

Lari: GC Cannot Disqualify Eminent Personalities

TEHRAN, Feb. 22--Guardians Council cannot disqualify eminent personalities, the interior minister told ISNA on Tuesday.

Commenting on the presidential election slated for June 17, Abdovalah Mousavi Lari added that the presidential election is different from parliamentary elections.

"Executive boards are in charge of vetting Majlis candidates and Guardians Council will act as supervisor in the second round. However, in the presidential election, the Guardians Council should directly take charge of the vetting procedure," he said.

He stressed that the disqualification of reformist MPs during the last Majlis elections during the vetting procedure will not be repeated.

Lari denied that the Al-Qaeda leader, Osama bin Laden, has been arrested.

Solana Calls For Coordinated EU-US Action German MEP Urges American Incentives

BERLIN, Feb. 22--Only coordinated cooperation between the European Union and the US can lead to a lasting political and nuclear accord with Iran, EU High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana wrote in an article for Tuesday's edition of the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung newspaper.



Javier Solana

"Only coordinated action between the US and EU offers the best chances to further consolidate the progress which we have already achieved with Iran, and lead it to a real success," he said.

He further said the current EU-Iran talks are aimed at "seeking objective guarantees for the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program."

Underscoring its hard-line anti-Iran stance, America refuses to support Europe's diplomatic efforts to seal a long-term political and nuclear accord with the Islamic Republic.

In an interview with the French Television Network LCI on Monday, Solana called on the US to adopt a more transparent policy in support of EU's nuclear talks with Iran.

"We should strive to push the diplomacy marked by the European countries vis-à-vis Iran," he said.

of the US would be welcome," a senior EU diplomat told journalists in Brussels.

He suggested that the US should adopt a policy toward Iran which was similar to the line taken toward North Korea.

"We will also make another point. We think that negotiations for a possible WTO entrance of Iran would help. It would help because those kind of negotiations would help to open up, to be transparent."

Meanwhile, a leading European Parliament lawmaker of the German Green Party, Angelika Beer, called on the United States to "actively support" Europe's diplomatic Iran initiative by providing Tehran with "positive incentives"--giving sanctions and giving security guarantees to the Islamic Republic.

"If Bush really has an interest in a peaceful development of the Near and Middle East, he should actively support the European Union negotiations," Beer said Tuesday in an interview with the online daily Zeitzeitung. "Don't threaten with a military strike; reason with positive incentives. That's the only possibility to commit Iran to a peaceful use of atomic energy," she added.

No Nuke Work at Natanz

Iran Offering Guarantees

WASHINGTON, Feb. 22--A team from the International Atomic Energy Agency conducted a routine inspection of Natanz this month and said it found no evidence of Iran's weapons program.

"Natanz is a frozen facility," said Mark Gwozdecky, an IAEA spokesman in Vienna. "The inspectors' job is to ensure that the suspension is in force."

The United States and other Western governments are not so sure about the Natanz facility, about 160 miles south of Tehran, USA TODAY.com reported.

One reason is that Iran has refused to give IAEA inspectors visas that would allow them to visit more frequently to check the facility. Delays in providing visas to IAEA inspectors have raised suspicions.

Western officials worry Iran could continue to perfect its centrifuge technology even under the eye of the inspectors.

"Even with intrusive IAEA inspections at Natanz, there is a serious risk that Iran could use its enrichment technology in covert activities," George Tenet, then-CIA director, told Congress in March.

Iran failed last year to get European agreement to continue work on a project for 20 centrifuges at Natanz. In addition,

IAEA officials say Iran recently upgraded 164 centrifuges at Natanz and described the operation as routine maintenance, according to the Associated Press.

Hossein Mousavian, a top negotiator with the Europeans on the nuclear issue, says Iran "already has achieved the capability and know-how for all enrichment processes".

It needs enrichment capability to ensure it can supply fuel for a power reactor nearing completion at Bushehr and 20 others it would like to construct, he says.

After the Islamic Revolution in 1979, Germany halted work on the Bushehr reactor, despite the fact Iran had paid billions for it.

As a result, "we have to diversify (uranium) sources," Mousavian says. "We have had a very bad experience with Europe... No one can guarantee this would not happen again."

Mousavian says Iran will guarantee it is not making weapons.

"It is willing to remain a member of the non-proliferation treaty and give the IAEA access to all nuclear sites," he says.

In return, Iran wants an end to its isolation by Europe and full engagement in political, security, economic and technological fields.

"If we had 100 billion euros in European invest-



Mark Gwozdecky

ment in Iran, and if we had Iranian investment in Europe, Iran would never even think of diverting the nuclear enrichment because the damage would be huge for Iran," he says.

The Bush administration has supported the European efforts but refuses to participate directly.

Philip Gordon, an expert on Europe at the Brookings Institution in Washington, describes the US policy as one of "malevolent neglect".

By not joining the talks, he says, the administration can say "I told you so" if they fail. The Europeans, he says, will say "the reason they failed is because the United States did not join us".

Geoffrey Kemp, an Iran specialist at the Nixon Center, a foreign policy think tank, says US ambivalence will be exploited by the Iranians. "Without a combined approach with the Europeans, the Iranians will drive a truck between the two sides and come out a winner," he said.

Kemp says the United States should clarify what it is prepared to give Iran in return for indefinite suspension of Iran's enrichment program.

Possible carrots for Iran from the United States: help joining the World Trade Organization; the sale of spare parts for Iran's decrepit fleet of Boeing airliners; and the unfreezing of Iranian assets held in the US.

"Persian Gulf" Misuse Pursued

TEHRAN, Feb. 22--A top official wants the Intelligence Ministry to identify those who will probably use the fake title 'Gulf' in their correspondence, Fars News Agency reported.

Secretary of Supreme Security Council Hassan Rohani, in a letter Tuesday to First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref, urged him to follow up on the issue.

He noted that since several commercial and tourism units do not use the full form of 'Persian Gulf' in their correspondence, the Intelligence Ministry should take up the matter. It added that Kish and Qeshm free trade zone organizations should change names of streets and other places from 'Gulf' to 'Persian Gulf'.

Rohani also asked Culture and Islamic Guidance Ministry to instruct newspapers, magazines and publishers to avoid using 'Gulf' in their articles and advertisements.

"Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organization should prevent activities of travel agencies that operate under the name of 'Gulf' in the country," he said.

Regional, Int'l Issues Discussed With Tunisia

TEHRAN, Feb. 22--Visiting Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council Hassan Rohani met with Tunisian officials on Tuesday in which the two sides discussed regional and international issues.

In a meeting with Tunisian Minister of National Defense Hedi Mhenni and Minister of State at the Foreign Ministry Hatim bin Salih in Tunis, the two countries' officials expressed their readiness to enhance Iran-Tunisia political, economic, cultural, academic and defense cooperation, IRNA reported.

The officials also held talks on restructuring the United Nations' charter, increasing the permanent members of the UN Security Council and establishing a rotating membership for countries from the Asian and African continents.

Rohani elaborated on Iran's nuclear policy, saying European capabilities in resolving international issues are being tested through Iran's nuclear talks. He termed uranium enrichment as the main challenge and said international laws have permitted member-states of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty (NPT) to make use of fuel cycle.

"Abandoning the right to have fuel cycle means to give up the legal and legitimate rights of NPT member-states," Rohani said.

He added that terrorism was also among the main challenges of the international security.

Pointing to the US role in the creation of Al-Qaeda's terrorist group, Rohani said the activities of Al-Qaeda were the main US pretext for meddling in Muslim affairs worldwide.

The Tunisian defense minister, for his part, pointed to the Iranian civilization and its effects on world's progress, expressing his country's readiness to bolster all-out ties with Iran.

He termed the Palestinian issue as the most important problem facing the Muslim world, calling for restoration of the rights of the Palestinian nation and settling the issue based on justice.

Rohani currently is in Tunisia and expected to visit Germany and France.

Mosque Fire Accidental

TEHRAN, Feb. 22--Judiciary Spokesman Jamal Karimi-Rad said no complaint has to date been filed by families of victims or any individual affected by the massive fire that gutted the Arg Mosque in downtown Tehran, killing tens and injuring hundreds of worshippers.

"No complaint has been lodged with the judicial body and Judiciary Chief Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi is insisting that the case be followed with utmost care and sensitivity, and all pre-

cautionary actions be taken to prevent the recurrence of such incidents." ISNA quoted Karimi-Rad as saying on Tuesday during his weekly news conference.

Asked about reports of tampering with evidence at the scene of the fire before the experts arrived, the spokesman said first-hand observations showed a faulty electrical heater had caused the blaze and there was no reason for any misrepresentation.

He said the reason the place was cleaned up immediately after the fire was to help resume mourning ceremonies marking the martyrdom of Imam Hossein (AS), the third imam of Prophet Muhammad's (AS) infallible household.

Karimi-Rad then advised reporters against adding fuel to political and judicial debates regarding certain cases and said he was also critical of the way some sections of the press had covered the judicial procedure and outcome of certain anti-corruption cases.

Persian Press Watch

Anti-Syria

ABRAR: It seems that the US is still pursuing its 'dual containment' diplomacy in the Middle East. This diplomacy dates back to the early 1990s. In fact, America continues to use the Middle East developments for its brand of interests. For example, assassination of former Lebanese prime minister, Rafik Hariri, is being used as a tool against Syria in order to force it to withdraw its 15,000 troops from Lebanon. Moreover, Washington is trying to prevent that it was not involved in Hariri's assassination. In the meantime, the US request for sending an international team to probe Hariri's murder is noteworthy. It also seems that the US is using UN as a tool to achieve its anti-Syrian objectives.

US Approach

KAYHAN: The US has explicitly said that it is presently using unmanned planes to monitor Iran's nuclear activities. American statesmen are pretending that they are seriously considering attacking Iran's nuclear installations. All in all, dispatch of unmanned spy planes and special commandos into Iran all indicate that America has launched a psychological warfare against Iran. But, whether pressuring Iran to quit its nuclear activities will work or not is something that will become evident in the course of time. President George W. Bush in his speech at the European Parliament acknowledged that Iran is not Iraq and that the US cannot adopt a policy vis-à-vis Iran similar to is Iraq policy.

Planning

HAMBASTEGI: All Iranians were saddened by the death of more than 70 worshippers at Arg Mosque last week, because no one likes to see his/her compatriots killed due to negligence of officials. It has become a norm in the country that whenever a tragic incident happens the officials express regret and it is only then that they say that they will try to prevent similar incidents in the future. For instance, only when a large number of rough sleepers died due to the sudden reduction in temperature, the officials felt the challenge. The bottom line is that tragic incidents can be avoided through proper planning schemes.

Contradiction

AFTAB-E YAZD: While the next presidential election, slated for June 17, is approaching, different political groups seem to be active but the people do not seem to display any enthusiasm towards the momentous undertaking. In other words, it seems that although the number of presidential candidates is increasing by the day, the people seem to be indifferent towards the election. An important point is that the number of conservative candidates has increased to 11 from the previous level of five. This in a way shows that the fundamentalists are not still willing to choose one single candidate for the important event. At any rate, this kind of approach contradicts the typical mottoes of fundamentalists.

Perspective

Mideast Pressures

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Anti-Syrian sentiments built up in Lebanon when Hariri's family went so far as to say that Lahoud, Interior Minister Suleiman Franjeh and Prime Minister Omar Karami, all three close to Syria, will not be welcome at Hariri's funeral.

After Hariri's assassination, the US also increased pressure on Beirut. A few hours after the murder, Washington summoned its ambassador to Damascus and reiterated that Syria has a role in the unrest in Iraq, supports terrorism and must immediately get out of all Lebanese territories. Now there are signs that as pressure mounts on the embattled Syrian leadership, Assad could finally decide to bring his troops home.

Pressure on Lebanon's Hezbollah is also on the rise. Now that it is possible that Israel and the Palestinian Authority are getting closer to some agreement, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon is trying to convince France to include Hezbollah in the European Union's list of terrorist groups.

The Zionist media recently reported that PA Chairman Mahmoud Abbas has called for ratification of a resolution by Arab states to condemn and stop all suicide attacks. This is while Paris is working hard to dislodge the Al-Manar satellite network, which is affiliated to Hezbollah, and has indicated that it wants to open a new chapter in its ties to the US.

France was a strong opponent of the US invasion of Iraq, and still insists on a timeframe for the withdrawal of the occupation armies from the Arab country. It is reportedly holding talks with all Iraqi parties with the aim of rebuilding bridges with Washington and doing its share in pushing the US-engineered reform agenda in the volatile region.