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Subsidy reform plan proceeding apace

◆ *Majlis approves establishment of body to implement plan*

Tehran Times Economic Desk

TEHRAN — The Majlis approved a bill calling for the establishment of an organization to implement the subsidy reform plan on Monday.



According to the MPs' decision, the subsidy reform plan must be implemented after the Guardian Council gives the final stamp of approval.

The idea to set up an organization to redirect subsidies was proposed by MP Mohammad Hossein Farhangi, who sits on the Majlis Budget Committee, and was approved with 134 votes in favor, 80 against, and 12 abstentions.

233 MPs of the 290-seat parliament attended the vote.

The goal of the subsidy reform plan is to bring prices to their true market level within a five-year period. The plan mainly targets energy prices.

According to the parliamentary ratification, the administration is obliged to set up the organization within one month after the Guardian Council approves the subsidy reform bill.

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Iran to attend London confab on Afghanistan if conditions met

Tehran Times Political Desk

TEHRAN — Iran has announced it will attend the international conference on Afghanistan in London later this month if it is allowed to play an important role.

British Prime Minister Gordon Brown has invited Afghan President Hamid Karzai, United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, NATO allies, Afghanistan's neighbors, regional powers, and key international bodies to a conference in London on January 28 to set a political and security timetable for Afghanistan for 2010 and beyond. The task includes setting out a roadmap for Afghan forces to gradually take over more security responsibilities, and refining an exit strategy for NATO forces.

"If the agenda of the London conference is clear and Iran's role in the conference is highlighted, (we) will study the request for (Iran's) participation in the conference with a positive outlook," Foreign Ministry spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast told reporters during his weekly press conference on Tuesday.

Iran will address border issues with Iraq based on Algiers Agreement

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The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman talks at a press conference on Tuesday.

(MEHR/Majid Asgaripour)

which was signed by the two countries in 1975, Mehmanparast explained.

The Algiers Agreement was an agreement between Iran and Iraq to settle their border disputes (such as the Shatt al-Arab -- known as the Arvand Rud in Iran -- and Khuzestan), and served as the basis for the bilateral treaties signed on June 13 and December 26, 1975.

Iran has made a proposal calling for the establishment of a joint committee with Iraq to demarcate the border between the two countries based on the Algiers Agreement and to prevent any misunderstandings on the issue, Mehmanparast added.

He expressed hope that the Iraqi gov-

ernment would agree to the establishment of a committee for addressing border issues.

Iran will respond to Saudi request about individual at embassy

Mehmanparast also said Iran will respond to Saudi Arabia's request to allow a person who is in the Saudi Arabian Embassy in Tehran and who claims to be Osama bin Laden's daughter to legally leave the country.

"Claims have been made about the identity of this person, but in consideration of the Saudi Arabian government's request, Iran will take measures in this regard with a humanitarian view," he stated.

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IRGC to hold war games in Strait of Hormuz

Tehran Times Political Desk

TEHRAN — The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps will hold a war game in the strategic Strait of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf in February, IRGC Navy Commander Rear Admiral Morteza Safari announced on Tuesday.

"The IRGC Navy's great sea maneuver will be held in the Strait of Hormuz during the first half of Bahman," Safari told a group of navy commanders at a morning parade in Tehran.

The Iranian month of Bahman runs from January 21 to February 19.

The volatile situation in the Middle Eastern region has made Iran's military preparedness more imperative than ever, Safari explained.

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PERSPECTIVE



Another war: This time in Africa?

By *Salman Ansari Javid*

Eight-and-a-half years after the 9/11 attacks, the U.S. administration along with Western media are teaming up once again to scare citizens that another terrorist attack is imminent and the only way to stop it is through another war: this time in Africa.

The unsuccessful attempt on Christmas day by Nigerian Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab has prompted widespread security measures in the airports all over the world, especially on U.S. bound flights. According to reports Abdulmutallab got his training and explosives from al-Qaeda elements while on a trip to Yemen.

The Bush administration managed to disproportionately respond to the 9/11 attacks by invading Afghanistan and Iraq by sowing the seeds of fear in American minds. As the first two episodes of "wars on terror" still remain unresolved, now there is talk of another one.

The questions being asked in various blogs and Western media include: "When do we go to war in Yemen? Or 'Next U.S. war front?'" or "With locals failing to stop al-Qaeda, America's hand may soon be forced," ... and so on.

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton warned Monday that the regional instability in Yemen is a threat to global security.

President Barack Obama returned from vacation on Tuesday and was due to hold a meeting with his top security officials concerning the security lapse surrounding Abdulmutallab, whose father had warned the U.S. Embassy in Yemen regarding his son's radicalization before his botched attempt.

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Rights group accuses Israel of poisoning Gaza land

The Italian New Weapons Committee accuses Israel of contaminating Gaza land through bombing.

The Italy-based group of researchers studied Israel's use of ammunition and said the population of the Gaza Strip is "in danger." It based the claim on soil analysis of four bomb craters. "It is essential to intervene at once to limit the effects of the contamination on people, animals and cultivation," the researchers stated. Their findings grabbed headlines in Italian, European and Middle Eastern publications, including Terra, Ambito, the Turkish Weekly and Tehran Times.

Paola Manduca, the committee's spokesperson, declined to comment when contacted by Haaretz. "Our study indicates an anomalous presence of toxic elements in the soil," she stated. This included metals that "can cause tumors and problems with fertility, and they can have serious effects on newborns, like deformities and genetic pathologies."

The researchers hailed from the universities of Rome and Genoa and elsewhere and listed the dangerous metals: tungsten, mercury, molybdenum, cadmium and cobalt.

(Source: haaretz.com)

Exhausted Japan finance minister to quit

TOKYO (Reuters) — Japan's aged finance minister is to quit due to poor health after weeks of exhausting wrangling over the budget, the Nikkei news agency said on Tuesday, a fresh blow for Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama as he struggles with a frail economy and huge public debt.

Hatoyama had said he wanted Hirohisa Fujii to stay on, but if he does go it could put the fiscal restraint championed by the 77-year-old lawmaker at risk and weigh on government bonds, though for now investors are reassured that bond issuance for the fiscal year from April is set.

"I want him to keep doing his best," Hatoyama told reporters after broadcaster NTV said Fujii -- who has high blood pressure -- had told Hatoyama he was worried he couldn't cope with long days of questioning in parliament, due to convene this month.

Foreign investment in Tehran bourse facilitated

Tehran Times Economic Desk

TEHRAN — The minister of finance and economic affairs stated that a directive has been finalized in the administration's economic commission to ease foreign investment in domestic stock exchange.

Shamseddin Hosseini added that economic growth and welfare in the country must be stable, balanced and just.

Speaking at the opening ceremony of an exhibition on bourse, banking and privatization in Tehran on Tuesday, the minister said that to reach this goal we need sustainable financial resources and developed financial institutions.

Hosseini highlighted the need to modify the banking system and boost its financial structure through attracting foreign investments, especially from Iranian expatriates. To this end, we are taking measures to remove obstacles, he noted.

Meanwhile, we are planning to establish a National Development Fund in which a minimum 20 percent of oil revenues will be deposited and used for granting facilities to the private sector.

Iran to play Singapore without European stars

Tehran Times Sports Desk

SINGAPORE — Iran is to play Singapore in the Asian Cup Group E qualifier match on Wednesday without its high-profile European stars.

Javad Nekounam and Masoud Shojaei will be absent against Singapore after La Liga side, Osasuna, didn't grant permission to them to leave Spain.

Victory in the match will surely ease the pressure on Afshin Ghotbi's shoulders for not getting satisfying results in the Qatar tournament last week.

(Contd. on P. 15)

Blair to face Iraq war inquiry, big demand for seats

LONDON (Reuters) — Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair will make his hugely-anticipated appearance before an official inquiry into the Iraq War in late January or early February, the inquiry team said on Tuesday.

And such is the demand to see Blair's appearance that the inquiry will hold a ballot to allocate public seats, while a third of the 60 or so available spaces will be allocated to families of soldiers who died in the war.

Blair, prime minister for a decade from 1997, ordered 45,000 British troops to take part in the 2003 U.S.-led invasion to topple Saddam Hussein, a move critics say broke international law.

He is also accused of deceiving the public over claims that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). No such weapons were ever found, and in a BBC interview last month Blair said he believed it would still have been right to oust Saddam even if he had known Iraq had no WMDs.

The comment added to the public desire to hear Blair give evidence to the five-man Iraq inquiry team which is examining Britain's role before, during and after the conflict.

(Contd. on P. 15)

Iran searching for top foreign weightlifting coach

Tehran Times Sports Desk

TEHRAN — Iran's weightlifting federation is seeking a top foreign coach, according to the federation's caretaker.

Iran, which is one of the Asian weightlifting powerhouses, is weak at the moment. The runner-up of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games took part with three lifters in Weightlifting World Cup in South Korea in November and got very awful results.

"We have started looking for a foreign coach for the team. Iran's weightlifting has to reclaim the top position in the continent and the world. I will meet Tamas Ayan President of the International Weightlifting Federation after January and talk to him about helping Iran return to the top," Hossein Rezazadeh said.

(Contd. on P. 15)



Bidding Announcement
Gol-E-Gohar Iron Ore Company
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