



## Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center

### Spotlight on Iran

March 2010—Esfand 1388  
Week of March 4-11, 2010  
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### Highlights of the week

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- ✓ Different voices on nuclear issue: top reformist intellectual warns that Iran must not reject West's nuclear proposal
- ✓ Majles approves budget proposal for next year two weeks before current Iranian year ends
- ✓ Debate on use of goldfish on holiday tables as Nowruz approaches
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### Iran satisfied over publication of preliminary election results in Iraq

Following the publication of the preliminary results of the general elections for the Iraqi parliament held this week, Iran's conservative media has expressed satisfaction over what appears to be a success for the main Shi'ite factions which took part in the elections.

An editorial published this week in the daily Keyhan says that the Iraqi parliament elections were the most sensitive since the fall of Saddam Hussein, since they are likely to have repercussions, among other things, on Iraq's relations with the countries of the region. The daily expressed satisfaction over the active participation of Iraqis in the elections, despite the

continuing terrorist attacks in the country perpetrated by Al-Qaeda and supported by the US and Saudi Arabia. According to the daily, the elections have strengthened the Shi'ite rule of the country and derailed the US efforts to stir disagreements between the Iraqi people and the ruling Shi'ite government with the purpose of facilitating the continuation of US control over Iraq. In Keyhan's view, the preliminary results indicate that the Iraqi people support the Shi'ite government and its anti-American views, constitute a failure for the US and Saudi Arabia, and reflect the Iraqi people's desire for an independent Iraq under an Islamic regime, free from American occupation and the meddling of its proxies in the region (Keyhan, March 9).

The conservative daily Ghods also addressed the apparent achievement of the two major Shi'ite factions (Iraqi National Coalition and State of Law List), predicting that Al-Iraqiya, the list headed by former PM Iyad Allawi whose members also include secular Sunni elements and ex-Ba'athists, would not be able to increase its strength and influence despite the considerable media and PR support from Saudi Arabia (Ghods, March 9).

On the eve of the elections, the conservative media accused the US of supporting the Al-Iraqiya list to weaken the political status of Iraqi Shi'ites. The conservative daily Tehran-e Emrouz claimed that the Americans had acted on behalf of Iraq's Arab neighbors in an attempt to lay the groundwork for the election of the remains of the Ba'ath party to the Iraqi parliament (Tehran-e Emrouz, March 7).

The daily Jomhuri-ye Eslami also accused the US of supporting the ex-Ba'athists. An editorial published by the daily earlier this week says that ever since the occupation of Iraq, the Americans have attempted to put their supporters in sensitive positions in the new Iraqi administration, but their efforts failed in light of the Shi'ite coalition's victory in the first general elections to the Iraqi parliament. Consequently, the Americans have changed their policy and began directly or indirectly supporting the Shi'ites' opponents, mainly those elements affiliated with the former Ba'ath party and Sunni political activists. For example, the Americans attempted to change the Iraqi authorities' decision to disqualify several hundred candidates for their support of the previous regime. The conservative daily also accused Saudi Arabia of meddling in election affairs in Iraq, claiming that it provided media, diplomatic, and financial assistance to Iyad Allawi's list (Jomhuri-ye Eslami, March 6).

## **Different voices on nuclear issue: top reformist intellectual warns that Iran must not reject West's nuclear proposal**

Professor Sadegh Zibakalam, one of Iran's top reformist intellectuals, called on the Iranian leadership this week to accept the West's proposal regarding the transfer of enriched uranium abroad in exchange for nuclear fuel, warning against the consequences of rejecting the proposal.

In an interview granted by Zibakalam to the Fararo news website, the senior political commentator said that the proposal was a good one, acknowledging Iran's right to enrich uranium, and that by accepting it Iran could pull the rug from under the Americans, who seek to obtain the support of the international community against it. Zibakalam compared the nuclear program with the nationalization of petroleum by PM Mohammad Mossadegh in the early 50s, saying that Iranian leaders must learn the historical lesson from Iran's refusal to accept the compromise proposals regarding the nationalization of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC).



Speaking at a convention on petroleum and Iranian foreign policy held this week on behalf of the Expediency Discernment Council, Zibakalam said that had Iran accepted the proposal made in the early 50s by the US and the World Bank to resolve the petroleum crisis, the objectives of petroleum nationalization could have been achieved with American support and without the severe political and economic consequences caused by the nationalization.

Referring to the nuclear issue, Zibakalam said that Iran had good proposals available to it to resolve that issue as well, which may help it create trust and achieve its national interests without paying a heavy price. He said that accepting the proposal would allow Iran to pull the rug from under the US over Iran's so-called refusal to cooperate with the international community, and to derail the American efforts to gather international support for its anti-Iranian views (Fararo, March 5).

Considered one of the top reformist intellectuals in Iran, Prof. Sadegh Zibakalam is a lecturer on political science in Tehran University and a senior political commentator. In recent years, Zibakalam has strongly criticized the regime's policy, including the foreign and nuclear policy of the Iranian leadership. In May 2009, Zibakalam sparked a public outcry when Iranian TV aired a panel in which he took part, which dealt with the US foreign policy 100 days into Barack Obama's presidency. During the panel, Zibakalam claimed, among other things, that the Iranian leadership was unwilling to acknowledge the tremendous change in US foreign policy since Obama's election for president, since it was locked into radical, non-compromising ideological notions.

It should be noted that it is not the first time that intellectuals and individual political activists affiliated with the reformist camp voice criticism on the nuclear policy of the Iranian leadership. For example, physicist and former Majles member Ahmad Shirzad had criticized the Iranian nuclear program, going as far as to say that it was not economically justified.

### **Majles approves budget proposal for next year two weeks before current Iranian year ends**

This week, at the end of a heated debate, the majority of Majles members voted in favor of the budget proposal for the next year (which starts on March 21). The budget will be approximately 347 billion dollars. 151 Majles members voted in favor of the budget proposal, 62 voted against it, and 12 abstained. Twenty speeches were given during the Majles debate: ten by Majles members who supported the budget, and another ten by Majles members who opposed the proposal.



The supporters of the budget claimed that it reflected a 70 percent increase in the development budget and would reduce the dependency on the country's petroleum revenues, encourage the activity of the private sector, boost economic growth, and increase employment and investments in cultural activities. Majles members who voted in favor of the

proposal also noted that the budget was transparent, allowing the Majles to monitor it more closely than before.

On the other hand, the opponents of the budget claimed that as it currently stood, the budget did not allow the government to meet the inflation, unemployment, and economic growth goals set in the multi-year economic program, and that it did not provide sufficient solutions to the inflationary effects of the expected government subsidy policy reform.

Ahmad Tavakoli, the chief of the Majles Research Center and one of the government's strongest critics from the conservative Majles members, warned that the budget could lead to negative economic growth, 50 percent inflation, and an increase in unemployment next year. Tavakoli further noted that in its budget proposal, the government ignored the predicted effects of the subsidy policy reform, which is supposed to be implemented in the coming months (various news agencies, March 8).

As the budget was approved, this week the Majles rejected President Ahmadinejad's request to increase the sum allotted to the subsidy cuts from 20 billion dollars to 40 billion dollars. During a debate attended by the president, 111 Majles members voted against the president's request while 105 voted in favor. In a speech given by the president prior to the vote, Ahmadinejad claimed that the sum approved by the Majles would not suffice for the implementation of the subsidy policy reform announced by the government (various news agencies, March 9).

### **Debate on use of goldfish on holiday tables as Nowruz approaches**

The goldfish is considered one of the symbols of the Iranian new year (Nowruz), marked on March 21, with many families placing a bowl with at least one goldfish on their holiday table, symbolizing a happy life.

However, the custom of using goldfish for the Nowruz has been cause for criticism and controversy in Iran this year. A senior official in the Tehran municipality Environment Department expressed his objection this week to selling goldfish on markets for the Nowruz and using them. He said that the fish are held in improper conditions and could cause various diseases, and that selling, purchasing, and using them were therefore unauthorized by the environment authorities (Fars, March 6).



This week, the Farda news website has also published an article expressing strong reservations about using goldfish for the holiday. Article author Hossein Abiri Golpayegani cited several reasons against using goldfish as a symbol during the holiday feast. A historical reason: he said that using goldfish during the Nowruz dinner was uncommon until about one hundred years ago, and that there is no evidence for earlier use of that fish as a Nowruz symbol. It is a custom originating in China which only reached Iran in the twentieth century, at the same time as tea was first introduced from China. A health reason: the fish might transmit the salmonella bacteria. A psychological reason: the premature death of the goldfish may in some cases have a negative effect on small children and even traumatize them and compromise their mental health. A religious reason: transporting goldfish from their natural habitats to a small, crowded place and holding them in improper conditions throughout the holiday may result in their death, polluting the atmosphere and being tantamount to animal abuse, which is forbidden in religious law. An economic reason: the price of a goldfish is about ten thousand tomans (about 10 dollars), and Iranian families spend an average of 20 billion tomans (about 20 million dollars) during the holiday season for purchasing goldfish, which do not last as it is. For the sake of God, the children, and the protection of the environment, goldfish should not be used as an item during the holiday dinner (Farda, March 2).

### **Pictures of the week: preparations for Nowruz**



