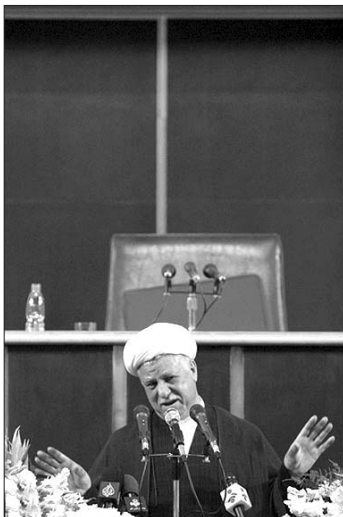


Rafsanjani Discusses Planning Contradictions

TEHRAN, March 16--Chairman of State Expediency Council Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani said on Wednesday outlines of the fourth development plan (2005-10) somehow deviate from the objectives of Iran's 20-Year Perspective.

Addressing the second day of the 13th Meeting of the Assembly of Experts, Rafsanjani said, "We must think about overcoming this deviation. If the outlines of the 20-Year Perspective had been compiled after the outlines of the fourth plan, then there might have arisen political tension in the country. We must remove our weak points and shortfalls in the coming years."

He observed that shortfalls for meeting the objectives of the 20-Year Perspective are the inefficient administrative system, red tape, high unemployment rate, low purchasing power of the vulnerable social strata, low productivity, excessive reliance on oil revenues, state interference in economic affairs, non-devotion of the youth to Islamic tenets, ineffectiveness of the social security system, insufficient research activities and non-institutionalization of economic and technological organiza-



Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani

tions. "Among the positive points for the fulfillment of the 20-Year Perspective are: the international tendency to use Iranian workforce, suitable geopolitical conditions of the country, global need for Iran's mineral resources, demand of Iran's southern neighbors for food resources and suitable market for

Iranian products," he said. Rafsanjani noted that great powers block the export of valuable technological advances to Iran. "And the US is interfering in the internal affairs of other countries in an illegitimate manner. Global powers intend to promulgate their own type of culture in third-world countries," he said.

No One Can Defy Reforms

TEHRAN, March 16--Secretary-general of the reformist Islamic Iran Participation Front said IIPF entered the scene as a political current and next year also belongs to reformers.

Speaking in a press conference in Tehran on Wednesday, Mohammad Reza Khatami noted that no one can defy reforms, IRNA reported.

Noting that reforms imply people's presence on the political scene, he said presenting reforms to be against people's demands will not be acceptable.

Khatami also said the Seventh Majlis cannot be repeated because it had many disadvantages.

"Although President Mohammad Khatami and former Majlis Speaker Mehdi Karubi endeavored to prevent holding Seventh Majlis election in that way, they didn't succeed," he said.

Asked whether he would prioritize freedom over people's economic conditions, the IIPF chief said this is not important but the government's main objective should be people's consensus and the elite should provide the people with solutions for everyday problems.

He stressed that the prerequisite for development is human development that will eventually result in economic and cultural developments.

"The elite consider freedom to be an important issue. Productivity will decline in the absence of freedom," he said.

Khatami will be vice president of the presidential aspirant, Mostafa Moin, in the ninth presidential election.

Dutch FM Appreciates Cooperation

BRUSSELS, Belgium, March 16--Dutch Foreign Minister Ben Bot Wednesday hoped that the Islamic Republic will continue its encouraging cooperation on the nuclear program.

"We hope that Iran will comply with the demands put on the table concerning a complete cessation of the (enrichment) activities," Bot told reporters in Brussels ahead of an EU foreign ministerial meeting, IRNA reported.



Ben Bot

"So far, we have been encouraged by the cooperation on the side of the Iranian authorities and we hope that they will continue to work in that direction. Europe is very interested in full compliance with the IAEA norms and we hope that Iran will cooperate as close as possible with Europe because that is in our mutual interest," he said.

The Council of EU foreign ministers is expected to discuss ties with Iran during their Wednesday meeting.

Yazdi Disqualification Not in National Interest

TEHRAN, March 16--A leading reformist said on Wednesday disqualifying the head of the banned Freedom Movement of Iran, Ebrahim Yazdi, from the Jan. 17 presidential race would be considered an act against national interests and will hinder maximum public participation.

Speaking to ILNA, Mostafa Tajzadeh, a member of Islamic Iran Participation Front, added that at present many people are not sure whether their votes would influence the country's future or if the presidential election would be held in a free manner, hence they are not interested in participating in the undertaking.

"Therefore, the number of nominees willing to pursue activism within the framework of the constitution should increase so that more people would show up at the ballot boxes and the country's security would be ensured," he said.

Tajzadeh pointed out that eight years after the letter Imam Khomeini wrote about the FMI, the Guardians Council (GC) qualified electoral nominees of the FMI and other nationalist-religious groups.

"Isn't GC using the Imam's letter as a pretext to disqualify Yazdi? So why should GC officials



Mostafa Tajzadeh

attribute their illegal moves of today to the Imam? If the yardstick for the GC is the Imam's views, he never agreed to expedient supervision and extensive disqualifications. GC's problem is not one or two candi-

dates. GC does not want elections to be held freely," he said.

Tajzadeh concluded by saying that attempting to eliminate certain people from the electoral scene would distort the image of the Islamic system.

Iranians Protest In Britain

LONDON, March 16--Five Iranian asylum-seekers set off on foot from Birmingham on March 12 to join the national anti-war demonstration in London on March 19 for protesting against the threats of military intervention by the US and its allies in Iran, workersliberty.org reported.

They will be walking through Coventry, Banbury, Oxford, High Wycombe and then on to London.

The asylum-seekers want to bring to the public

and media attention that the threats by the US and allies to intervene in Iran will significantly weaken the growing movement for democracy in Iran.

The legacy of foreign interventions, especially those of the US and UK in suppressing past democratic movements in Iran, means that this growing movement would have to divert part of its efforts and resources to resist any intervention by foreign governments.

The asylum-seekers taking part in this walk consider themselves part of this movement for democracy in Iran and want the progressive and freedom-loving people in Britain to extend their support.

"We ask the British public to support this walk and the greater democratic movement in Iran by opposing the threat of intervention by the US and its allies," they said.

Call for Addressing Youth Needs

TEHRAN, March 16--President Mohammad Khatami on Tuesday highlighted the important roles played by the youth in scientific, cultural, political and social fields, calling for paying due attention to the young generation.

In a meeting with provincial managers of National Youth Organization's affiliated institutes, Khatami said a society's prosperity and destiny depend on the three principles of piety, democracy and progress, IRNA reported.

The president added that the widening gap between the youth and their families, the ever-increasing young population and planning for the youth are challenges facing the society. He urged the organization to meet their needs.

Khatami noted that a system's power lies in making long-term plans to meet their needs in scientific, cultural and social areas.

More Ex-MKO Members Return

TEHRAN, March 16--Nine former members of the banned Iranian opposition group, Mujahideen Khalq Organization, reunited with their families on Wednesday during a ceremony held at Nejat Society's Khuzestan office.

Director of Nejat

Society Hamid Dehdar Hosseini said the ex-MKO members fled from Iraq last week, IRNA reported.

He pointed out that Islamic Republic is determined to facilitate the return of defected MKO members.

"Nejat Society is a non-

governmental organization and its members are all former MKO members who are making efforts to secure the return of former MKO members to Iran," he said.

Hosseini further noted that all MKO members will soon return to Iran.

Iraq Assembly Inauguration

Welcome

TEHRAN, March 16--Majlis Speaker Gholamali Haddad-Adel here Wednesday felicitated the Iraqi nation and government on the inauguration of its first elected National Assembly in decades, IRNA reported.

Addressing the open Majlis session, Haddad-Adel said, "The new National Assembly is due to pick the future president, two vice-pres-

idents and prime minister today."

Haddad-Adel expressed optimism about restoration of peace and stability in Iraq, hoping that foreign occupiers will exit the country.

The Shiite-led United Iraqi Alliance won 140

seats in the 275-member National Assembly during the election held on January 30. They are currently negotiating with the Kurds to form a coalition that will give them the two-thirds majority necessary for taking binding decisions.

Quakes Jolt Zarand

TEHRAN, March 16--Two earthquakes measuring 4.2 and 4.1 on the open-ended Richter scale hit the town of Zarand in the southeastern province of Kerman in the early hours of Wednesday.

According to the seismological base of Tehran University's Geophysics Institute, the quakes occurred at 02:19 hours local time (2249 GMT) and 02:13 hours (2243 GMT) respectively, IRNA reported.

The seismological base located the epicenter of the quake in Zarand.

No reports of casualty or damage to property

have been received yet. On Feb 22, 2005, a strong quake, measuring 6.4 on the open-ended Richter scale, struck the same town, killing over 600 people and injuring over thousands of others.

The epicenter of the quake was 60 kilometers (35 miles) northwest of the city of Kerman. The quake destroyed four villages by 100 percent and damaged 40 villages by over 25 percent.

Iran is situated on some of the world's most active seismic fault-lines and quakes of varying magnitudes are of usual occurrence.

Persian Press Watch

Character Assassination

SEDA-YE EDALAT: While only three months are remaining to the Ninth Presidential Election, the candidates still lag behind schedule in terms of presenting electoral plans. At the time when the country is experiencing a critical situation, radicals of both political factions are performing in a manner that mars Iran's credibility on the international scene. It seems that these radicals are practicing character assassination of rival candidates every possible way. However, the radicals of both parties have one thing in common and that being they are both practicing character assassination of the Chairman of the State Expediency Council Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani.

Self-Restraint

ABRAR: Government of Lebanon intends to ban rallies by opponents and proponents of pullout of Syrian troops from south Lebanon. In fact, this ban is aimed at avoiding clashes between these two groups and the emergence of a civil war. Lebanon's prevailing conditions are very similar to those of 1975, when the civil war broke out. Amid this all, the self-restraint exercised by Lebanon's Hezbollah has helped foil the plots of enemies of Lebanese people. Hezbollah has shunned any form of clash with its opponents. All political parties of Lebanon should model Hezbollah and exercise self-restraint given the country's sensitive conditions.

Shortage

AFARINESH: Commerce Ministry has announced that if there is no balance in the supply-demand cycle of fruits market, it will begin importing fruits. This is while nothing has been done so far to reduce the pressures currently exerted on customers. Importing fruits will lower prices and lessen the pressures on customers. Officials should be accountable to the public and explain why they have not yet facilitated import of fruits despite their previous pledges. Now that the shortage of fruits in the local market is quite clear, necessary measures should be immediately taken for importing fruits.

Unfavorable

DONYA-YE EQTESAD: It is predicted that the economies of most countries will reach favorable conditions in 2005. An economic growth for three percent for US and eight percent for China means that demand for crude oil in 2005 will be considerably increase while current prices will be restrained. These conditions can be encouraging for oil exporting countries. However, the political conditions are not favorable for Iran. The Islamic system is presently under the US pressure for its nuclear activities. Under the present circumstances, even if Iran's nuclear dossier is not eventually referred to the UN Security Council, it will be tough to convince foreign investors to participate in Iranian developmental projects.

Perspective

Reality Check

From Page 1
The strong majority of those 'advisers' were low ranking and retired military personnel living in luxury they could never dream at home.

Having lost Iran, the superpower failed miserably to break out determination or dislodge the ruling elite in Tehran. Not only did the US-backed eight-year Iraqi war not remove Iran from the global political map, it made the nation more determined in its struggle for self-reliance, honor and independence, and do more with less. It also opened the eyes of many nations and their leaders to what friendship with America is really worth.

Today few would disagree with the reality that Iran has more friends than it did in the early 1980s, and for this America should really be thanked.

By the same token, the number of nations and governments that have a deepening dislike for the superpower is visibly increasing, including in western societies, as Bush steadily becomes a nightmare for the people of America and the world.

Iran's proximity with Muslim and Arab nations is more manifest for the reason that the Muslim-Arab region and millions of others in the free world are tired of the US lies and arrogance of its anti-intellectual leaders. The more American rulers bark at Iran and its declared foreign policies, the more will Iran's magnetic attraction increase for the Muslim world plagued with despots who confuse loyalty with legitimacy.

So, a logical conclusion is that with the non-stop attacks and almost daily condemnation and obstruction from Bush's America, successive governments in Tehran have worked against heavy odds and managed to deliver as best as they can. This does not mean that all those in high places here have done a wonderful job. To the contrary, many deserve to be shown the door for their flaws and failures as the nation moves forward slowly and prepares for the difficulties that lie ahead.