

Foreign Tourists Receive E-Visas

SHAHR-E KORD, Chaharmahal-Bakhtiari, Oct. 31--A senior tourism industry official here Tuesday announced that with the issuance of the electronic visas, all tourists can receive their visas via the Internet.

Mohammad Sharif Malekzadeh, deputy head of Iran Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization (ICHHTO) for tourism affairs said that applicants would have no difficulties regarding the issuance and receipt of the electronic tourist visas, disclosing that under a recent presidential decree, the foreign elites and tourists

are authorized to visit nuclear power plants in Iran and that numerous tourist groups have referred to the international travel agencies to express their willingness to visit the high-profile nuclear facilities of the country.

"A group of British tourists are in talks on this with the private sector," he said, adding that the tourism sector has witnessed a significant growth in the number of visitors in August-October compared to the figure for the corresponding period the previous year.

"For the first time in Iran's history, the ICHHTO has managed to set up enti-

ties, known as entrance tours committees," he said adding that the organization would grant some exports incentives of \$10 for each Central Asian and \$20 for each European and American tourists visiting Iran to the relevant agencies.

He further said that the organization has established joint tourism firms with Indonesia, Malaysia, Turkey and Saudi Arabia as part of efforts to ensure the key sector's prosperity. The first Iranian tourism information center abroad will become operational in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in December, he added.

"The ICHHTO and the

Islamic Republic of Iran Air Force are to sign a memorandum of understanding, under which the overseas branches of Iran Air would disseminate information about the Iran's tourism attractions," he said.

Referring to the long-awaited Low-Cost Tourism Scheme, Malekzadeh recalled that the said scheme was launched on Eid-al Fitr (October 24), adding that the provincial departments have identified more than 205 fresh tourism routes to pave the way for the materialization of the objectives of the aforementioned scheme.

Mesri Promises Higher Pensions

TEHRAN, Oct. 31--The newly-appointed Minister of Welfare and Social Affairs Abdorreza Mesri has vowed to increase the pension allowances by maximum \$65 per month, if the required funds for the ambitious move are provided.

Mesri, a former law-

maker, told the Persian daily Iran a day after securing a parliamentary vote of confidence that the retired population would hopefully see the outcome of cooperation between the parliament and the government in this respect before March 2007.

He said the

Ahmadinejad administration has worked hard over the past 12 months to reduce the problems facing the retired and other pensioners, stressing that financial requirements of the project are expected to be supplied from the supplementary budget bill or the \$5.3-billion gasoline subsidies.

He said many Iranian families are worried about their future due to poor insurance coverage, stressing that social security services will have to be distributed among people equally.

The minister said some 10 million Iranian nationals do not enjoy health insurance coverage.

Statoil Interested In Long-Term Cooperation

TEHRAN, Oct. 31--Statoil ASA, Norway's largest oil producer, announced Tuesday that the company is willing to establish long-term cooperation with Iran, stressing that it would welcome any new business opportunity in the hydrocarbon-rich country's lucrative energy sector.

Olave Hieger, the company's Iran country director, told Fars that Statoil is involved in only one project in Iran at present, adding that it is willing to participate in Iran's gas industry activities as well as recovery enhancement and new exploration projects.

He said the company currently acts as an offshore operator in the project to develop phases VI, VII and VIII of the world's largest gas field South Pars in partnership with PetroPars of Iran.

The official said three metal jackets have been

installed and all the ordered wells have been drilled in the project, adding that two of the three required pipelines have also been constructed while the third one is being built.

Hieger said the project will become operational in the first half of 2007, when its first offshore gas consignment is expected to be shipped to onshore facilities.

He said the company is also cooperating with the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines (IRISL) in holding marine safety training courses in Iran.

Asked whether the European company will continue its activities in Iran in the face of likely sanctions against the country, Hieger said since the nature of the sanctions and their possible consequences are not yet clear, it would be too early to comment on Statoil's reaction.

Future Bank to Invest In Iran's Capital Market

TEHRAN, Oct. 31--Future Bank, an equal joint venture between Bahrain's Ahli United Bank BSC, Bank Melli Iran (BMI) and Bank Saderat Iran (BSI), is reportedly planning to invest in Iran's capital market.

Fereydoon Abqari, who heads the bank's representative office in Iran, told Moj news agency that the bank has asked Iranian authorities to issue the necessary permit and provide state guarantees for a 100-million-euro fund the bank intends to establish for this purpose.

"Such a permit will help Bahraini investors to use the fund to trade shares in Iran's stock market," he said, adding that the activities of foreign investors in Iran's capital market will help

strengthen the market.

"With the arrival of foreign investments, the (capital) market should await higher prices and, consequently, indices," he said.

Future Bank officially began operations in Bahrain on February 1 with an initial paid up capital of \$99 million.

Iran announced in January that the capital market does not depend on foreign investments for its survival, stressing that the market will grow significantly once the Capital Market Law is implemented properly.

Ali Salehabadi, Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE) chief, said that it is not true that foreign investors' growing confidence in Iran's stock market will save it against possible challenges.

Workers Protest Plans Facilitating Expulsions

TEHRAN, Oct. 31--A number of workers and members of workers' associations gathered in front of the parliament for the third consecutive day on Tuesday to protest against a recent decision by Majlis Industries and Mines Commission to amend the Labor Law in favor of the employers.

According to Fars, the workers have stepped up their protests since Sunday. Some 100 workers participated in the protest demonstrations chanting slogans against the minister of labor and social affairs and the parliamentary commission.

The protesters said that the parliamentary plan to facilitate the expulsion of workers should not be allowed to become a law.

It is not yet clear whether the government and the parliament are really looking after such a measure which, if enforced, could further jeopardize the already fragile job security in Iran.

In reaction to the workers' protests, a senior lawmaker accused the protesters of being instigated by political currents.

Hamid Reza Katouzian, vice chairman of Majlis Industries and Mines Commission, told Fars that the commission is only trying to remove obstacles in the way of production and investments.

Many employers contend that the current Labor Law, which has made it very difficult for them to expel workers without convincing reasons, as a major hurdle hindering their business activities.

This is while Minister of Labor and Social Affairs Mohammad Jahromi said earlier that the proposed amendments to the Labor Law should take account of greater job security for contractual workers, adding that the modified version of the law must help boost employment.

The minister further said the government has to create three million jobs given the growing imbalances between supply and demand in the job market in recent years.

Tehran Yearning to Stretch Limits Traffic Congestion Persists

TEHRAN, Oct. 31--Tehran Mayor Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf here Tuesday approved the plan to expand Tehran city limits, adding once relevant officials give the go-ahead to the scheme, the boundaries of the Iranian metropolis would stretch, Fars reported.

Qalibaf, who was speaking on the

given its heavy costs, the new measure has failed to ease traffic congestion, noting that transient and temporary decisions are ineffective in resolving traffic congestions.

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sidelines of a ceremony to inaugurate an interchange joining Tehran-Karaj and Azadegan highways, said that Tehran Islamic City Council has begun expert studies in this respect in cooperation with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, noting that the said reform would bring about some changes in the municipal districts of Tehran.

The scheme has been finalized in the Municipality and Tehran City Council and is now awaiting the approval of the Interior Ministry, he said.

Referring to the recent changes in the working hours of banks, he argued that

inate traffic jams forever, he said.

The mayor further noted that weekly 6-7 gyms are inaugurated in the capital, announcing that some 90 gyms would become operational by January.

He disclosed that 15 cinemas, theatres and amphitheatres would come into operation by March 2008, adding that 5-6 vast parks would also be inaugurated in the same period.

"Tehran Municipality has also planned to attract investments for implementing some giant projects at regional levels in the capital," he said, hoping that the Tehran residents would feel the ever-growing development of the city.

Russian MP Proposes Gas Alliance

MOSCOW, Oct. 31--A senior Russian parliamentarian has called for a gas alliance to unite former Soviet republics and Iran to help Russia stand up to the European Union's 'cartel' of gas consumers, AFP quoted Russian media as reporting.

"It is necessary to form a gas alliance, which could be joined by Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Russia, Ukraine and Belarus," the head of the Russian parliament's energy committee Valery Yazev said Monday, RIA-Novosti reported.

"Tomorrow, with the removal of the problem of Iran's nuclear program, I would also see Iran in this alliance," said Yazev, speaking at a meeting of the Russian Gas Union industry group, which he also heads.

He said that the alliance would form a counterweight to the European Union, which he suggested is taking advantage of its position as a vital source of income for Russian gas export monopoly Gazprom.

"In the EU we have a very clearly formed cartel of customers of Russian gas, which is imposing on us the ratification of the Energy Charter, which does

not meet Russian interests," he said.

The EU, which imports around a quarter of its natural gas from Russia, has been seeking to persuade Moscow to ratify an international energy charter that regulates transit and investment in the energy sector and would allow for market competition between foreign and independent companies.

Russia has declined to ratify the charter because the Kremlin wants to protect Gazprom's monopoly and has sought recently to exclude foreign investors from its strategic energy sector.

Gazprom, which is moving aggressively to gain greater access to Europe's downstream energy retail market, has complained of unfair treatment from wary European regulators.

Yazev said the alliance would consist of non-governmental organizations like his Russian Gas Union, which would coordinate export policies and act as a counterweight to the energy alliance being formed by France and Germany, the Kommersant business daily reported.

He said the original idea for the alliance came from Russian President Vladimir Putin.



Islamic Republic of Iran
Ministry of Energy
Fars Regional Water Authority
International Competitive Bidding

First invitation to tender for the construction of Chameshir Dam and power plant

Fars Regional Water Authority is inviting qualified contractors to participate in the tender for designing and construction of Chameshir storage dam and power plant, by means of foreign finance based on EPC procedure.

Tender specifications:

- Design and construction of Chameshir storage dam and relevant facilities with approximate 1,800 MCM volume.
- Design and construction of water transmission tunnel with approximate length of 5.5 km.
- Design and construction of power plant and the relevant facilities of approximate capacity of 75 MW.

Design and construction period: 5 years
Location: Dam is situated on Zohreh River about 35 km south of Dogonbadan city in Kohkilyeh & Boyer Ahmad province.
Consultant: Tehran Sahab Consulting Engineers.

General description of services:

- Engineering study of the second phase of the project (detail design) based on the results of feasibility study of the phase one provided by the project consultant.
- Planning for project execution & construction in parallel with the second phase engineering study and detail design.
- Capability to finance 85% of the project costs including the design and construction of dam, power plant and relevant facilities.

Required qualification of participants:

Participants must possess the highest level of recognition in design and construction of dam and hydraulic structures or an official equivalent combination of grade A water works contractors

along with grade A consulting engineers in the field of water resources development and dam engineering certified by Management and Planning Organization of Iran.

Date and place of receiving assessment documents:

Qualified candidates must refer to procure assessment documents within 28 days from the date of second announcement and must be purchased at the cost of 200,000 rials from: Tehran Sahab Consulting Engineers at : No. 26 Shirin Ave., Ostad Nejatollahi St., Tehran - Iran.

The completed assessment documents with any other related materials must be submitted to Tehran Sahab Consulting Engineers within 30 days from the permissible deadline of purchasing documents.

Other prerequisites:

Participants are obliged to observe the following:

- Compliance with Iranian laws and regulations for the maximum use of Iranian technical and engineering skills, industrial abilities and project execution and management in accordance with the law 799-F issued on April 5, 1997 by MPO, and relevant standards.
- Compliance with government laws and limitations for the protection of environmental aspects in the area under the influence of the project.
- The client is responsible for the required project land acquisition.
- Required electricity and access roads to the site are presently available.
- The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Finance of the Islamic Republic of Iran will guarantee the reimbursement of both principal and interests of provided finance upon successful completion of the project.
- The invitation expenses are to be charged on the selected participant(s)