

# Iran Mulls Accession to Espoo Convention

Department of Environment (DoE) declared that Iran would soon join the European Convention on the Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (Espoo), reported IRNA. The decision was announced following a meeting between head of Iran's DoE, Masoumeh Ebtekar, and the Espoo Convention secretary, Wiek Schrage, who discussed Iran's accession to the convention. Referring to the department's eight-year efforts in assessing environmental impacts of large-scale projects across the country, Ebtekar highlighted the significance of Iran's accession to major international conventions and organizations for the success of its assessment programs. "Continuation of international cooperation is a necessity pursued by the DoE," she added. Schrage, who traveled to Iran to hold a specialized workshop on environmental assessment in a transboundary context in the Caspian Sea region on July 11-12 in Gorgan, hailed Iran's extensive efforts to preserve the environment and assess the impacts of national projects. He also welcomed the country's intention to join the Espoo Convention.

## Tehran Green Infrastructure Expanding

Governor General of Tehran Ali Akbar Rahmani said the per capita green area in the province had increased to 15 square meters in 2004 from only three square meters in 2001.

He explained that the total green area had grown to 195 million sq.m. from 36 million sq.m. during this period, ISNA quoted.

Rahmani said Tehran was the most successful province in terms of expansion of its green infrastructure including trees, shrubs and grass, and went on, "As predicted in the Third Development Plan (2000-2005), a total 15 million saplings, three million each year, were planted across the province. We are prepared to plant four million saplings a year during the fourth development plan (2005-2010)."

He expressed hope that the per capita green area for Tehran province would increase to 25 square meters, adding fulfillment



A total 15m saplings were planted across the province during the Third Plan.

of the goal requires allocation of sufficient budget to the task.

"Municipalities have been obliged to develop green areas in the outskirts of cities. Village managers should also help promote plans for expansion of vegetation," he said.

Rahmani explained that the per capita figures do not include the fruit trees.

The governor general insisted that systematic mechanisms need to be employed to efficiently manage water resources and irrigation schemes, adding careful maintenance of trees and plants should be combined with efforts to upgrade and expand green infrastructure (parks, greenways, natural areas).

## 1,000 Trout Perish in Polluted River

As many as 1,000 trout fish perished over the past week in Kileh River of Tonekabon, Mazandaran, as a result of heavy contamination in the waterway, IRNA wrote.

Head of Tonekabon Department of Environment, Rahman Mohtasham Amiri, said the waste material from a nearby dairy manufacturer had also killed all amphibians inhabiting the river, imposing more than 81 million rials in damage.

An expert and university instructor, Hamidreza Jamalzadeh, admitted that the

release of waste material into the water, the plundering of sand and gravel from riverbeds, as well as unbridled construction on the riverbanks had pushed the indigenous fish to the brink of extinction.

He proposed that "we can prevent further degradation of the river's ecosystem by upgrading public awareness, getting help from NGOs and adopting scientific mechanisms."

An official with the Caspian Sea Aquaculture Cooperative, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said local authorities

in charge of sand exploitation and irrigation affairs were to take the blame for the incident.

The official harshly criticized the poor supervision over exploitation of sand reserves in the area.

Meanwhile, head of Noshahr and Chalous Department of Environment, Mehrnosh Kiakojouri, acknowledged that tapping riverbeds illegally and disposing of garbage in unhygienic ways had put Chalous River in an awkward position.

"This is while the river marks the western boundary of the

Alborz protected zone wherein no destruction should occur," she added.

"Some 6,000 tons of river sand are illegally dug on a daily basis."

Kiakojouri blamed the river's pollution on an increase in the number of people inhabiting the banks, and discharge of industrial and agro waste material into the water, adding 70 percent of the population is living in 6.5 percent of the area which will naturally pollute rivers, underwater reservoirs as well as the Caspian Sea water.

## Catalytic Converters' Timely Replacement Underscored

Vice president of the Department of Environment for human environment, Youssef Hojjat, said the pollution emitted by the newly-manufactured vehicles will multiply by three to four times within two years, unless their catalytic converters are replaced in time.

Hojjat was quoted by ISNA as saying that the durability of catalytic converters, installed on domestically manufactured cars, are guaranteed for 80,000 kilometers or five years, whichever occurs first. The device needs to be replaced after that period. "Otherwise, the catalytic converter will no longer function efficiently in

removing pollution," he noted.

Putting the price of each converter at between 300,000 and 800,000 rials, he said, "We need to have an efficient auto tune-up program, so that catalytic converters will be tested for aging and replaced if necessary."

The DoE would undertake the costs of catalytic converter replacement for taxis and licensed private cars transporting passengers.

To help reduce the cars' emissions, a device called a catalytic converter has been developed, which treats the exhaust before it leaves the car and removes a lot of the pollution.

## Unused Antibiotics Can Cause Bacterial Resistance

Failing to take an antibiotic dosage completely and throwing the pharmaceutical away can negatively affect the environment, head of Gilan Department of Environment, Shabnam Nezami, warned.

He expressed regret over the public unawareness and the widespread un-prescribed antibiotic use in the country, citing studies which suggest antibiotics are highly durable in waterways.

"They are absorbed by the soil and remain in the environment for a long time."

Nazemi told IRNA, "The presence of antibiotics in the wastewater causes the bacteria to learn to overcome the drugs and develop resistance toward them."

Bacteria can transfer the resistance genes to other species of bacteria. As a result, the drug-resistant or virtually untreatable diseases continue to rise.

"All these genetic jumps can deteriorate the quality of harmful bacteria and kill beneficial bacteria," he added, saying the most suitable place for such gene transfer is the sludge, sewerage systems and garbage dumping sites.

He further warned that antibiotics could even disturb the balance of certain good bacteria such as cyanobacteria, and give rise to ecological changes.

## EU Commission Targets States For Noise Pollution

European Union states that have not adopted EU rules aimed at reducing noise in crowded cities will face court action if they fail to act soon, the bloc's executive said, Reuters reported.

The Commission said it was initiating legal action against 11 states which had failed to incorporate the rules into national noise pollution legislation, which should have been done by July 2004.

The states are Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Portugal and Britain.

"The EU's objective is to

substantially reduce the number of people in Europe affected by noise by 2012," Environment Commissioner Stavros Dimas said in a statement.

"To reach this objective, it is crucial that all member states implement the agreed measures."

The rules require states to draw maps that track the level of noise from cars, planes, machinery and other sources in areas inhabited by more than 100,000 people. Busy intersections or traffic networks are also targeted.

Once the maps are established, the states must formulate a plan to make the area quieter.

## Abu Dhabi Will Auction Camels

The emirate of Abu Dhabi is expected to hold a camel auction during the September 12-16 International Hunting and Equestrian exhibition, organizers said, AFP reported.

The event will feature the auction of 135 female Arabian camels, produced by artificial insemination at Abu Dhabi's Suwaihan Camel Reproduction Center.

Camel crossbreeding is a widespread practice in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which has a unique hybrid species from a male camel and a female llama produced at the Dubai Camel Reproduction Center.

Persian Gulf residents are passionate about camel races, a long-standing traditional activity and a popular national sport.

In January 2002, a UAE national paid about \$160,000 for a camel which then held a championship title from the Sultanate of Oman. Seven years earlier, a camel was sold for \$500,000.

During the Abu Dhabi exhibition in September, another auction will be held of between 200 and 300 horses, most of them Arabian purebreds.

William Blake (British painter, engraver, and poet, 1757-1827): To create a little flower is the labor of ages.



The birth of a red poppy in Khalkhal mountains, Ardebil province (Photo by Oshin D. Zakarian)

## Dalan Wetland Needs Revival

Dalan Wetland, one of the largest marshlands located in south Boroujerd, Lorestan province, is in need of careful protection, director of Boroujerd Department of Environment for preservation affairs warned.

Amir Saket told ILNA that Dalan Wetland, once stretched over an area of 913 hectares, has shrunk to 113 hectares due to human intervention and farmers' attempts to clear it for cultivation.

The Boroujerd Department of Environment intends to designate the area as a no-hunting zone to prevent further deterioration of the site and its rich biodiversity, the

official expanded.

"The measure is a step toward designation of Dalan Wetland as protected area," he stressed.

The wetland is home to unique flora and fauna species which should be conserved, Saket reiterated, adding due attention should be paid to the nourishment, security and shelter for the indigenous wildlife.

"The number of birds living in the wetland has declined due to food dearth while excessive hunting has made the zone an insecure habitat for animals, the official warned."

He believes that Dalan Wetland had undergone extreme environmental degradation and the department should endeavor to revive the

marshland for regaining its status as protected zone.

Criticizing Boroujerd Municipality's plans to turn the region into a tourism site, Saket warned that the move would be the last straw for the wetland.

Earlier studies by environmentalists last year suggested the wetland is matchless nationwide due to its rich biodiversity. A plant species going extinct in other parts of Iran, is abundantly found in the wetland—not to mention that it is a highly suitable habitat for migratory birds. The Boroujerd Department of Environment has only 87 hectares of the marshland under its protection.

## Ice Shelf Collapse Reveals Underwater Life

Collapse of a giant ice shelf in Antarctica has revealed a thriving ecosystem half a mile below the



A radarsat image from northeastern Weddell Sea

sea. LiveScience said. Despite near-freezing

and sunless conditions, a community of clams and a thin layer of bacterial mats are flourishing in undersea sedi-

ments.

"Seeing these organ-

isms on the ocean bottom—it's like lifting the carpet off the floor and finding a layer that you never knew was there," said Eugene Domack of Hamilton College.

Domack is the lead author on the report of the finding in the July 19 issue of *Eos*, the weekly newspaper of the American Geophysical Union.

The discovery was accidental. US Antarctic Program scientists were in the northwestern Weddell Sea investigating the sediment record in a deep glacial trough twice the size of Texas. The trough was unveiled in the 2002

Larsen B ice shelf collapse.

Toward the end of the expedition, the crew recorded a video of the sea floor. Later analysis of the video showed the clams and bacteria growing around mud volcanoes.

Since light could not penetrate the ice or water, these organisms do not use photosynthesis to make energy. Instead, these extreme creatures get their energy from methane, Domack said today.

The methane is produced inside the Earth and is distributed to the sea floor by underwater vents.

This type of ecosys-

tem is known as a "cold-seep" or a "cold-vent." The first of its kind was discovered in 1984 near Monterey, California. Since then, similar ecosystems have been discovered in the Gulf of Mexico and in the Sea of Japan.

This recent discovery is the first cold-seep to be described in the Antarctic. The nearly pristine conditions—which have been undisturbed for nearly 10,000 years—will serve as a baseline for researchers probing other parts of the ocean. They better hurry though—debris from the iceberg calving has already begun

to bury some of the area.

Domack hopes to find new species and that this discovery will open the door to future Antarctic expeditions, specifically into Lake Vostok, a freshwater lake that sits two miles below the surface.

Any knowledge gained from studies into Antarctic life could help researchers search for life in other subterranean water locations on Earth. And, experts say, this research could better prepare scientists to examine the hypothesized ocean on Jupiter's moon Europa or on Saturn's moon Titan.