

Toleration Of Dissent, Key Reformist Achievement



Ahmad Shirzad

ISFAHAN, Dec. 12-A prominent activist said on Sunday the freedom to criticize and toleration of dissident voices are the most important achievements of President Khatami's reformist government.

Speaking late on Sunday to members of Isfahan University's Students Islamic Association, a member of Islamic Iran Participation Front (IIPF), Ahmad Shirzad, said the number of political parties representing diverse political ideologies is unprecedented in Iran's history.

As to reasons behind the failure of reformists to garner votes in the last two elections, he said the mass disqualification of reformist candidates by the Guardians Council deprived reformists of an equal chance to compete in the polls.

"Following the elections, studies by the Interior Ministry revealed reformists were barred from fielding candidates in at least 140 electoral constituencies," he said, adding that a recent opinion poll indicate two-thirds of the population back reforms.

The IIPF member also said the level of political awareness of the Iranian society is currently very high.

"People know what they want and want to direct their expectations to," he said.

Noting that according to a poll 60 percent of Iranians are against privatization, Shirzad said traditionally Iranians hold the government responsible for everything related to national affairs and so attribute all shortcomings to the ruling establishment.

"This attitude has created a wide gap between the rulers and the ruled," he concluded.

TEHRAN, Dec. 12-Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), Hassan Rohani, said here on Sunday Iran is a member of the Nuclear Fuel Cycle Committee and will take part in its next meeting.

Talking to reporters at Mehrabad International Airport prior to his departure for Brussels at the head of a delegation to the crucial Iran-EU talks, Rohani said he will hold talks with the foreign ministers of Germany, France and Britain, namely Joschka Fischer, Michel Barnier and Jack Straw, on Monday.

"The negotiations will be held at three levels," he said, adding that he and his accompanying delegation will be attending the ministerial meeting.

He noted that the EU high representative Javier Solana is also scheduled to participate in the meeting.

"The second meeting will be that of the steering

committee," Rohani said, adding that Iranian negotiators who participated in the Paris talks, along with some new members, will represent Iran in the talks.

He further said the European team that attended the Paris negotiations will also participate.

Rohani announced that three working groups on political and security issues, technology and cooperation, as well as nuclear issues, will also be convened.

As to the resolution of the International Atomic Energy Agency's Board of Governors on Iran's nuclear activities on November 25, he said, although the resolution has been the best ever issued by the board,

Tehran is still not satisfied with certain wordings.

The SNSC secretary said the steering committee is due to meet again within three months to receive progress reports from the working groups and move ahead with projects and measures that can be implemented in advance of a full long-term agreement.

Rohani stressed that the positive outcome and success of the talks will benefit the two sides as well as the entire region, noting that the failure of negotiations will also be felt by all.

"We will continue the talks if we feel that they are progressing," he said, adding that in case they reach a dead-end, Tehran will cease talks.

Rohani Leaves For EU Talks

Persian Press Watch

Deteriorating

ABRAR: Majority of Britain's political and military personalities called on Prime Minister Tony Blair to publicly announce the exact death toll of the Iraqi people in wake of the US invasion of Iraq in March 2003. This request came after a British research institute announced that about 100,000 Iraqis have been killed so far. Britain is a US ally and has dispatched a large number of troops to Iraq. It is considered as a US accomplice in murder of a large number of Iraqi people. However, Blair rejected this request and defended Britain's diplomacy in Iraq. The interesting point is that the British officials made this request at the time when Iraq's conditions are deteriorating.

Bellicosity

DONYA-YE EQTESAD: Two years ago today global discussions about Iraq had reached their climax. At that time the UN weapons inspectors announced that they didn't find any traces of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. In the meantime, everyone was certain about the US attack on Iraq because the US President George W. Bush was insisting on his doctrine of regime change in Iraq. The bottom line is that Bush invaded Iraq in order to increase the US control over Middle East's energy resources. Recent changes in the US administration reveal that America is going to pursue its policy of bellicosity in other parts of the Middle East.

Khatami's Meeting

MARDOMSALARI: President Mohammad Khatami had a face-to-face meeting with a group of students last week. This is while he had not had a meeting with students even once during his second term in office. Despite the fact that students were Khatami's biggest supporters in the May 2001 presidential race, the chief executive practically did not pay heed to their rather radical reformist ideals. Students seem to be against Khatami's moderate policies. The president's meeting with students had both advantages and disadvantages. The good omen was that he listened patiently to the critical comments of the students. However, the negative aspect of this meeting was that he was not transparent in responding to the students' various demands.

Bitter

AFTAB-E YAZD: What happened during President Mohammad Khatami's visit to Tehran University last week was bitter for both the opponents and proponents of the reform movement. Bitterness of the development was due to the fact that Khatami was infuriated and he told the students to either keep calm or leave the auditorium. Notwithstanding the above, Khatami referred to an important point and that being the issue of officials' neglecting criticism from within. The point is that our officials have to learn to accept constructive criticism no matter how unpleasant it might be.

Perspective

Changing Realities

From Page 1

Iran is an important player in the oil-rich region and is well aware of its responsibilities. Its cordial ties with Syria, Lebanon and even Turkey have compelled other regional countries, that do not support the Islamic system, to accept that Iran has untapped potentials on the international scene.

Iran's relations to China, its pivotal role in OPEC and its interaction with European and African states are worthy of attention. Some US think tanks have recently talked about accepting Iran's nuclear activities and underlined that the West should learn to coexist with Iran as a nuclear power.

Iran's military and defense capabilities should also not be overlooked. The experience and lessons of the 8-year war with Iraq, inter alia, proved to the West that Iran is more powerful than what it had contemplated.

Yes, Bush's America wishes to disclose the present set-up in Iran, but the present international climate and Iran's military prowess are realities Washington cannot afford to ignore.

Tehran should use the governing mood to its benefit and build its political and economic relations with truly free and independent nations. We need to strongly interact with other countries and build confidence on the global stage to be able to strengthen our position in the Middle East and beyond.

Gov't Vows to Confront Lawlessness

ZAHEDAN, Sistan-Baluchestan, Dec. 12--Minister of Intelligence Ali Younesi said perpetrators of criminal acts are enemies of peace and civil society.

Talking to reporters in this southeastern city on Sunday, Younesi vowed that his ministry will confront such criminal elements firmly, IRNA reported.

Referring to the recent discovery of compact discs in this city to sow discord among Sunnis and Shiites, he said those behind this cowardly move were certainly enemies of peace and civil society.

The minister stressed the relative peace and stability enjoyed by the entire country and said the opening of a stock exchange market in

Zahedan and the progress achieved by the province has been largely due to the security prevailing in the region.

Yunesi further said that his ministry is cooperating with neighboring countries to uproot all causes of insecurity which mainly emanates from across Iran's borders.

Ali Younesi



Deputy FM Confers With Malaysia's Albar

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia, Dec. 12--Deputy Foreign Minister for International Affairs Gholamali Khoshrou conferred with Malaysian Foreign Minister Hamid Albar here on Saturday and discussed bilateral relations, as well as regional and international issues.

In the meeting, Khoshrou praised the positions of Malaysia and the Non-Aligned Movement regarding Iran's nuclear issue, IRNA reported.

He said recent negotiations between Iran and Europe have also been discussed.

Khoshrou added that they reviewed developments in Iraq and Afghanistan as well.

Albar, for his part, said Malaysia has always insisted on Iran's right to the peaceful use of nuclear energy and praised Iran's cooperation with IAEA.

Khoshrou, who arrived in Kuala Lumpur on Thursday to participate in a meeting of OIC member-states, left here late on Saturday.

War Disabled Dies In Karaj Prison

TEHRAN, Dec. 12--A war disabled, Mohammad Rajabi-Sani, who died in a Karaj prison had been tortured so that he could not be identified, an MP from Tabriz claimed.

Eshrat Shayeq also told Fars News Agency on Saturday that she has called on Justice Minister Esmail Shushtari to clarify the death of the war disabled.

"His son identified his father from a mark on his ear. Although the victim used to take psychological pills, prison wardens prevented him from taking the same," she said. Shayeq noted that a Majlis probe into the judiciary's performance will clarify everything.

Meanwhile, Tehran Justice Department in a communiqué criticized the manner in which the media covered the court proceedings of Rajabi-Sani who was convicted after being tried on a personal complaint.

Tehran Justice Department rejected all rumors pertaining to the prison's refusal to give him his pills.

Call for Russia's More Active Role in Region

TEHRAN, Dec. 12--Majlis Speaker Gholamali Haddad-Adel here on Saturday called for a more active role of Russia in the region.

In a meeting with Russian Federation Council Chairman Sergei Mironov, the Majlis speaker referred to the cooperation of Iran and Russia to establish peace and stability in Afghanistan and Tajikistan.

"We welcome a more active role of Russia in the region and are ready to help in this regard," he said.

Commenting on the interference of western countries in Ukraine's domestic affairs, he

said, "This and other similar events in Yugoslavia and Georgia prove that the West is not committed to international norms."

He added that despite democratic and humanitarian gestures of the West, they continue to follow colonialist policies.

On Tehran-Moscow relations, Haddad-Adel said promotion of bilateral ties will bolster mutual interests and promote stability in region.

"International and regional conditions necessitate the continuation of consultations between the two countries' senior officials,"

he said.

The speaker noted that Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant is a symbol of technical cooperation between the two countries.

Mironov expressed satisfaction about his visit to Iran and said the aim of his trip is to promote parliamentary relations.

Referring to the role of parliaments in the two countries, he emphasized the support of Russian Federation Council for mutual political, economic and cultural cooperation.

He said the positions of Iran and Russia with regard to international issues, especially

efforts to establish peace in the region as well as the campaign against terrorism, are very close and called for greater coordination in these areas.

"Tehran and Moscow are working out technical details of an agreement to bring a nuclear power plant in the Iranian port city of Bushehr on line in 2006," he said.

Mironov, who arrived in Tehran on Saturday for a one-day visit, stressed Iran's right to peaceful nuclear technology in the framework of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, of which the country is a signatory.

Iran Is No...

From Page 1

The United States wants the UN International Atomic Energy Agency, which ElBaradei heads, to report Iran to the UN Security Council for possible sanctions over what Washington says is a covert nuclear weapons program.

But ElBaradei says the "jury is still out" on whether Tehran's program is peaceful or not.

The Egyptian diplomat, 62, also earned the ire of Washington by questioning US intelligence on Iraq. The Bush administration opposes his winning a third term in 2005 as IAEA chief.

The official US position is that heads of international organizations should not serve more than two terms, as ElBaradei will have done by next year.

Washington has no clear candidate to replace him but is nevertheless "searching for material" to support its argument that he should step down, the Post said.

"Anonymous accusations against ElBaradei made by US officials in recent weeks are part of an orchestrated campaign" to oust him, the paper said, quoting "several senior policymakers" who spoke on condition of anonymity.

These accusations include an unproven charge that ElBaradei withheld damning evidence on Iran's activities from the IAEA board, it noted.

Washington's top favorite to replace ElBaradei is Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer, but he has been unwilling to challenge the IAEA chief, the Post said.