

Iranian officials Tuesday threatened to break off negotiations

Reuters, Mar. 8, Tehran - Iranian officials Tuesday threatened to break off negotiations with France, Britain and Germany if the three European Union heavyweights continue to insist that Tehran abandon all sensitive atomic activities. Tehran insists it is intended solely to generate electricity and has rejected an EU demand to terminate its uranium enrichment program, which could be used to produce fuel for nuclear power plants or atomic weapons. "If the Europeans refuse our proposals in the talks during the next couple of days, their proposals will be strongly



opposed by Iran as well," Foreign Ministry spokesman Hamid Reza Asefi was quoted as saying by Iran's student news agency, ISNA. Speaking on condition of anonymity, European diplomats close to the talks told Reuters no breakthroughs were expected. In a further sign of defiance, Iran's parliament Tuesday added a clause to next year's budget bill obliging the government to conduct feasibility studies for the construction of nuclear power plants that would generate 20 gigawatts (GW) of electricity.

Kissinger says Europeans must clarify their position



The Associated Press, Mar. 9, Washington - Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger said Tuesday in an opinion piece that the health of the western alliance could well be determined by how it handles the Iran nuclear issue .Writing in The Washington Post, Kissinger said the European allies engaged in the Iran negotiations _ Britain, France and Germany_ need to clarify their position ... He suggests that some in the alliance "would rather face the perils of a proliferated world than the risks of avoiding it through common pressures "...

Data is lacking on Iran's arms, U.S. panel says



The New York Times, Mar. 8, Washington -- A commission due to report to President Bush this month will describe American intelligence on Iran as inadequate to allow firm judgments about Iran's weapons programs, according to people who have been briefed on the panel's work. The report comes as intelligence agencies prepare a new formal assessment on Iran, and follows a 14-month review by the panel, which Mr. Bush ordered last year to assess the quality of overall intelligence about the proliferation of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons.... In interviews, people who have been briefed on the commission's deliberations and conclusions said they regarded the record on Iran as particularly worrisome. One person who described the panel's deliberations and conclusions characterized American intelligence on Iran as "scandalous," given the importance and relative openness of the country.

Iranian official confirms underground nuke plant



The Associated Press, Mar. 7, Natanz -- "To protect the safety of equipment against possible danger of aerial attack, a major part of the [uranium enrichment] plant has been constructed underground, especially where thousands of centrifuges need to be located," Salehi (a nuclear affairs adviser to the Iranian foreign ministry) told the Associated Press. It was the first public confirmation by Iran that the Natanz facility is underground...On Saturday, Iran's top nuclear negotiator, Hasan Rowhani, confirmed Iran is building a tunnel next to another nuclear facility in Isfahan. He said that the tunnel, under a mountain, will be used to store unspecified equipment and that air attacks would not be able to destroy it.

Runaway Iranian diplomat reveals mullahs' atomic plan

Farda Radio, Mar. 7 – The Iranian leadership has planned to use the Bushehr power plant for expanding its atomic weapons program. This was said by an Iranian diplomat who has defected to the Western world and is staying in a completely secret place. According to this Iranian, whose remarks have been published by the German weekly Der Spiegel, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has formed a special group to work on programs on ways to deceive the IAEA officials. Diverting the route of the atomic material from the Bushehr power plant is another duty of the special group. Its main goal is to obtain enough plutonium so that with the help of new technologies, Iran can develop at least one nuclear bomb per year. Citing the Iranian official, Der Spiegel wrote that the first misleading operation will take place near the end of 2006 and that is when the spent fuel from Bushehr power plant is due to be handed over to Russia. If this program is revealed in one way or another, the Iranian diplomat says the leadership in Tehran will consider quitting the international conventions and subsequently embark on another plan called plan "B". According to this plan, the Bushehr power plant, which is considered for exploiting nuclear energy for humanitarian objectives, will openly turn into a factory of nuclear warfare. For this change, special software that is called MSNP must be available from before.

Iran thinking of building 10 other Natanzes

AFP, Mar. 6, Tehran - A fourth round of talks starts in Geneva on Wednesday and Thursday. "We have said clearly to the Europeans that a halt (of enrichment) is not acceptable," said Iranian negotiator Cyrus Nasseri. He also asserted that Iran was instead thinking of building "10 other Natanzes" -- a reference to the enrichment facility in the centre of the country...



And foreign ministry spokesman Hamid Reza Asefi told reporters that any demand for Iran to completely halt its enrichment activities went beyond the deal reached in Paris last October that kicked off the current round of talks. "The text of the Paris agreement was in English. There was nothing about permanent suspension. It mentioned 'objective guarantees', which means we continue enrichment and they are assured that no deviation is done," he said.

"We want to make it clear we are not haggling. We are not looking for incentives."

The spokesman also asserted that the Islamic republic was not concerned about US threats of being hauled before the UN Security Council. "We do not want to have our case referred to the UN Security Council. It could be solved by the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) and the EU. But, if it is referred, we are not worried," Asefi said. "If the Americans, the Europeans or anyone else think they can threaten Iran with the Security Council so Iran will give up its legitimate right, they are mistaken and one day they will regret it. This is Iran's red line."

Iran admits concealment, says insistence on cessation would kill talks



AP, Mar. 6, Tehran - Iran confirmed Sunday that it initially developed its nuclear program in secret, going to the black market for material, and blaming its discretion on the U.S. sanctions and European restrictions that denied Iran access to advanced civilian nuclear technology .

Iran now openly admits that it has already achieved proficiency in the full range of activities involved in enriching uranium ...

"True. There was secrecy," former president Hashemi Rafsanjani said Sunday.

"But secrecy was necessary to buy equipment for a peaceful nuclear program " .

"If sanctions had not been imposed on us, we would have declared everything publicly, but we had problems buying metal. Nobody sold us anything in the market," he said .

..

"Definitely we can't stop our nuclear program and won't stop it. You can't take technology away from a country already possessing it," Rafsanjani said .Alaeddin Boroujerdi, head of the National Security and Foreign Policy committee of the Iranian parliament, told the conference that Parliament would not approve additional protocol to the NPT if the Europeans insist Iran turn its temporary suspension of uranium enrichment-related activities into a permanent freeze. ... Iran's top nuclear negotiator, Hossein Mousavian, told the conference that European demands for a permanent freeze went against accords already signed by Iran and the three key European nations".Insisting on cessation kills the process of negotiations," he said .

Who are we to believe? (Intelligence Minister reacts to Resistance's nuclear revelations)

Iranian state-run TV, Ch. 1 – Excerpts of an interview with Intelligence Minister Ali Younessi: We consider it our duty to protect nuclear information so that it does not fall in the hands of terrorists or irresponsible countries. Therefore, we control them. The (Mojahedin) claimed to have intelligence, but that was not intelligence. The Americans obtained intelligence through their spies and the (Mojahedin) used that. The Americans sent the (Mojahedin) to the front, so they could protect their own spies. The Americans sent them to the front to claim that the (Mojahedin) obtained the intelligence. We know that the Americans' intelligence did not come from (the Mojahedin). The information was from their spies, who we have identified and arrested.

Iran's Sponsorship for International Terrorism

Iran tells Bush to stop labeling freedom seeking nations as terrorists



AFP, Mar. 9, Tehran - Iran reacted angrily to fresh criticism from George W Bush, telling the US president to "open his eyes" and "stop labeling freedom-seeking nations as terrorists".

"America's full support of Israel's state terrorism is so obvious and outrageous that leaves the United States with no right to comment on terrorism," foreign ministry spokesman Hamid Reza Asefi was quoted as saying in the Iranian media.

Bush lauds spread of democracy

The Miami Herald, Mar. 9 -- On the Israeli-Palestinian crisis, Bush accused Syria and Iran of having financial links to the terrorists responsible for a fatal attack in Tel Aviv, Israel, last month. "Syria, as well as Iran, has a long history of supporting terrorist groups determined to sow division and chaos in the Middle East, and there is every possibility they will try this strategy again," Bush said. "The time has come for Syria and Iran to stop using murder as a tool of policy, and to end all support for terrorism."

Bush urged Iran to abandon its nuclear ambitions, which he said threatened to destabilize the region. Germany, France and Great Britain are negotiating with the Iranian government to halt its nuclear program. "The Iranian regime should listen to the concerns of the world, and listen to the voice of the Iranian people, who long for their liberty and want their country to be a respected member of the international community," the president said.

Iran up to its neck in terrorism



AFP, March 9, Jerusalem - In Washington for talks with Condoleezza Rice, Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom said the US Secretary of State had indicated that Hamas would remain on the US list of terrorist organisations, sapping it of

funds.

"Our policy is clear: we want to strengthen moderate Arabs and isolated extremists such as Syria and Iran, who are up to their neck in terrorism, as well as Hamas and Islamic Jihad," Shalom said. He reiterated complaints from the Israeli administration that the Palestinian Authority had so far not dared disband armed groups.

International Women's day

Despite preventive measures, Tehran women commemorate Women's Day



Iran National Television (opposition), Mar. 8,

Tehran – Some 1,000 women staged an anti-government demonstration this afternoon in Tehran's Laleh Park to mark the International Women's Day. A number of demonstrators carried pictures of Mrs. Maryam Rajavi, the President-elect of the Iranian Resistance, and

distributed leaflets in support of the third option for the future of Iran, i.e. supporting the Iranian people and their resistance for democratic change in Iran. The protesters chanted antigovernment slogans such as "down with the clerical regime." State Security Forces and agents of the Ministry of Intelligence attacked the demonstrators, beating and arresting a number of them. The demonstration, however, continued for several hours. Those arrested were transferred to the police precinct 148 in Enghelab (Revolution) Square. The rally was held despite the fact that the suppressive forces had an extensive presence in the Laleh Park in order to thwart any rally from taking shape. They also controlled all entrances to the park.

Paris rally rebukes execution of minors, women in Iran



VOA Radio, Mar. 7 – On the eve of the International Women's Day, upon the invitation of a human rights organization called "All for Abrogation of Death Decree", a demonstration was staged in front of the Embassy of the Islamic Republic in Paris... On the reason for this gathering, the spokesman for this foundation, Mr. Michel Toub, said: On the eve of the International Women's Day, we want to provide the world public opinion with information on the situation of women in Iran. Compared to the international norms, Iran condemns many women to death and hangs them under inhuman conditions. Stoning and torture must be added to

this list...Sarvnaz Chitsaz (Chair of NCRI Women's Committee): Today, we face a phenomenon called the execution of young people under 18 years of age in Iran. Hopeless girls who are victims of the Iranian regime, are executed for hollow and ridiculous reasons...

Feature

Expert on Iran: Subvert regime

Miami Herald March 17, BY NOAH BIERMAN

A Middle East security expert who served in the Reagan administration said Wednesday that the United States needs to work with an Iranian opposition group that's now on the national list of terror organizations. Raymond Tanter, who cofounded the newly formed Iran Policy Committee think tank, advocated what he called "forceful diplomacy" to prevent Iran from building nuclear weapons. Tanter spoke to about 25 people at the downtown Hyatt Regency in Miami as a guest of the Iranian Society of South Florida. The society is trying to raise its profile and to promote change in Iran, which is emerging as a Bush administration foreign policy priority. The United States has not officially called for regime change in Iran. Nonetheless, Tanter said regular diplomacy will not prevent Iran from building nuclear weapons. Using a military strike against its nuclear facilities -- situated near population centers -- would kill too many civilians, he said. "Work with the group that the regime dislikes the most," he said. That's the Mujahedeen-e-Khalq, known by the abbreviation MEK. The State Department in 1997, under President Bill Clinton, put the MEK on its terror list. Tanter said the move was an attempt to win favor with moderates in Iran. The United States continues to hold thousands of the group's members in Iraq, under coalition supervision. MEK has been lobbying for legitimacy in Washington. The State Department, according to The Associated Press, reported that Saddam Hussein funded MEK groups, that the MEK supported the seizure of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran in 1979, and that it was responsible for the deaths of Americans in the 1970s. Tanter said he has looked into reports about the MEK and has not found credible evidence that it is engaged in terrorism. He said leaving MEK on the terror list prevents the CIA from getting direct information from the group. Still, the intelligence community uses back channels to gather "superb" tips from MEK, which have been verified through Israel and other sources, he said. Bahman Badiee, president of the Iranian Society of South Florida, said most local Iranian Americans have family in Iran and would favor getting rid of the oppressive government but would not support a military attack.