

Caspian Needs Effective Pollution Controls

Experts believe that the release of over one billion cubic meters of industrial, chemical, and household wastewater into the Caspian Sea per annum has polluted the water, and reduced the level of oxygen jeopardizing over 400 aquatic species including sturgeons.

An expert with Gilan Oceanology and Climatology Center, Behzad Layeqi, told IRNA that oil excavation and extraction together with oil tankers traveling in the sea have increased the level of oil pollution in the world's largest lake.

"The water circulation in the Caspian Sea directs contaminations in the water toward Iranian shores, more than other places," he stated.

"An increase in the number of coastal inhabitants is the main source of pollution, because the level of underground water is high and wastewater directly enters the sea."

Head of Iran Sturgeon International Research Institute, Mohammad Pourkazemi, said oil leakage into the sea can endanger the marine food circle and cut the fish reserves.

He added that Iran had taken effective measures in recent years to reduce Caspian pollution, insist-



Iranian provinces located on Caspian shores are responsible for 6 percent of the total pollution.

ing that the northern littoral states take most of the blame for the pollution.

Pourkazemi is of the opinion that preventing pollutants from entering the sea requires public efforts and collective collaboration of littoral states.

Director of Bandar Anzali Department of Environment, Ataollah Taqvaei, also stated that every day tons of industrial and household sewage enter the Anzali Wetland via local rivers and flow toward the Caspian.

Citing the Caspian Sea's

importance in terms of attracting tourists, providing rich protein sources, drawing local and migratory birds as well as providing a natural habitat for marine reproduction, he demanded that provincial authorities establish wastewater treatment plants in nearby cities as soon as possible.

"Caspian pollution will endanger the health of aquatic creatures, inhabitants of coastal cities, tourists and swimmers," he noted.

Meanwhile, Bandar Anzali Governor, Seyyed Ali Aqazadeh, stated that a compost factory was being constructed in the port city which would help partially alleviate the

problem. According to Gilan's Governor General, Masoud Soltanifar, studies show that around 80 percent of pollution in the Caspian Sea is caused by Russian industrial cities through the Volga River. Also Baku with its two-million-strong population pours a large part of its pollution into the sea.

He regretted about lack of effective pollution monitoring systems in the Caspian Sea and media's indifference to the issue.

"According to international studies, Iranian provinces located on Caspian shores are responsible for only 6 percent of the total pollution," he mentioned.

Concerns About Miankaleh Ecosystem

State Inspectorate Organization warned against efforts to exclude Miankaleh wildlife sanctuary from the list of protected areas and convert it into a development site, ISNA quoted deputy head of the organization for agriculture and production inspections, Mahdavi Rad, as saying.

Miankaleh wildlife sanctuary and wetland, in the northern province of Mazandaran, is an environmentally unparalleled area which has also been registered in the list of international wetlands. It is counted as one of the world's top nine biospheres.

Mahdavi Rad explained that the private company, World Tourist Areas Organization, which enjoys the support of a number of political and economic figures, has intruded the region, planning constructions that will jeopardize regional ecosystem.

Referring to the organization's comprehensive report about Miankaleh, he pointed out, "Documents signifying the company's ownership of the lands have been issued without even the permission of the Department of Environment, which is rather questionable."

The DoE disagrees with any activities that would change or endanger local ecosystem, he said, slamm-

ing DoE's hesitation in purchasing the areas under question over the



Miankaleh peninsula and wetland is being monitored by UNESCO, the 1971 Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea.

past decade. Underlying the status and value of Miankaleh sanctuary, he proposed that the refuge be upgraded to a national park by the High Council for Environment.

Commenting on the same, deputy head of DoE for natural environment and biodiversity, Hadi Soleimanzadeh, told ISNA that Miankaleh peninsula and wetland, extended over an area of 68,700 hectares, is being moni-

Managed by Tehran Air Quality Control Company stated that noise pollution reportedly exceeded the authorized levels in 542 locations in Tehran's districts six, seven, nine, 11 and 12, adding such circumstances should set off alarm bells for the capital city, ISNA reported.

Yousef Rashidi mentioned that 417 of the locations were educational and 125 others were medical centers.

Describing the measures taken to ward off the malady, he added that the company had conducted projects in several Tehran districts with the help of municipalities, aimed at determining the level of noise

pollution and proposing ways to control it.

ing on construction projects. The noiseless



Tehran Municipality is preparing noise maps for every district.

He blamed the cars and motorcycles for a lot of noise they produce, stating industrial cities like Tehran and other metropolises experienced the highest level of sound pollution.

Putting Tehran top on the list of cities plagued with noise pollution, he went further to say that the city might as well be listed high on the global list of cities with sound pollution, due to its often congested streets, dilapidated vehicles, and the automakers' failure to observe standards.

He mentioned the most polluted areas in Tehran as the jam-packed downtown streets, the densely-populated districts in south of the city, regions located in the vicinity of railroads or the airport, and finally areas alongside highways.

Rashidi continued, "The common procedure worldwide is that the noise map of a region is plotted before embark-

spots are allocated to hospitals, educational centers and residential areas, while the industrial sites, commercial buildings and factories are constructed far from residential areas.

"Also airlines which violate the noise standards face cash penalties. Some flights are banned at night, rubberized road asphalt is used to reduce tire noise; sound barriers are installed between residential areas and highways; and finally car manufacturers are obliged to observe noise standards."

Stating that Tehran Municipality was preparing noise maps for every district, he said the maps for districts six, seven, nine, 11 and 12 were ready, the maps for districts 10 and 17 were being plotted and the one for Mehrabad Airport was already complete.

Singapore Seizes Python Skin Cargo

Singapore immigration officers on the border with Malaysia seized a half-ton consignment of python skins hidden among audio speaker parts,

authorities in the city-state said, Reuters reported.

Officers identified the skins after putting the lorry through a scanning system at Woodlands in northern Singapore, the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority said in a statement.

The 36-year-old Malaysian driver was arrested and faces a fine and up to one year in jail.

Under Singapore's Endangered Species Act, the export and import of python skins must be accompanied by permits.

The Singapore authority did not put a market value to the python skins seized, but local newspaper the Straits Times said the skins were worth about \$545,000 (\$27,110).

The paper said local authorities had in October intercepted a shipment of 40,000 python and monitor lizard skins worth \$880,000 from Indonesia.

Kahlil Gibran (Lebanese-born American poet, 1883-1931):

And forget not that the earth delights to feel your bare feet and the winds long to play with your hair.



A farmer strokes a purebred Turkman horse in Jargalan, Bojnourd, northeast of Iran. (Photo by IRNA)

DoE: Protect Shark Species

An advisor with the Department of Environment's Office for Marine Environment said the Fisheries Organization should take swift action to protect the sharks, pointing to a recent increase in shark fishing.

Mohammad Fatemi told IRNA, "The organization has not prohibited catching of shark whose meat has also been announced as halal. These parameters have induced a sizeable rise in the exploitation of shark reserves."

He said that although shark is not considered as endangered, there has been a drastic decline in the number of several species.



Shark hunting in the Persian Gulf is the major threat to the species.

Fatemi blamed shark hunting in the Persian Gulf as the major threat to the species.

"Some fishers sell shark meat as sturgeon to naive customers," he mentioned.

The official stated that sharks fall into two categories, those which live

near the seabed and those which live in the surface of water.

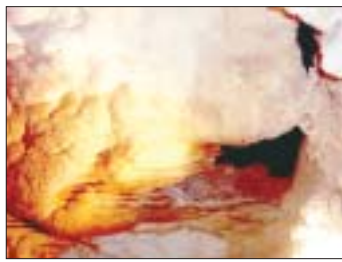
"Shark is at the top of the marine food pyramid. Fortunately, a decline in its population will not jeopardize other fishes," he explained.

A rare geological site located in the city of Delijan was registered at the Markazi province's first national heritage.

According to the Persian daily Iran, an expert with the provincial Department of Environment said that the cave, called Chal Nakhjir by locals, is known for its exceptional white dolomite sediments, covering the floors and major corridors of the cave.

Ansari added that the floor and the walls are bristled with crystallized minerals. Coupled with picturesque pools and pathways, these features turn the cave into one of the most exotic caverns in the Middle East. It is also a rich reserve of decorative stones.

Ansari explained that "If you proceed 140 meters into the cave, there



Interior part of Chal Nakhjir cave in Delijan, Markazi province

lies a beautiful lake within a depth of 70 meters from the entrance.

Meanwhile, general director of Markazi Department of Environment pointed to unique properties of Chal Nakhjir, adding the cave could serve as an exceptional site for tourists. Mohammad-Baqer Sadouq reiterated

Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea.

Soleimanzadeh added that the Department of Environment is strictly against any attempts to convert the protected sanctuary, and will not tolerate any violation of the Environment Restoration Law.

Chal Nakhjir Cave Registered

ed the cave's registration as natural heritage, insisting that any development projects within a radius of 140 meters from the cave should be sanctioned by the Department of Environment.

He went on to say, "So far, a total 165,900 hectares of provincial territory have been brought under DoE supervision, in the form of protected area and wildlife refuge."

The protected areas of Hafad Qolleh and Alvand, and the wildlife refuges of Jaz, Rasvand and Mouth cover about 6.5 percent of provincial area, he detailed.

Sadouq predicted that the protected areas would grow to cover 6.7 percent of the provincial terrain, once the Bazarjan and Palangab no-hunting zones would be added to the list.