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A Cambodian voter in Pailin holds up her voting card prior to casting the ballot in the general election



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More than 1,100 private auto parts manufacturers account for 20 percent of Iran's industrial production



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Afghan Interior Minister Ali Ahmad Jalali (r) with his Pakistani counterpart Faisal Saley Hayat in Islamabad



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Foreign Ministry Performance Defended

TEHRAN, July 27--Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi here on Sunday said his ministry has been able to successfully reform its structure.

According to IRNA, in response to questions of MPs in the Majlis, Kharrazi defended the performance of his ministry and recalled that reform is a time-consuming process.

Responding to a question by Tehran MP Elahieh Koulaie about the Foreign Ministry not utilizing the services of competent individuals, Kharrazi said, "Management experts have carefully studied the ministry's mode of operation and identified all its weak and strong points. Within a few months, these experts identified 1,100 management

procedures." The top Iranian diplomat also noted that the Foreign Ministry uses a fully automated system and modern managerial concepts. He emphasized that his ministry has utilized advanced telecommunications and information technology in order to revolutionize its structure.

"The ministry closed down 18 representation offices abroad in a bid to pursue downsizing and has sacked 21 percent of its personnel. In tandem with our downsizing policy, 10 directorates and two deputy foreign minister posts were abolished and instead the post of deputy foreign minister for economic coordination was created," he asserted.

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Khatami Favors Enhancement Of Cyprus Ties



President Mohammad Khatami in talks with Cypriot Foreign Minister George Iacovou in Tehran on July 27 (IRNA Photo)

Cypriot FM Concedes EU Turnabout Over Iraq

TEHRAN, July 27--President Mohammad Khatami here on Sunday called for further expansion of bilateral ties between Tehran and Nicosia, IRNA reported.

Speaking at a meeting with visiting Cyprus Foreign Minister George Iacovou, Khatami referred to the strategic historical and geographical position of Cyprus. He further said that Tehran supports a united Cyprus where Turks and Greeks can live peacefully together.

Saturday on a two-day visit for bilateral talks. Iacovou has conferred with his counterpart, Kamal Kharrazi, and Majlis Speaker Mehdi Karubi over ways of bolstering cooperation as well as key developments in the Middle East region.

Iacovou on Saturday confirmed EU's change of tack over Iraq and said the European block had backed down on its initial anti-occupation stance.

"At present, the European Union is after adopting a pragmatic approach," he told reporters at the Mehr News Agency building here.

"After the (US-led) attack on Iraq, (the European Union) held the position that the United Nations must play a role in Iraq, but it has not managed yet to implement this policy. The European Union has not been able to pursue a unified foreign policy in this regard," he added.

Iacovou also reiterated his country's position that "the indigenous representatives of Iraq must decide about running the country's affairs in order to resolve the problems of the Iraqi people."

Conservative Analyst: Political Parties Not With Masses

TEHRAN, July 27--A conservative analyst here on Sunday said political parties have distanced themselves from the masses.

Amir Mohebbian, who was being interviewed by ISNA, noted that people understand that political groups are reacting to their demands artificially.

"Political currents have basically adopted two approaches due to their lack of experience in

functioning in a democratic system. One approach is based on fantasies and idealism, and relies on sloganeering. The other is based on paternalistic elitism and tends to set frameworks for people's actions without paying any attention to the demands of the masses," he said.

The analyst stressed that people know some political groups only care for their votes in order to

wield power. He further said that people currently do not trust the political parties.

"If this feeling of trust is not forged, the political party system will be deadlocked," he said.

Mohebbian, also a member of the Persian daily Resalat's Editorial Board, emphasized that political strategists should revise their performance.

"As a religious-oriented intellectual who attaches credence to the lofty notion of democracy, I am duty-bound to warn that political parties of the country are following the wrong course of action and have distanced themselves from the society. Currently, blue-collar workers, farmers, clerks and teachers do not find their wishes fulfilled by political parties," he said.

Mohebbian concluded by saying that the elite should hold a debate on the wedge between the political parties and the masses.

Anti-Torture Convention Will Ensure Justice

TEHRAN, July 27--Iran's accession to the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment will ensure judicial development and that justice is dispensed more fairly nationwide.

A legal expert, Ali Abhari, told ISNA on Sunday that in Iran's judicial system, it has been stipulated that defendants should be interrogated freely.

"If it is proven that the judge or the interrogator have tortured a defendant to extract confessions, they will be punished. Hence, in the Iranian law torture has been banned," he observed.

Abhari, who is also a former advisor to the Supreme Court, added, "The convention has also explicitly outlined laws and regulations against torture. Even countries, which do not have specific laws on torture, should abide by the convention's ratification after they join it."

The legal expert went on to emphasize that according to the Islamic Penal Code, if it is proven that a defendant

has been forced to make a confession, that confession is not considered legal.

"Sometimes, defendants in the preliminary stages of interrogation complain that they were forced to make confessions. If Iran joins the convention, then such issues would not come to the spotlight," he noted.

Abhari stressed that countries, which advocate human

rights, must join the convention. "Iran's accession to the convention will promote national judicial development and observance of human rights. Of course, we have sound laws and regulations ourselves. Our joining the convention is more a tactical move and will ensure that justice is dispensed more fairly nationwide," he concluded.

Perspective Back to the Constitution

By Hossein Ahmadi

Constitution of the Islamic Republic is a national covenant and among laws which cannot and should not be easily changed or altered to meet the whims and desires of interest groups.

If and when there are calls for amendment, it must first be made clear why it is so and what are basis for change in constitutional law.

Implementing changes demands specific instruments which normally cannot be readily procured. So, it is quite illogical and also unacceptable to talk about changes to the constitution simply because a specific political current is pushing for it.

It is obvious that in a working democracy groups interact and some may even maintain that the constitution needs a new lease of life to help meet their interests and goals.

However, since the constitution is indeed a national commitment which has been compiled on the vote and views of the society at large, it cannot be changed or rewritten to meet the demands of some individuals and groups. Those who constantly raise the issue of amending the constitution should above all realize that different interpretations of the constitution can create more questions than answers.

The crux of the matter is that since the constitution may be rendered in a variety of ways, sometimes this issue comes up that it needs revision. If the laws enshrined in our constitution are implemented, they can help address almost every aspect of public ideals and demands. See Page 2

Egypt, Jordan Inaugurate Underwater Gas Pipeline

AQABA, Jordan, July 27--King Abdullah II of Jordan and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak opened an underwater pipeline for a one-billion-dollar gas project between their countries in this Red Sea port on Sunday, AFP reported.

The two leaders arrived by boat from the Egyptian resort of Taba where they held an earlier official opening ceremony for the first phase of the project which is to be extended elsewhere in the Middle East and Europe.

The pipeline, 270 kilometers (167 miles) in length, passes 15 kilometers (9.3 miles) under the Red Sea between the two coastal resorts, allowing Jordan to receive some 1.1 billion cubic meters (38.8 billion cubic feet) of Egyptian liquefied natural gas (LNG) per year. The cere-



Jordan's King Abdullah II (r) and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak open the pipeline that runs from Egypt's Arish in Sinai to Jordan's Red Sea port of Aqaba in the two coastal towns Taba and Aqaba, July 27. (Reuters Photo)

monies not only highlighted Egypt's growing importance as a gas exporter, but also showed a rare level of economic cooperation among Arab states, which critics complain is stifled by high tariffs and bureaucracy. See Page 2

Pope Says Atheism Spreading in Europe

CASTEL GANDOLFO, Italy, July 27--Pope John Paul II on Sunday issued a stern warning to Europe's Roman Catholics against the decline of religious observance and the rise of atheism across the continent, AFP reported.

"A vague and constraint-free sort of religious sentiment is gaining ground across Europe, which can become a breeding ground for agnosticism and atheism," the pope told 3,000 pilgrims at his summer residence near Rome.

John Paul said he regretted the fall in church attendance across Europe, and the decline of Bible studies.

The head of the Roman Catholic Church has been lobbying hard for European Union's future constitution to include a reference to Europe's Christian roots, with support from several historically Catholic nations, including Ireland, Italy, Portugal and Spain.

But such a reference appeared unlikely as work on drafting the document drew to an end

last month, even though the current EU president, Italy, has said it would continue to push for the text to include a religious dimension.

EU leaders endorsed the draft constitution on June 20 and the final text is due to be approved by an intergovernmental conference starting in October.

High-ranking officials from the Church of England and Orthodox churches across eastern Europe, including Greece, Romania and Russia, have all backed the pope's stance.

Canada Wants Reciprocal Rights In Probing Deaths

TORONTO, July 27--Canada's foreign minister rejected claims of injustice in the recent death of an Iranian teenager, but promised a full and transparent investigation into the incident, pressing Tehran to reciprocate in the case of an Iranian-Canadian journalist, AFP reported.

Minister Bill Graham told reporters in a teleconference call from Calgary's airport late Friday that a full investigation would be launched into the death of 18-year-old Keyvan Tabesh. The Iranian immigrant

to Canada was fatally shot by a police officer after charging the latter with a machete in a July 14 incident near Vancouver, British Columbia.

Canada also would put the officer involved on leave, hold a public coroner's inquest into the death, and give Iranian officials the opportunity to be present during the investigation as well as return the body of the victim to Iran, Graham said, according to local media reports on Saturday.

A diplomatic row between Canada and Iran erupted after the July 11

death of journalist Zahra Kazemi, 54, died in custody from a brain hemorrhage caused by an unexplained blow to the head following her arrest June 23 for taking unauthorized photographs outside Tehran's Evin Prison.

Ottawa, backing her Montreal-based son's request to have the body returned to Canada, recalled its ambassador to Iran on Wednesday in protest to Kazemi's burial in Shiraz, which Iranian authorities said was the request of Kazemi's mother who still lives in Iran. See Page 2