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IRAN DAILY

Number 3635 • Tuesday March 9, 2010 • Esfand 18, 1388 • Rabi Al-Awwal 22, 1431 • Price 2,000 Rials • 12 Pages

Tehran to Host Nuclear Disarmament Confab

>> Mugabe Envoy

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad Monday said Iran has always denounced pressures exerted by the bullying powers and it will stand by Zimbabwe to the best of its ability. See Page 2

Extradition Call



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Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani said Monday diplomatic efforts are underway for extradition of the leader of Free Life in Kurdistan Party (PJAK), Abdolrahman Haji Ahmadi.

Uncertain Future



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There could not be a better warning of the risks of getting involved with Italy's national phone company: in late February, Telecom Italia said an investigation into alleged large-scale...

Supporting Invasion



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Britain's decision to back the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 earned it "respect" among states in the Middle East and it must not be scared of similar "engagement" in the future...

RIFF Judge



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Iranian filmmaker Ramtin Lavafipour has been invited to serve on the jury of the 2010 Roma Independent Film Festival (RIFF).



Iran at ITB 06

57 Killed in Turkey Quake

A strong earthquake with a preliminary magnitude of 6 on the Richter scale struck eastern Turkey on Monday, killing 57 people as it knocked down stone or mud-brick houses and minarets in at least six villages, the government said.

The government's crisis center said about 100 other people were injured in the quake, which hit at 4:32 am (0232 GMT, 9 pm EST Sunday) in Elazig province, about 340 miles (550 km) east of Ankara, the capital, AP reported.

The earthquake, which caught many people as they slept, was centered near the village of Basyurt and followed by more than 30 aftershocks, the strongest measuring 5.5 and 5.1, the Kandilli seismology center announced.

"The worst-hit area was the village of Okular, where some 17 people were killed and homes crumbled into piles of dirt. Another 13 people were killed in the village of Yukari Demirci," Governor Muammer Erol said.

"By noon, everyone had been removed from the rubble and there

was no one left buried inside the debris," Erol added.

"Everything has been knocked down, there is not a stone in place," said Yadin Apaydin, administrator for the village of Yukari Kanatli, where he said at least three villagers died.

Authorities blocked access to Okular so ambulances and rescue teams could maneuver on the village's narrow roads. Relatives rushed to the village for news of their loved ones.

"The village is totally flattened," village administrator Hasan Demirdag told private NTV television.

Prime Minister Recep Erdogan and Kandilli Observatory's director, Mustafa Erdik, urged residents not to enter any damaged homes, warning that they could topple from aftershocks that Erdik said could last for days.

Turkey's Red Crescent organization sent tents and blankets to the region.

Erdogan said ambulance helicopters, prefabricated homes and mobile kitchens were also being sent.

Amendments to Help Working Women

Women's Social and Cultural Council has sent Labor Law amendments to Majlis, which reduce the working hours of women and ban their employment in night shifts. 07

Iranian Makes Trucks More Green, Profitable

If you have ever stood by a highway and felt the blast wave of a large truck passing by, that experience may become a thing of the past, or at least... 08

Perspective

Hoping the Best for Iraq

By Mahmoud Mohammadzadeh

Iraq's parliamentary elections at the weekend have been billed by many as an important litmus test of democracy after brutal Baathist regime became history in 2003.

Pundits and politicians in the region and beyond say the impressive exercise suggests that three developments took place on March 7: healthy polls with the least violence, huge participation of voters despite crude threats by terrorist, and finally victory for Nuri Al-Maliki and his platform.

This election was different from those held in the past seven years since the invasion and occupation of the Arab country in the sense that all political groups, including those with sectarian tendencies, came out to vote.

Al-Sabah newspaper reported that 90 percent of eligible voters in Diyala province, where both Shiites and Sunnis live, cast ballots. It also said turnout in the Sunni-dominated provinces of Al-Anbar, Nin-

evah and Salahuddin was 64, 65 and 62 percent, respectively. This is while voters in the same three regions had boycotted the last parliamentary polls.

The Maliki can now fairly say Sunday's vote was the most dynamic political rivalry ever among the country's diverse and divided players.

Even if the coalition of Shiites is not the top victor, the extensive participation of political groups is indeed a positive and sign for all those who wish and work so that armed conflict among those vying for power would transform into political competition.

There were explosions in Baghdad and holy cities like Najaf on Sunday. The attacks were seen by many as being among the last and futile attempts by seditious quarters trying to fan sectarian tensions and block the democratic process.

Amid all this, the schemes of those opposed to calm and democracy and wanting to create chaos problems for the ballot failed to materialize. The intention was to turn the electoral rivalry into a sectarian confrontation between Shiites and Sunnis, making Shiite-dominated regions unsafe to curb voter turnout and target key areas of Baghdad to convey that the Maliki government is weak and out of step. 02

Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki Monday said a conference on nuclear disarmament will be held in Tehran next month.

"With the presence of several countries we hope that the issue of nuclear disarmament is institutionalized worldwide," he told the 17th international conference on Central Asia and the Caucasus in Tehran. He did not give a date.

For the past four decades Iran has been calling for a Middle East without nuclear weapons, Mehr News Agency quoted him as saying.

Nuclear powers have been in talks for curbing the banned weapons in an effective manner, he said.

"But the negotiations have been intermittent and a systematic plan is needed to get rid of nuclear weapons at the universal level."

Iran has actively participated in meetings of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) treaty, which outlaws chemical weapons.

"The year 2012 being declared as the final year for destroying all chemical weapons was at the outset unbelievable for many countries. Today the subject is on the agenda (of CWC) and we hope that in the near future chemical weapons will be removed from the face of the Earth," he told the conference.

Mottaki referred to the arrest of Jundallah ringleader Abdolmalek Rigi last month.

>Hidden Agendas

"Over 400 people have been killed and wounded because of that group's terrorist acts... We see hidden hands that nurture terrorists under the guise of fighting terrorism. This is something Iran had warned about in the past," he said. 02

Israel OKs New Settlement In West Bank

Israel has authorized the construction of 112 new apartments in the West Bank despite a pledge to slow down settlement building, the government disclosed Monday -- enraging the Palestinians just a day after they reluctantly agreed to resume peace talks.

Word of the new construction in the Beit Ar Illit settlement and their possible complication of the talks came amid a flurry of activity by the US to try to salvage peace-making.

Vice President Joseph Biden arrived in Israel on Monday, marking the highest-level visit to Israel and the Palestinian territories by a US President Barack Obama administration official, AFP reported.

Washington's special envoy to the Middle East, George Mitchell, was also in the area, meeting Monday with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat accused Israel of trying to undermine the talks even before they began. "If the Israeli government wants to sabotage Mitchell's efforts by taking such steps, let's talk to Mitchell about maybe not doing this (in direct talks) if the price is so high," Erekat said.

The Palestinians presented the US envoy with a document outlining their desired peace agreement -- a Palestinian state in Gaza and the West Bank, with minor border adjustments. At his meeting with Mitchell, Abbas also raised the issue of the new construction, Erekat said, saying it "put a big question mark on what it is that we came to do."

Netanyahu sounded upbeat after his meeting with the US envoy Monday. "I believe we will succeed in advancing the diplomatic process," the Israeli premier said. 02

