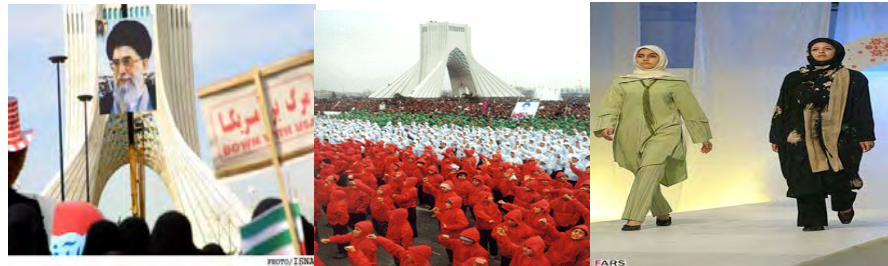




Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center



Highlights of the week

- ✓ Opposition leaders step up criticism of government policy following resolution on sanctions against Iran
- ✓ Iranian criticism of Russia escalates following Russian president's statement
- ✓ Severe heat wave continues; government offices shut down for two days
- ✓ Government, bazaar merchants reach tax agreement following week-long protest
- ✓ Senior conservative theoretician issues warning about American TV series
- ✓ Pictures of the week: women's soccer team uniforms unveiled

Opposition leaders step up criticism of government policy following resolution on sanctions against Iran

Mehdi Karoubi, one of the leaders of the reformist opposition, has strongly criticized this week the government's stance on the nuclear crisis. Speaking at a meeting with families of political prisoners, Karoubi said that the reckless foreign policy and lack of sanity in President Ahmadinejad's words and actions have caused considerable damage to Iran in recent years. That policy, coupled with the violent suppression of citizens over the past year, has created a particularly worrisome situation for Iran. He said that Iran must avoid making shallow statements or displaying lack of ability, which could give others a pretext to easily impose sanctions on it.

Karoubi further claimed that some elements in the Iranian regime, including the Revolutionary Guards, support the sanctions because they make “exorbitant profits” from them, while the public pays the price (Kalemeleh, July 11).

Karoubi’s statement came days after opposition leader Mir-Hossein Mousavi lashed out against the government’s policy, claiming that the president ignores the impact of the international sanctions. Describing the resolution on sanctions as a “piece of used paper” will not solve the problems plaguing the people and the country, and will not alleviate the damage caused as a result of the government’s demagogic policy, Mousavi said, referring to a statement made by President Ahmadinejad. He claimed that the UN Security Council resolution would have severe consequences for Iran’s national security and economy. There is no denying that Iran is now more isolated than it has ever been since the Islamic revolution, Mousavi said. Iran must learn from the fate of other peoples in the region that had fallen into the trap of their governments’ hollow words of pride. Under current circumstances, he added, it is necessary to consider solutions that would diminish the threats to Iran’s independence and territorial integrity and guarantee its legitimate rights while maintaining the rights of liberties of the Iranian people, since maintaining national security is impossible without supporting free, informed citizens.

Meanwhile, Mousavi condemned the UN resolution, saying that it hurt the Iranian people. He stressed that one cannot condemn Iran and rob it of its legitimate right for peaceful nuclear technology while crimes are committed in “occupied Palestine” and while nuclear weapons held by other countries are being ignored. He added, however, that there is no denying the consequences of the adventurous policy of Iran’s government.

Mousavi also called on the government to inform the Iranian public about the consequences of the sanctions, saying they are likely to cause an increase in unemployment and decrease in economic growth, making the lives of Iranians more difficult and widening the gap between Iran and developing countries, mostly its neighbors. He noted that the Iranian people have the right to know what impact the sanctions will likely have and how they will influence their lives as well as the progress and security of their country. The public cannot be expected to oppose the sanctions if the government does not tell Iranians the truth about their consequences. Many Iranians are unaware of the dangers inherent in the path Iran follows due to lack of ability and bragging. If the government cannot do it, Mousavi said, the least it should do is allow non-government media to provide Iranians with information and assessments regarding the sanctions in a clear, non-exaggerated manner.

Mousavi stressed the need to expand the circle of advisors on the nuclear issue, claiming that the issue is currently handled by a small group of inexperienced advisors. The Green Movement must continue expressing opposition in view of the external threats facing Iran, showing that the way to end the crisis and the threats is to return to the principles and solutions it proposes. The movement must enlist all of its international capabilities to let foreign powers know that it will not let them exploit the weakness and illegitimacy of the current government to compromise Iran's independence, territorial integrity, or national interests (Kalemeleh, July 7).

The conservative daily Keyhan strongly lashed out against Mousavi for his statements this week, claiming they reflected the analyses published by "Zionist media" about the sanctions and their effects. The admission of Western leaders that the sanctions would not result in the cessation of Iran's nuclear program left Western intelligence services no other choice but to launch the second phase of their plan, designed to influence Iran's domestic public opinion. That phase is supposed to be implemented by their agents in Iran. Mousavi and his supporters are now acting on behalf of the US and Israel, after those two countries' efforts to enforce effective sanctions against Iran had failed. However, Keyhan claims, the West ignores the fact that Mousavi no longer enjoys any status or influence in Iran (Keyhan, July 13).

Iranian criticism of Russia escalates following Russian president's statement

Iranian top officials have reacted strongly this week to a statement made by Russia's president Dmitry Medvedev, who warned that Iran is close to acquiring the means to allow it to manufacture its first nuclear bomb. Speaking at a meeting with ambassadors in Moscow, Medvedev said that Iran is getting close to achieving the potential that would allow it to manufacture nuclear weapons, and that the Iranians did not behave properly.

Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki strongly rejected the statement made by the Russian president, saying it was "completely erroneous". At a press conference he held during his visit to Spain, Mottaki said that whatever the purposes behind such statements, Iran categorically rejected them. He said that Iran is interested in maintaining good relations with Russia, but does not accept some of its stances in recent months (IRNA, July 13).

Alaeddin Boroujerdi, the chairman of the Majles National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, also had reservations about the Russian president's statement. He said that Iran expects Russia, a major world power, not to be misled by the false information spread by Western intelligence services. He said that IAEA inspectors are free to visit Iran's nuclear

facilities, and that the Russians are well aware that the Iranian nuclear activities are meant for peaceful purposes (Mehr, July 13).



Cartoon by Nikahang Kowsar, Rooz Online, May 26, 2010

Meanwhile, the reformist daily Mardom Salari strongly criticized the Russian policy towards Iran, claiming that Moscow's hostile views on the nuclear issue have become a permanent matter in recent months. An editorial published by the daily says that the rapprochement between the US and Russia has led the latter to toughen its stance towards Iran over the past year. The damage to Iran's interests by the "new tsars" in Moscow is reflected not only in the nuclear issue, the article says, but also bears on Iranian interests in the Caspian Sea, on Iran's acquisition of S-300 missiles from Russia, and on the ongoing delays in the operation of the nuclear reactor in Bushehr. Russia is considered one of Israel's major allies; it supported the former government of Yugoslavia in the massacre of Bosnian Muslims; and suppresses Muslims in Chechnya and in Dagestan. The daily claimed that Russia's audacious attitude towards Iran results from the fact that Iran has ignored Russia's violations of its rights over the years, the lack of appropriate response from Iran to Moscow's hostile stances, and its insistence on continuing to expand economic ties with it (Mardom Salari, July 14).

The conservative daily Ebtekar also addressed the latest statement of the Russian president. A commentary article published by the daily, titled "Behind the scenes of the Russia-US agreement against Iran", brought up a theory that Medvedev's announcement reflected a covert agreement between Russia and the US in which the US released the Russian spies it had recently arrested in exchange for toughening the Russian stance on Iran, reevaluation of its position on transporting nuclear fuel to the reactor in Bushehr, and increasing Russian pressure on Iran (Ebtekar, July 14).

Severe heat wave continues; government offices shut down for two days

Last weekend, the government decided to shut down government offices in 19 provinces across Iran, including Tehran, due to the severe heat wave which continues to sweep the country this week. An announcement released by the government last Saturday says that the shutdown of government offices and government bodies was meant to make it easier on Iranian citizens and to conserve energy in government offices, whose energy consumption reached new peaks last week (various news agencies, July 10).

Temperatures in Tehran remained above the 40 degree centigrade threshold for several days in a row last week. In light of the severe heat wave, electricity and water consumption reached an unprecedented peak, with several power outages taking place in Tehran. The director of Iran's meteorological service said that his organization had no part in the government's decision to shut down its offices on July 11 and 12. In an interview to ILNA news agency, Parviz Reza-Zadeh announced that the meteorological service had not given the government any recommendation on that matter, saying he believed that the decision had to do with difficulties in meeting the high electricity demand (ILNA, July 10).



The website Khabar Online wrote this week that following the decision to shut down government offices on July 11 and 12, the annual number of vacation days in Iran is expected to reach 81 this year (including Fridays, the weekly rest day in Iran) (Khabar Online, July 10).

The government's decision drew criticism from government opponents. Mohammad-Reza Khabbaz, a spokesman for the Majles Economy Committee, criticized the decision and warned about its economic implications. He said that unless the decision was overturned, the gap between Iran and the world's developed industrial countries would increase. The reformist Majles member noted that while the current government promised to turn Iran into an "Islamic Japan", the number of school days in Japan is 220, in the US it is 200, and in Iran it is as low as 160. Khabbaz added that the government's decision goes against the Supreme

Leader's instruction to work harder and increase Iran's economic output (Parleman News, July 10).

Jomhuri-ye Eslami, a daily affiliated with Ali-Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, the chairman of the Expediency Discernment Council, also criticized the government's decision, saying that the weather in Tehran in the past several days was not unprecedented compared to previous years and was not warmer than in the south of the country. The daily claimed that there were no grounds to shut down government offices while the private sector and non-government organizations continued work. It would be better, the daily said, if the government asked Iranian citizens to conserve electricity instead of shutting down its offices for two days (Jomhuri-ye Eslami, July 11). The reformist daily Mardom Salari also had criticism for the government's decision, wondering how the president intended to increase Iran's population to 120 or 150 million when even now a vacation is needed to meet the energy needs of all Iranians (Mardom Salari, July 12).

Even though the government's decision to shut down its offices earlier this week did not apply to market trade across Iran, opposition elements claimed that the decision had nothing to do with the heat wave but was rather aimed to curb the wave of protest which broke out last week at the Tehran bazaar. Nasrollah Torabi, a member of the reformist minority faction of the Majles, even demanded that the government explain to the public the true reason for its decision to shut down government offices for two days. In an interview to the Parleman News website, Torabi said that according to the weather forecast the heat wave is not expected to become more severe, and that therefore it appears that the heat wave was not the main reason behind the government's decision (Parleman News, July 10).

Government, bazaar merchants reach tax agreement following week-long protest

After a week-long protest, government representatives and bazaar merchants reached an agreement Monday on raising the tax imposed on the merchants by 15 percent. The agreement on the new tax rate for the year 1388 (March 2010 – March 2011) was signed by representatives from the Ministry of Commerce, the Association of Traders, and the State Tax Organization (various news agencies, July 12). Many of Tehran's bazaar merchants, however, refused to accept the agreement and continued their strike in recent days as well (Khabar Online, July 14).



Strike at the Tehran bazaar, Peik-e Iran, July 12

The merchants' protest began last Tuesday following the government's decision to increase the tax rate by 70 percent. The protest first broke out in shops selling gold, rugs, and textile, shortly spreading to other parts of the bazaar. During the three-day protest, the merchants shut down some of the bazaar shops and held protest gatherings against the government. The protest continued even after Minister of Commerce Mohammad-Ali Zeyghami said that the 70 percent tax increase was canceled and that the tax would only increase by 30 percent. The merchants' representatives claimed that, in light of the economic recession, high inflation, and lack of economic growth, there was no justification for increasing their tax rate.

On Thursday, the internal security forces arrested one of the chief textile merchants of the bazaar for calling on his fellow merchants to gather in a square to protest the government policy (Jaras, July 8). Jaras, a news agency affiliated with the reformist opposition, reported this week that clashes between merchants and internal security forces in Tehran led to the death of a well-known textile merchant (Jaras, July 11).

It is the second time in the past two years that bazaar merchants have embarked on a protest against the government. In October 2008, merchants in Tehran and in other major cities held a several-day-long strike following which the government was forced to abandon its intention to impose a value-added tax on products.

It should be noted that bazaar merchants are highly significant in Iran's modern history, having played (alongside clerics and other social groups) a major role in political upheavals and revolutions which took place in Iran starting from the late 19th century, including the Islamic revolution. The merchants have lost some of their status in recent years as a result of changes in Iran's economy, including the strengthening of the industrialist class, the establishment of modern shopping centers, and the increased involvement of the Revolutionary Guards in the economy. The merchants are still considered, however, a force to be reckoned with on the political scene. In recent years the merchants have been increasingly critical over President Ahmadinejad's economic policy and his foreign policy,

which played a part in worsening the economic sanctions against Iran and consequently affected the merchants as well.

Senior conservative theoretician issues warning about American TV series

Dr. Hassan Abbasi, the head of the Revolutionary Guards-affiliated Center for Doctrinal Strategic Studies, appeared this week on a show called “Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow”, aired on Iranian TV.

In the show, Abbasi, considered one of the leading theoreticians of the ultra-conservative bloc and the Revolutionary Guards, laid out his views on the dangers of the “soft cultural war” waged by the West against Iran through cinema, Persian-language satellite TV broadcasts, and cultural infiltration by other means. As an example, he cited the use allegedly made by the Americans of the Barbie doll in their war in Afghanistan, saying that, as part of its efforts to combat such cultural infiltration, Iran developed the dolls Dara and Sara as an original substitute for the popular American doll.

Abbasi’s interview was mostly dedicated to American TV series that infiltrate Iran, reflect Western values which the Americans seek to impose, and serve US interests. For example, the American series 24 was meant to encourage hatred of Muslims and fear of Islam by portraying Muslims as terrorists. Other series, such as the sci-fi show Kyle XY, which follows the story of a teenage boy who awakens in a forest outside Seattle without remembering anything about his past, are examples of a Western attempt to compromise social and family values, reflecting a desire for a society in which a child can be born outside of his mother’s womb. According to Abbasi, that series reflects the increasing power of Darwinist ideas in American society.

Abbasi also addressed the American thriller series Supernatural, which revolves around two brothers whose mother had been killed in a supernatural fire caused by a demon, warning about the negative consequences of such series on young Iranians. According to Abbasi, that series portrays the angels that appear in Muslim Holy Scriptures in a grotesque fashion, creating a false image of them. He claimed that American series paint Satan as a victor and also compromise family values by dealing with forbidden romantic liaisons, extramarital affairs, and women involved with several men at the same time. Such series and films encourage immoral conduct, he said.

Abbasi emphasized the need for creating a mechanism to monitor the harmful influence of such series and deal with them. Iranian media must inform the public about the threats

posed by the series and immunize Iranian society against their destructive effects (Ansar News, July 12).



Abbasi is considered one of the experts who have had the greatest influence on President Ahmadinejad's defense and strategic views. In recent years, he has been frequently lecturing in universities across Iran, mainly on issues pertaining to national security, strategy, and Iran's policy towards the West. He is one of Iran's major thinkers on the concept of asymmetrical warfare, having stressed on several occasions the need of using suicide attacks in case of a military offensive against Iran's nuclear facilities.

Abbasi has become known in Iran and elsewhere for a series of radical statements made in recent years, and for his strong criticism against top Iranian officials affiliated with the reformist camp.

Pictures of the week: women's soccer team uniforms unveiled

The new uniforms of Iran's female soccer players were unveiled last week during a practice session of the women's junior soccer team. The design of the uniforms reflects an attempt to reach compromise between the Iranian Soccer Association and FIFA, after the latter's decision several months ago to prohibit the participation of Iranian women players in international soccer games while wearing a veil. This coming August, the Iranian women's team is to take part in an international soccer tournament in Singapore.

However, the new uniforms have already come under fierce criticism. Marziyeh Akbarabadi, the deputy head of Iran's physical education department, claimed that the department had no intention of authorizing the uniforms since they did not conform to the demands of Islamic religious law. Akbarabadi noted that there is no need to send the young athletes to the international tournament at any cost, and left the practice session in protest (ISNA, July 7).

