



The Meir Amit Intelligence
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Spotlight on Iran

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Editor: Raz Zimmt



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Discussion on “salvation portents” continues: the miracle of the Supreme Leader’s birth

A video circulated on YouTube this week shows Qom Friday prayer leader Hojjat-ol-Eslam Mohammad Sa’idi ascribing messianic portents to the birth of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. In a sermon delivered by Sa’idi, the cleric related stories told by those close to the Supreme Leader that, at Khamenei’s birth, his step sister heard him say “Ya Ali”, a common utterance among Shi’ites attributed to the first Shi’ite imam, Ali bin Abi Taleb.

According to government critics and opponents of the regime, Sa'idi's remarks are yet another sign indicating the spread of messianic views and attribution of superhuman qualities to the Supreme Leader by radical circles, as seen recently in the distribution of the film "The Reappearance [of the Imam] is Imminent". Among other things, the film claims that Ali Khamenei is Seyyed Khorasani, who according to Shi'ite tradition will lead the community of believers prior to the return of the Twelfth Imam, while President Ahmadinejad is Shu'aib bin Saleh, who is meant to command the imam's army. The film continues to provoke strong criticism from traditional conservative circles in the Shi'ite religious establishment and Iran's political system, which argue that any attempt to give indications as to the time of the imam's return based on actual events is tantamount to deviation from the principles of Shi'ite religious law and may compromise the believers' faith. The Supreme Leader's acting representative to the Revolutionary Guards has claimed recently that the creators of the film are not the only ones who believe that there is a possible connection between Khamenei and Seyyed Khorasani.

Political and media storm over conflicting reports on intelligence minister's sacking

The conflicting reports on Intelligence Minister Heydar Moslehi's sacking by President Ahmadinejad have stirred a political and media storm in Iran this week.

On the evening of Sunday, April 17, Iran's media reported that President Ahmadinejad had accepted the Intelligence Minister's resignation and appointed him intelligence affairs advisor. Several hours later it was reported that the Supreme Leader expressed his objection to Moslehi's removal, and that the minister would therefore remain in his post.

The president's supporters claimed that the report on the Supreme Leader's alleged objection to the minister's removal was baseless, accusing the president's opponents of releasing the report to hurt him and give the impression of differences of opinion between the president and the Supreme Leader. Ali-Akbar Javanfekr, the president's press advisor, defined the release of the report on the Supreme Leader's objection to the minister's removal from office as a "new plot against the government".

The government's critics, on the other hand, took advantage of the affair to once again slam the president and his government, accusing Ahmadinejad of deliberately ignoring the Supreme Leader's position.

The Alef website claimed that it was the second time the president ignored explicit instructions given by the Supreme Leader, after in 2009 he insisted on appointing Rahim Masha'i, his controversial associate, to his first deputy in spite of the Supreme Leader's objections. The Tabnak website also strongly criticized government media and the president's supporters, warning them that they could not do as they please and ignore the desires of the people and the top regime officials. The editor-in-chief of Keyhan claimed that the affair had the fingerprints of the faction affiliated with Masha'i, advising the president to distance himself from its dangerous, harmful influence.

From recruitment of suicide bombers to increased online presence: radical right-wing government supporters step up activities

Hajj Hossein Allah-Karam, one of the founders of the radical Islamic organization Ansar Hezbollah, has announced this week the coming launch of recruiting volunteers for suicide missions to help the Bahrainis' uprising against the regime. In an interview to Ammariyon, a website affiliated with radical circles in the conservative camp, Allah-Karam detailed a four-stage strategy that the Hezbollah Coordination Committee, headed by himself, intends to employ to help the "revolutionists" in the region: organizing processions and distributing memorandums of opinions following Friday prayers in mosques, holding demonstrations in front of the embassies of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, creating human chains in Iran's southern provinces and then in the three islands disputed between Iran and UAE, and launching flotillas to Bahrain and providing Bahrainis with practical assistance.

Hossein Allah-Karam has recently been appointed as member of the central council of a new think tank center established by the Supreme Leader's supporters, called "Base of Ammar" (Gharargah-e Ammar) or "The Strategic Center of the Leader's Supporters Front" (Markaz-e Rahbordi-ye Jebhe-ye Ahl-e Velaa'). The center was established in the wake of the riots that broke out after the presidential elections and the Supreme Leader's message to Iran's elites to mobilize to prevent the reoccurrence of similar events in the future. The center's main tasks include formulating strategies in the cultural and political spheres, coordinating the forces operating on the cultural and political front of the Islamic

revolution, supervising and monitoring the activity of cultural and political bodies and centers, formulating a vision to contend with the “soft war” waged by Iran’s enemies, and identifying the covert and overt activities of Iran’s enemies and their agents inside Iran. Members of the central council include top personalities and major theoreticians affiliated with the radical right wing of the mainstream.

The establishment of the Ammar think tank center reflects the increasing activity of radical circles in the conservative bloc who, over the past year, have joined the campaign against the regime’s opponents and the reformist opposition in light of Iran’s political crisis, which has been escalating since the presidential elections in the summer of 2009. These circles, which came to be called the “Ammariyon Faction” (after Ammar Yasser, one of the supporters of the first Shi’ite imam, Ali bin Abi Taleb), have created several blogs and websites in recent months to mobilize support for the Supreme Leader, disseminate radical views, and wage a struggle against the regime’s opponents.

Government critics once again question official unemployment data as president and deputy make promises to solve unemployment problem

President Ahmadinejad and his vice president Mohammad-Reza Rahimi have recently declared that the government intends to create 2.5 million new workplaces in the coming year to fight the unemployment crisis.

As senior government officials make promises to promote solutions to the unemployment problem, the government’s critics once again criticize the government’s inability to resolve the issue, claiming that the unemployment data released by the government are untrustworthy. Majles member Oodratollah Alikhani noted this week that the official unemployment rate released by the Labor Ministry—10 percent—is incorrect, and that other official reports given to Majles members indicate that the current unemployment rate is 15.6 percent.

The daily Jomhuri-ye Eslami also seriously questioned the unemployment figures released by the government, and demanded that the government publish accurate, reliable data on the number of employed people. The daily also criticized the way the government calculates the number of people with jobs, as even those working for one hour a week are considered to be “employed”.

The daily Mardom Salari seriously questioned the president’s ability to fulfill his promise to solve the unemployment crisis, mentioning that while Ahmadinejad

had promised to eliminate unemployment in the beginning of his term, it has not been eliminated and has not even gone below 10 percent.

Discussion on “salvation portents” continues: the miracle of the Supreme Leader’s birth

This week, several websites and blogs affiliated with the reformist opposition and the regime’s opponents posted a YouTube video showing Qom Friday prayer leader Hojjat-ol-Eslam Mohammad Sa’idi ascribing messianic portents to the birth of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. In a sermon delivered by Sa’idi, the cleric related stories told by those close to the Supreme Leader that, at Khamenei’s birth, his step sister heard him say “Ya Ali”, a common utterance among Shi’ites attributed to the first Shi’ite imam, Ali bin Abi Taleb. According to the story, when Khamenei was due, his step sister called for a delivery nurse. As the baby emerged, the nurse started screaming and said that the baby had called “Ya Ali”.



Hojjat-ol-Eslam Sa’idi’s sermon on YouTube. The video is available at:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3w_VocORRp

Sa’idi claimed that he had recently related the story at a meeting with commanders who had retired from the Revolutionary Guards, and told them that Khamenei was a person who had called “Ya Ali” as soon as he was born and throughout his entire life, and that the believers must forever repeat that call behind the Supreme Leader, because that will guarantee their continuing victory.

According to government critics and opponents of the regime, Sa’idi’s remarks are yet another sign indicating the spread of messianic views and attribution of superhuman qualities to the Supreme Leader by radical circles, as seen recently in the distribution of the film “The Reappearance [of the Imam] is Imminent” (Saham News, April 14). The film’s creators indicate similarities between events that have taken place in the Middle East in recent years and events mentioned by various Shi’ite sources, portraying them as proof of the coming return of the Twelfth Imam. The film also draws parallels between major political players in

the Middle and characters whose appearance marks the Imam's return. Among other things, the film claims that Ali Khamenei is Seyyed Khorasani, who according to Shi'ite tradition will lead the community of believers prior to the return of the Twelfth Imam, while President Ahmadinejad is Shu'aib bin Saleh, who is meant to command the imam's army.

The film continues to provoke strong criticism from traditional conservative circles in the Shi'ite religious establishment and Iran's political system, which argue that any attempt to give indications as to the time of the imam's return based on actual events is tantamount to deviation from the principles of Shi'ite religious law and may compromise the believers' faith.

The Supreme Leader himself has yet to comment on the film despite the strong criticism it has received and the public debate surrounding it. However, Hojjat-ol-Eslam Mojtaba Zolnour, the Supreme Leader's acting representative to the Revolutionary Guards, claimed last week that the film's creators were not the only ones to believe in the existence of a possible link between the Supreme Leader and Seyyed Khorasani. While Zolnour did express reservations regarding some of the themes brought up by the film, he noted that many senior officials and clerics do believe there is a possibility that Seyyed Khorasani may reappear as Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei (Khabar Online, April 12).



-“I’m Seyyed Khorasani”
-“and I’ve been a sheep so far; now I’m a donkey!”
Cartoon by Nikahang Kowsar, Rouz Online, April 17

Ultra-conservative cleric Ayatollah Mohammad-Taqi Mesbah-Yazdi, considered a senior figure in the radical right wing of the conservative bloc, also reacted to the controversial film last week. Cleric Hojjat-ol-Eslam Qasem Ravanbakhsh, Mesbah-Yazdi's close associate, noted that in the past Mesbah-Yazdi had reservations regarding attempts to determine the time of the mehdī's return based on recent events. Ravanbakhsh related that in response to the film “The Reappearance is Imminent”, Mesbah-Yazdi had said that he had much more faith in the Supreme Leader than in Seyyed Khorasani, mentioned in the traditions, and that he did not need those traditions to affirm his faith in Khamenei. Mesbah-Yazdi noted that the believers

must be ready for the possibility that the imam may return at any time, instead of trying to predict the time of his return (www.bibanknews.com, April 14).

Political and media storm over conflicting reports on intelligence minister's sacking

The conflicting reports on Intelligence Minister Heydar Moslehi's sacking by President Ahmadinejad have stirred a political and media storm in Iran this week.

On the evening of Sunday, April 17, Iran's media reported that President Ahmadinejad had accepted the Intelligence Minister's resignation and appointed him intelligence affairs advisor. Several hours later it was reported that the Supreme Leader expressed his objection to Moslehi's removal, and that the minister would therefore remain in his post. Fars, Mehr, and ISNA news agencies therefore removed the initial report on the minister's resignation.

IRNA, a government news agency, claimed that the report on the Supreme Leader's alleged objection to the minister's removal was baseless, claiming that the report was released due to the political considerations of those who oppose the president to give the impression of differences of opinion between the president and the Supreme Leader. IRNA noted that the Supreme Leader's office had issued no official announcement on Khamenei's objection to the minister's removal, and that it would publish the Supreme Leader's official stance on this matter if and when it was available (IRNA, April 18).



Heydar Moslehi, the intelligence minister who was sacked for two hours

Ali-Akbar Javanfekr, the president's press advisor, also claimed that the information on the Supreme Leader's alleged objection to the intelligence minister's removal was false, and that it aimed to compromise the government by portraying the president as not following the Supreme Leader's instructions.

On his official website, Javanfekr wrote that the removal of such an important, strategic minister as the minister of intelligence cannot take place without prior coordination between the president and the Supreme Leader. Accordingly, the conflicting reports released within such a short period of time about the minister's removal and the Supreme Leader's objection are unreasonable and only meant to weaken the president, the Supreme Leader, and the status of the "rule of the religious jurispudent". The president's press advisor defined the release of the report on the Supreme Leader's objection to Moslehi's removal from office as a "new plot against the government".

The government's critics, on the other hand, took advantage of the affair to once again slam the president and his government, accusing Ahmadinejad of deliberately ignoring the Supreme Leader's position.

Alef, a website affiliated with Ahmad Tavakoli, one of Ahmadinejad's major opponents in the conservative bloc, claimed that it was the second time the president ignored explicit instructions given by the Supreme Leader. The website noted that following Ahmadinejad's re-election in 2009 he insisted on appointing his associate Rahim Masha'i to his first vice president in spite of the Supreme Leader's objections. At the time, those close to the president also claimed that the Supreme Leader had issued no formal letter about Masha'i's appointment. It was only after the Supreme Leader released explicit instructions that the president was forced to go back on his decision and appointed Masha'i his office chief instead of first vice president. Also according to Alef, Ali-Akbar Javanfekr recently claimed that the Supreme Leader's letter on Masha'i's appointment as vice president was only a recommendation, and the president was therefore under no obligation to implement it. It appears, Alef says, that the government and the president's media team once again took the Supreme Leader's instructions as a recommendation. The fact that government media refrain from publishing the report on the Supreme Leader's objection to the removal of the intelligence minister reflects, according to Alef, their refusal to accept the Supreme Leader's position as mandatory, using the excuse that Khamenei's position was not officially published by his office (Alef, April 18).

The Tabnak website also strongly criticized government media and the president's supporters for their conduct in the affair. The website also expressed reservations over the fact of the president's decision to dismiss the intelligence minister, claiming that in light of the dramatic developments in the region, making changes to the leadership of the country's most important intelligence body was inappropriate.

According to Tabnak, the behavior of the pro-government media exacerbates Iran's political crisis and seeds doubts among Iranians. The website warned the government supporters that they could no longer delude themselves thinking they may do as they please and ignore the people and the top regime officials. The government will only have support as long as it operates within the context of the principles of the revolution and the approval of the clerics, who according to the website have become the government's most prominent opponents (Tabnak, April 18).

The name of Rahim Masha'i, the president's former office chief, was also brought up in connection with the affair when several news websites reported he had been behind the president's decision to dismiss the intelligence minister. The Jahan News website said that Masha'i had pressured the president into dismissing Moslehi after the minister had dismissed his deputy Hossein Abdollahi, deputy minister for planning and budget, who was Masha'i's close associate (Jahan News, April 18).

Hossein Shariatmadari, the editor-in-chief of Keyhan, also mentioned Masha'i in connection with the affair, strongly criticizing pro-government media for not reporting the Supreme Leader's objection to the removal of the minister. Shariatmadari insinuated that it was the faction affiliated with Masha'i that attempted to keep the media from releasing information on the Supreme Leader's objection. Luckily, says an editorial published by the editor-in-chief of Keyhan, President Ahmadinejad saw himself committed to the Supreme Leader's instructions. The government news agency, however, continued ignoring the Supreme Leader's instructions, apparently acting on Masha'i's orders. Shariatmadari advised the president to distance himself from Masha'i's dangerous, harmful influence (Keyhan, April 19).

From recruitment of suicide bombers to increased online presence: radical right-wing government supporters step up activities

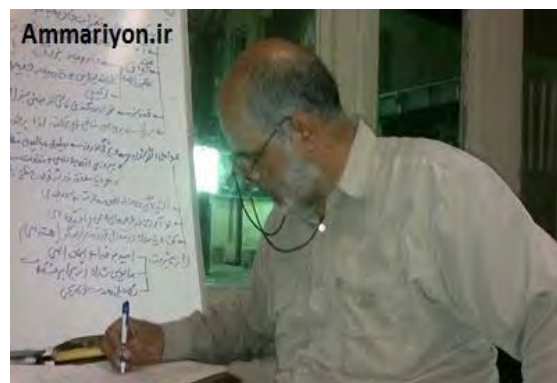
Hajj Hossein Allah-Karam, one of the founders of the radical Islamic organization Ansar Hezbollah, has announced this week the coming launch of recruiting volunteers for suicide missions to help the Bahrainis' uprising against the regime.

In an interview to Ammariyon (www.ammariyon.ir), a website affiliated with radical circles in the conservative camp, Allah-Karam provided details on the strategy that the Hezbollah Coordination Council, headed by himself, intends to employ to help the "revolutionists" in the region. According to Allah-Karam, the strategy relies on the position of the council, which believes that the government must extend assistance and support to the peoples of Saudi Arabia, Libya, Gaza, Bahrain, and Yemen in their uprisings against their respective regimes.

The strategy consists of four stages: first, organizing processions and distributing memorandums of opinion following Friday prayers in mosques; second, holding demonstrations in front of the embassies of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain; third, creating human chains in Iran's southern provinces and then in the three islands disputed between Iran and UAE (Abu Musa and the Greater and Lesser Tunbs); fourth, launching flotillas to Bahrain and providing Bahrainis with practical assistance. As part of the strategy, the council will soon begin registering volunteers willing to go to the conflict areas to carry out suicide missions (Ammariyon, April 15).

Hossein Allah-Karam, a former Revolutionary Guards senior officer, is one of the founders and leaders of Ansar Hezbollah, a radical Islamic militia that, mainly in the late 1990s and early 2000s, employed violence against reformists, intellectuals, liberals, and students who opposed the regime.

In September 2005 Allah-Karam expressed support for suicide missions against the West. He claimed that, in light of America's insistence on maintaining a military option against Iran, there could be no objection to suicide missions, and that dozens of volunteers had already expressed willingness to go on such missions. In 2007 Allah-Karam was made Iran's military attaché in Croatia.



Hossein Allah-Karam has recently been appointed as member of the central council of a new think tank center established by the Supreme Leader's supporters, called "Base of Ammar" (Gharargah-e Ammar) or "The Strategic Center of the Leader's Supporters Front" (Markaz-e Rahbordi-ye Jebhe-ye Ahl-e Velaa'). It is named after Ammar Yasser, who was close to Prophet Muhammad and one of the main supporters of the first imam, Ali bin Abi Taleb. He was killed in the battle of Siffin, which took place between Ali and Muawiyah bin Abi Sufyan, the governor of Syria, in 657 AD.

This week, the conservative Fars News Agency reported that Hojjat-ol-Eslam Mehdi Ta'eb was appointed chief of the center, with Ali-Reza Panahian as his deputy. In an interview granted to the news agency, Panahian said that the center was established in the wake of the riots that broke out after the presidential elections and the Supreme Leader's message to Iran's elites to mobilize to prevent the reoccurrence of similar events in the future. Consequently, senior political and cultural personalities held several meetings and came to the conclusion that there was need for coordination between the active cultural forces to contend with Iran's domestic and foreign enemies and implement the Supreme Leader's views. According to Panahian, the center's first general conference was attended by 70 major personalities who had until then acted in different cultural institutions across the country. Members of the center's central council have been elected recently and a charter defining its main tasks has been approved. The tasks include formulating strategies in the cultural and political spheres, coordinating the forces operating on the cultural and political front of the Islamic revolution, supervising and monitoring the activity of cultural and political bodies and centers, formulating a vision to contend with the "soft war" waged by Iran's enemies, and identifying the covert and overt activities of Iran's enemies and their agents inside Iran. Panahian said that further details on the activity of the new center were forthcoming (Fars, April 15).

The 15 members of the central council elected to lead the center include top personalities and major theoreticians affiliated with the radical right wing of the conservative bloc, including Sa'id Qasemi, Hassan Abbasi, and Qasem Ravanbakhsh.

Sa'id Qasemi, a former Revolutionary Guards intelligence officer, is considered one of the most prominent theoreticians on strategy issues among President Ahmadinejad's advisors. In the past, Qasemi spoke in favor of establishing Iranian resistance cells in Europe as one of the ways to deal with the pressure exerted by the West on Iran. During a convention held during the second Lebanon war (waged between Israel and Hezbollah), attended by volunteers for suicide operations against Israel and the West, Qasemi called to use suicide forces against Israel, saying they were preferable to long-range missiles.

Hassan Abbasi, head of the Revolutionary Guards-affiliated Center for Doctrinal Analysis, is considered one of the major conservative theoreticians. He is believed to be one of the experts who have had considerable influence over President Ahmadinejad's strategic and defense views. A high-profile proponent of "asymmetrical warfare", he has stressed the need for using suicide warfare in case of a military attack on Iran's nuclear facilities. In recent years, Abbasi has become known in Iran and even elsewhere for a series of extremist remarks and strong criticism against senior figures affiliated with the reformist bloc.

The cleric Qasem Ravanbakhsh is a student of ultra-conservative cleric Mohammad-Taqi Mesbah-Yazdi, and the editor-in-chief of the radical conservative weekly Parto-ye Sokhan.

The establishment of the Ammar think tank center reflects the increasing activity of radical circles in the conservative bloc who, over the past year, have joined the campaign against the regime's opponents and the reformist opposition in light of Iran's political crisis, which has been escalating since the presidential elections in the summer of 2009. These circles, which came to be called the "Ammariyon Faction" (after Ammar Yasser, one of the supporters of the first Shi'ite imam, Ali Bin Abu Taleb), have built several blogs and websites in recent months to mobilize support for the Supreme Leader, disseminate radical views, and wage a struggle against the regime's opponents. The following websites and blogs should be noted in the context of this online activity: www.ammariyon.ir, www.mehrabehandishe.blogfa.com, www.aynaammar.ir, www.ammargroup.persianblog.ir.

Government critics once again question official unemployment data as Ahmadinejad and vice president make promises to solve unemployment problem

President Ahmadinejad announced last week that the government intends to create 2.5 million new workplaces in the coming year to fight the unemployment crisis. In a speech given by the president during a visit to the southeastern Sistan-Baluchistan Province, Ahmadinejad said that the government had decided to invest about 130 billion dollars to create new workplaces by establishing employment training centers and new employment projects.

Vice president Mohammad-Reza Rahimi has also announced this week that the government intends to create 2.5 million workplaces in the coming year. In a speech given at an international economic conference in Tehran, Rahimi said that the government had created 1.6 new workplaces last year, and that by creating 2.5 million workplaces it intends to lower the unemployment rate to below 5 percent (Mehr, April 16).

As senior government officials make promises to promote solutions to the unemployment problem, the government's critics once again criticize the government's inability to resolve the issue, claiming that the unemployment figures released by the government are untrustworthy. Majles member Qodratollah Alikhani noted this week that the official unemployment rate released by the Labor Ministry—10 percent—is incorrect, and that other official reports given to Majles members indicate that the current unemployment rate is 15.6 percent—that is, 4 million unemployed people.



Alikhani added that, due to the increasing cost of energy products caused by the subsidy policy reform, many factories are now facing a severe crisis and are unable to continue production. He warned that the crisis may further exacerbate the unemployment problem. Alikhani also noted that the fact that Friday prayer leaders in mosques across Iran speak about the unemployment problem in their sermons is proof that the government's figures on the alleged drop in unemployment are untrue, and that Iranians are unaware of any such drop (Aftab, April 17).

The daily Jomhuri-ye Eslami, affiliated with Expediency Discernment Council chairman Ali-Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, also seriously questioned the unemployment figures released by the government. An editorial published by the daily states that in recent months, Ahmadinejad and his vice president had given three conflicting figures on the number of new workplaces the government was able to create last year.

The government's promise to create 2.5 million workplaces is also highly questionable, according to Jomhuri-ye Eslami, and it is unclear what the government's figures are based on. The daily noted that even those working just one hour a week are considered to be "employed", wondering how one could live off just one hour of work per week.

The daily demanded that the government publish accurate, reliable data on the number of employed people, since the conflicting figures undermine the public's trust in the information provided by the government. The ministries of labor, economy, housing, and industry, as well as the Central Bank, must also provide accurate data on the funding required for the creation of new workplaces in the cities and villages to let the Majles calculate whether the budget proposal submitted by the government to its approval provides the necessary funds to realize its promise of creating another 2.5 million new workplaces (Jomhuri-ye Eslami, April 17).

The daily Mardom Salari also questioned the president's ability to fulfill its promise to solve the unemployment crisis. The daily claimed that while Ahmadinejad had made a promise to

eliminate unemployment in 2006, it has not been eliminated and has not even gone below 10 percent. The president has recently promised once again to solve the unemployment problem; however, it is unclear how he intends to follow through on his promise. The daily noted that even developed countries with smaller population growth rates than Iran's are having difficulties facing the unemployment problem. Iranians do hope that the president's promises come true and are willing to help him realize them. In light of world experience and the government's performance in recent years, however, it is highly doubtful whether the president's promises can be fulfilled in such a short time, Mardom Salari said (Mardom Salari, April 11).

Economic commentators have been claiming for years that Iran's true unemployment rate is considerably higher than suggested by the government's official figures, estimating it to be in the 25-30 percent range and particularly high among younger Iranians. The figures released by the government are based on a slanted calculation of the number of employed people, defining soldiers, students, and housewives to be "employed".

Pictures of the week: Army Day events, April 18



