



**The Meir Amit Intelligence
and Terrorism Information Center**



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Iranian media reacts to EU foreign policy chief's letter on possibility of resuming nuclear talks

This week the EU's foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton expressed the willingness of the 5-plus-1 group to hold another meeting with Iranian representatives within several weeks to resume talks on Iran's nuclear program. It has to be ensured, Ashton stressed, that the talks lead to significant progress and concrete results and do not end like the last round of talks between Iran and the West, which took place in Istanbul in January 2011.

The reformist daily Mardom Salari said that Ashton's letter shows that both sides (Iran and the 5-plus-1 group) have come to the conclusion that negotiation is the best way to put their fears to rest. Criticizing belligerent statements formerly made by top Iranian officials on the nuclear talks with the West, the daily argued that, in Iran's current political atmosphere, top regime officials have an attitude of respect for the decisions made by the Supreme National Security Council and no longer make bizarre statements against it.

The Iranian Diplomacy website suggested that Ashton's offer to resume the nuclear talks should be accepted, and that Iran's agreement to resume the talks just prior to the release of the IAEA chairman's report on the Iranian nuclear program may alleviate some of the pressure the report is expected to generate.

The conservative press, however, once again took an uncompromising stance on the resumption of negotiations with the Western world. The daily Keyhan argued that there is nothing new in Ashton's letter, and that it once again brings up the two familiar Western demands from Iran: to avoid restating the positions expressed by its representatives during the Istanbul talks, and to agree to practical confidence-building measures at the very start of the talks. It was the daily's assessment that the letter aims to secure the support of Russia, China, and Germany in stepping up the pressure exerted on Iran following the coming publication of the IAEA chairman's report, and to stir internal differences of opinion in Iran between supporters and opponents of resuming the nuclear talks with the West.

The daily Jam-e Jam claimed that Ashton's letter should be considered in the light of the statement made by President Ahmadinejad during his last visit to the UN General Assembly, according to which Iran is willing to consider suspending the enrichment of uranium to 20 percent in exchange for the West's willingness to

provide it with nuclear fuel. The daily also argued that the willingness shown by the West to resume negotiations with Iran stems from its recognition that the policy of sanctions is ineffective.

The daily Siyasat-e Rooz also had reservations about Ashton's letter, defining it as a tactical measure aimed to increase the pressure exerted on Iran. Even though Iran wants the negotiations to succeed, it does not mean that it has to go to the talks as a defendant, and there is no point in negotiations that do not recognize its rights. If the West is serious about holding talks with Iran, it has to abandon the policy of sanctions and threats. Iran will not give up its rights, and it is the West that will be left with the taste of defeat.

Lessons from dictator's death: Iranian media reactions to death of Qaddafi

This week the Iranian media gave extensive coverage of the death of Libya's former ruler Muammar Qaddafi, expressing its satisfaction with his fate. The conservative media reported that the fate of the Libyan dictator should become a lesson for other dictators in the Arab world. At the same time, the Iranian media stressed that Qaddafi's fall was made possible thanks to the struggle of the Libyan people rather than the actions of Western countries, warning the West against attempts to exploit his death to entrench its military, political, and economic hold in the new Libya.

The daily Jomhuri-ye Eslami condemned Qaddafi for bullying the citizens of his country while showing weakness in his dealings with the world powers, as evidenced by his surrender to the West with regard to the nuclear issue. The daily opined that the fate of the Libyan dictator will be similar to the fate of other dictators in the Middle East, mainly the rulers of Yemen, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan.

The daily Keyhan accused the West of playing a double game with Libya and its former ruler. For years, Western leaders have ignored Qaddafi's crimes and his country's involvement in terrorism, supporting him in exchange for financial and economic benefits. It was only when Qaddafi was faced with the wrath of his citizens that Western leaders were forced to dispatch their forces to Libya to secure their interests in other ways. The daily Siyasat-e Rooz also argued that the Western world is trying to take credit for the Libyan people's success in toppling the dictator. Western leaders, particularly President Obama, claim that if it wasn't

for the Western assistance, the Libyans would not have won the fight. However, most of the sites attacked by NATO forces were installations having to do with the oil industry, and the attacks on those sites were aimed to give the West future control of the oil market.

Iranian bloggers operating on the internet did more than just express their satisfaction with Qaddafi's death: they said that a similar fate awaits the Iranian dictator. The Supreme Leader has to learn the lesson of Qaddafi's death and take a look at his two only remaining photographs: a photograph of his mutilated corpse, and another where he is seen standing next to Khamenei.

Presidential or parliamentary system: growing public discourse on possible change of government system

Several weeks ago a number of Majles members suggested dispensing with the office of president, restoring the institution of prime minister (abolished in 1989), and transferring the authority to elect the head of the executive branch to the Majles. Last week Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei first addressed the possibility of changing the system of government. Khamenei said that the current system, where the president is directly elected by the people, is good and effective. He did not rule out the possibility, however, of changes being introduced into the system in the distant future.

The Supreme Leader's remarks have provoked an intensive public discourse on a possible change of the government system. Most politicians affiliated with the conservative camp expressed their support in principle for changing the system. Majles speaker Ali Larijani announced this week that he supports moving from a presidential to a parliamentary government system. Placing the election of the president in the hands of the Majles, Larijani said, will strengthen the status of the legislative branch and improve coordination between the three branches of government.

Cleric Mohsen Gharavian, a student of top radical cleric Ayatollah Mohammad Taqi Mesbah Yazdi, also expressed his support for changing the government system, saying that most clerics support such a change to enhance the unity between the government and the Majles and to reduce the considerable expenses involved in the current system of electing a president.

Some of President Ahmadinejad's supporters, however, voiced reservations about the possibility of giving the Majles the authority to elect a president. Blogger Mojtaba Daneshtalab strongly criticized the proposal, saying it is a mistaken idea that will rob the people of their right to directly elect a president, and provoke widespread public resistance.

Elements in the reformist camp also expressed their concern that taking the power to elect a president away from the people and giving it to the Majles will further strengthen the status of the Supreme Leader and the authoritarian tendency followed by the regime in recent years. Expediency Discernment Council chairman Ali-Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani expressed his concern that a change in the government system could weaken the foundation of republicanism, which, together with the foundation of Islam, is a cornerstone of the Iranian regime.

Another example of Green Movement's distress: reformist media on verge of bankruptcy

Rah-e Sabz, the official website of the reformist opposition, which operates outside of Iran, published a special announcement this week asking Iranians for urgent financial assistance to keep the website online. An announcement published by the website said that, unless a specified amount is secured by November 15, the website, which suffers from a severe budget deficit, will be forced to shut down.

At the same time, RASA TV, a channel used by the reformist opposition, admitted that it is likewise facing a severe economic crisis that threatens its ability to remain operational. Reformist activists claimed that the Iranian authorities succeeded in stopping the flow of funds from Iran to Europe, on which the channel depended for its operation, and even in tracking down and blocking some of RASA TV's information sources in Iran.

The conservative media was satisfied to report the economic distress of the reformist media. The daily Keyhan reported the "bankruptcy of the green media in London and Paris", arguing this is yet another example of the reformist movement's defeat. The daily made mocking comments about the claims brought forward by the reformist media that they avoid receiving financial assistance from foreign countries, arguing that they get millions of dollars from the Western world, particularly the United States.

Coming soon: special bicycle for women

Mohammad Royanian, head of the Transportation and Fuel Management Office, reported this week that development is currently underway of a special bicycle women can ride without fear of violating the rules of Islamic conduct. The bicycle is also designed to be useable by women in the cities, being part of a policy encouraging the use of this means of transportation in the big cities, plagued by a transportation crisis and extreme air pollution.

For many years, the issue of women using bicycles has been the subject of a fierce public debate in Iran. Last year, top conservative cleric Seyyed Ahmad 'Alam al-Hoda announced that the participation of women in bicycle competitions is forbidden in Islamic religious law.

Iranian media reacts to EU foreign policy chief's letter on possibility of resuming nuclear talks

This week the EU's foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton expressed the willingness of the 5-plus-1 group (the five permanent Security Council members and Germany) to hold another meeting with Iranian representatives within several weeks to resume talks on Iran's nuclear program. It has to be ensured, Ashton stressed, that the talks lead to significant progress and concrete results and do not end like the last round of talks between Iran and the West, which took place in Istanbul in January 2011. In a response to a letter sent by Supreme National Security Council chairman Sa'id Jalili, in September 2011 Ashton said that Iran must be willing to engage in negotiations without pre-conditions, take confidence-building measures, and provide a response to the international community's concerns over its nuclear program.

Alaeddin Boroujerdi, chairman of the Majles National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, commented on Ashton's letter by saying that Iran had never refused to hold talks with the West based on the principles it had previously proposed for resuming the negotiations (Fars, October 23). During the Istanbul talks, Iran demanded an unequivocal recognition of its right to enrich uranium and the removal of the international sanctions imposed on it, among other things.

The Iranian press also commented on the letter sent by the EU's foreign policy chief. The reformist daily Mardom Salari said that Ashton's letter shows that both sides (Iran and the 5-plus-1 group) have come to the conclusion that negotiation is the best way to put their fears to rest, and that any other strategy is unsuccessful and costly.

Criticizing belligerent statements formerly made by top Iranian officials, including President Ahmadinejad and Majles speaker Ali Larijani, on the nuclear talks with the West, the daily argued that, in Iran's current political atmosphere, top regime officials have an attitude of respect for the decisions made by the Supreme National Security Council and no longer make bizarre statements against it (Mardom Salari, October 23).

The Iranian Diplomacy website suggested that Ashton's offer to resume the nuclear talks should be accepted, saying that, by agreeing to resume the talks just prior to the release of the IAEA chairman's report on the Iranian nuclear program, which is likely to be problematic for Iran, the country may alleviate the tension and tone down the threats and pressure the report is expected to generate (Iranian Diplomacy, October 24).



Unlike Mardom Salari and Iranian Diplomacy, the conservative press once again took an uncompromising stance on the resumption of negotiations with the Western world. The daily Keyhan argued that there is nothing new in Ashton's letter, and that it once again brings up the two familiar Western demands from Iran: to avoid restating the positions expressed by its representatives during the Istanbul talks, and to agree to practical confidence-building measures at the very start of the talks.

An editorial published by Keyhan said that Ashton's letter has four main objectives: to make Iran realize that, while it is coming under increasing pressure, the door has not closed on the possibility of negotiations; to secure the support of Russia, China, and Germany in stepping up the pressure exerted on Iran ahead of the release of the IAEA chairman's report on the Iranian nuclear program, scheduled for next month; to encourage Iran to give a positive response to the Russian foreign minister's proposal to resume the nuclear talks; and to stir internal differences of opinion in Iran between those who support the resumption of the negotiations with the West and those who believe that such negotiations are pointless (Keyhan, October 24).

The daily Jam-e Jam also said that Ashton's letter has to do with the coming release of the IAEA chairman's report and the intention of the United States to step up the pressure on Iran after its release. The daily further argued that the statement made by President Ahmadinejad during his last visit to the UN General Assembly, according to which Iran is willing to consider suspending the enrichment of uranium to 20 percent in exchange for the West's willingness to provide it with nuclear fuel, encouraged the foreign policy chief to answer Jalili's letter on the resumption of the talks. The West has realized, according to Jam-e Jam, that the policy of sanctions and pressure against Iran is ineffective, and that there is no way to contend with it other than talks (Jam-e Jam, October 23).

The daily Siyasat-e Rooz also had reservations about Ashton's letter, defining it as a tactical measure aimed to increase the pressure exerted on Iran rather than advance the negotiations. Ashton should be reminded, said an editorial published by the daily, that the talks between Iran and the West have to be conducted on equal terms. While Iran does want the negotiations to succeed, it does not mean that it has to go to the talks as a defendant. Talks conducted for the sole purpose of exerting pressure on Iran are meaningless, and there is no point in negotiations just for the sake of negotiations. According to Siyasat-e Rooz, Ashton wants the negotiations to end with what is for her the desired outcome: the suspension of Iran's nuclear activity, which goes against Iran's rights. While Iran is interested in securing the nuclear fuel it needs, and is even willing, as noted by President Ahmadinejad, to suspend the enrichment of uranium to 20 percent in exchange for the supply of nuclear fuel, the West keeps looking for excuses to exert pressure on Iran (Siyasat-e Rooz, October 24).

Another article published by Siyasat-e Rooz said that Western countries must cease their demands to suspend Iran's nuclear activity, stop the carrot-and-stick policy employed towards Iran, and acknowledge that, given the economic crisis they are facing and their failing position on the international scene, they need Iran and the negotiations with it more than Iran needs them. If the West is serious about holding talks with Iran, it has to abandon the policy of sanctions and threats for one that is reasonable. The Iranian people and regime are not willing to give up their rights and will continue following their own path, while it is the West that will be left with the taste of defeat, Siyasat-e Rooz said (Siyasat-e Rooz, October 25).

Lessons from dictator's death: Iranian media reactions to death of Qaddafi

This week the Iranian media gave extensive coverage of the death of Libya's former ruler Muammar Qaddafi, expressing its satisfaction with his fate. The conservative media reported

that the fate of the Libyan dictator should become a lesson for other dictators in the Arab world. At the same time, the Iranian media stressed that Qaddafi's fall was made possible thanks to the struggle of the Libyan people rather than the actions of Western countries, warning the West against attempts to exploit his death to entrench its military, political, and economic hold in the new Libya.

The daily Jomhuri-ye Eslami said that a death that makes other people happy is one of the worst kinds of death. Qaddafi's main problem was that he bullied the citizens of his country and yet showed weakness in his dealings with world powers. While proclaiming himself the leader of the Arab world, he agreed to yield to Western countries on the nuclear issue and surrender his nuclear facilities.

The daily added that Qaddafi did not learn the lessons of other dictators in the Middle East, and that a similar fate awaits such Middle Eastern dictators as the rulers of Yemen, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan (Jomhuri-ye Eslami, October 22).

The daily Keyhan accused the West of playing a double game in its policy towards Libya and its former ruler. For years, Qaddafi had enjoyed the broad-based support of Western leaders, who were willing to ignore his crimes and his country's involvement in terrorism in exchange for financial and economic benefits. Western leaders' recent change of policy towards Qaddafi cannot erase their long-standing support of the dictator.

Keyhan accused Qaddafi of waging a prolonged battle against anti-Western elements in the Arab world: he detained top Lebanese Shi'ite cleric Musa Sadr, avoided supporting Hezbollah in the second Lebanon war, refused to support the leaders of Hamas in Operation Cast Lead, and joined Israel and the United States in supporting the South Sudanese struggle for independence from Arab Sudan.

For years, the Libyan intelligence apparatus collaborated with the intelligence services of Britain, France, Italy, and the United States in oppressing the people of Libya and government opponents. By collaborating with Western leaders and quickly dropping his nuclear program, so vital for the Libyan people, Qaddafi made it obvious that he was willing to sacrifice his people for his own interests. Western leaders were partners in Qaddafi's crimes against his people, Keyhan said, but when he was faced with the wrath of his citizens, they sent their troops to the battlefield to secure Western interests in other ways. Now these leaders are trying to claim that, not only they did not support Qaddafi, but that they played a major role in his downfall (Keyhan, October 22).

The daily Qods also expressed opposition to the Western policy towards Libya, arguing that, contrary to the claims made by NATO, it is thanks to the Libyan people that the dictator was toppled. Western countries strive to secure their interests in light of the developments in Libya, trying to evoke a sense of obligation from the Libyan people to let the West maintain its presence in Libya. The daily advised the citizens of Libya not to ignore Western plans to establish military bases in Libya and expand the activity of the big oil companies under the pretext of restoration and economic development (Qods, October 22).

The daily Siyasat-e Rooz also argued that the Western world is trying to take credit for the Libyan people's success in toppling the dictator. Every Western leader, particularly President Obama, is trying to make themselves part of Qaddafi's fall, claiming that if it wasn't for the Western assistance, the Libyans would not have won the fight. However, most of the sites attacked by NATO forces were installations having to do with the oil industry, and the attacks on those sites were aimed to give the West future control of the oil market and take advantage of the situation in Libya for making economic profits (Siyasat-e Rooz, October 22).



From Sharq, October 22

The reformist press also expressed its satisfaction with the fate of the Libyan dictator, saying that over the years he had distanced himself from the people of his country and exploited the resources of Libya for his own interests (Sharq, October 22). Iranian bloggers operating on the internet did more than just express their satisfaction with Qaddafi's death: they said that a similar fate awaits the Iranian dictator. One blogger wrote that the death of the Libyan dictator should be a message for Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. The Iranian leader needs to see that there is nothing left of Qaddafi except for two photographs: a photograph of his mutilated corpse, and another where he is seen standing next to Khamenei. Qaddafi also ignored his citizens, slaughtered them on the streets, considered himself an all-knowing ruler and his citizens as meaningless. Khamenei needs to learn the lesson, become concerned, and think about the bad impression he will leave behind (<http://iraniangreenvoice.blogspot.com>,

October 20). Another blogger asked Khamenei to take a look at Qaddafi's photographs and contemplate the fate of the one who killed his citizens, threatened the whole world, thought that he would leave his sons in power, and until several months ago did not even imagine the possibility of meeting such a fate (<http://neoeblis.blogspot.com>, October 20).

Presidential or parliamentary system: growing public discourse on possible change of government system

In recent days media and top officials have addressed the possibility of changing Iran's government system and method of presidential elections. The issue was first brought up several weeks ago on the backdrop of the strong differences of opinion between the president and the Majles. A number of Majles members suggested dispensing with the office of president, restoring the institution of prime minister (abolished in 1989), and transferring the authority to elect the head of the executive branch to the Majles.

Last week Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei first discussed the possibility of changing the system of government. In a speech given during his visit in Kermanshah Province, Khamenei said that the current system, where the president is directly elected by the people, is good and effective. He added, however, that if it becomes evident in the distant future that a parliamentary government system is better than a presidential system, there will be no problem to change the government system by amending the constitution.

The Supreme Leader's remarks have provoked an intensive public discourse on the possible change of the government system. Most politicians affiliated with the conservative camp expressed their support in principle for such a change. Majles speaker Ali Larijani announced this week that he supports moving from a presidential to a parliamentary government system. In an interview to Mehr News Agency, Larijani said that placing the election of the president in the hands of the Majles will strengthen the status of the legislative branch and improve its ability to monitor the executive branch as well as the coordination between all three branches of government.

He noted that the Supreme Leader was not referring to the revival of the institution of prime minister but rather to the transfer of the authority to elect a president to the Majles. Larijani argued that the election of a president should be left to those with experience and expertise, just as the Supreme Leader is elected by the Assembly of Experts. Direct presidential elections, according to Larijani, are only possible in countries with strong parties that can screen and control candidates. Since Iran has no strong ideological parties, it is better to transfer the authority of election to the Majles. Commenting on claims that changing the government system would strengthen anti-democratic tendencies, Larijani said that such a

change would reduce the possibility of tyranny since it will shift the president-Majles balance of power to the Majles, which reflects the sovereignty of the people (Mehr, October 22).



Larijani's reaction to the Supreme Leader's remarks: Why wait for the distant future? (Rooz Online, October 24)

Majles member Hamid Reza Katouzian, one of the first to bring up the possibility of changing the government system, once again expressed support for the change. In an interview to the Khabar Online website, the conservative Majles member said that the current political structure in Iran is problematic because it defines, on one hand, the president as chief of the executive authority, and on the other hand limits his status vis-à-vis the Supreme Leader. According to Katouzian, changing the government system will reinforce the status of the Majles and allow it to better control the head of the executive branch, and even remove him from office if necessary without causing a severe political crisis (Khabar Online, October 24).

Cleric Mohsen Gharavian, a student of top radical cleric Ayatollah Mohammad Taqi Mesbah Yazdi, also expressed his support for changing the government system. In an interview given to the Asr-e Iran website, Gharavian argued that the current method of presidential elections is not good. He said that, to the best of his knowledge, most clerics support changing the system to enhance the unity between the government and the Majles and to reduce the considerable expenses involved in the current method of presidential elections. In Gharavian's view, Ahmadinejad is the last president elected using the existing method (Asr-e Iran, October 24). On the other hand, Majles member Hassan Ghafouri-Fard estimated that no change in the government system is forthcoming in the next decade. He noted that the Supreme Leader's remarks on a possible change of the system are geared mostly towards expert discussions, and that there is no urgent need to be concerned with the issue (Basirat, October 24).

Some of President Ahmadinejad's supporters voiced reservations about the possibility of giving the Majles the authority to elect a president. Blogger Mojtaba Daneshtalab strongly

condemned the Supreme Leader's remarks, saying that placing the election authority in the hands of the Majles is a mistaken idea that will rob the people of their right to directly elect a president and provoke widespread public resistance. He warned that, in the event that the government system is changed, the government may become a tool to be used by Majles politicians as they wish (Digarban, October 17). The government daily Iran also voiced reservations about the idea of entrusting the Majles with the power to elect a president, arguing that those who support changing the system are those who wish to position themselves as the "political elite" (Iran, October 16).

Some in the reformist opposition also expressed their concerns about changing the system, arguing that taking the power to elect a president away from the people and giving it to the Majles will further strengthen the status of the Supreme Leader and the authoritarian tendencies of the regime (Jaras, October 24). Expediency Discernment Council chairman Ali-Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani had reservations about changing the government system. Speaking at a meeting with journalists, Rafsanjani said that the Iranian regime is based on two elements, republicanism and Islam, and expressed his concern that a change in the system could weaken the foundation of republicanism and restrict the people's power of election (Khabar Online, October 24).

Another example of Green Movement's distress: reformist media on verge of bankruptcy

Rah-e Sabz ("The Green Path", Jaras), the official website of the reformist opposition, which operates outside of Iran, published a special announcement this week asking Iranians for urgent financial assistance to keep the website online. An announcement published on behalf of the Political Council of the Green Path said that, unless urgent and constant assistance is secured by November 15, the website will be forced to shut down.

According to the announcement, the Jaras website is on the verge of a severe budget deficit, and the difficult conditions facing its operators make it impossible for the website to remain online. In its announcement, the council stressed that the principles on which the website operates prevent its owners from accepting assistance from foreign countries, and that increasing suppression from the Iranian authorities has eliminated the option of relying on funds transferred by Iranians residing in Iran. Accordingly, Iranian citizens who reside abroad are asked to volunteer to save the website and donate money to keep it online (Jaras, October 22).

The activity of the official Green Movement website began in July 2009, shortly after the outbreak of the riots that began after the presidential elections in Iran.



The homepage of Jaras, the reformist opposition website

At the same time, RASA TV, a channel used by the reformist opposition, admitted that it is likewise facing a severe economic crisis that threatens its ability to remain operational. Reformist activists claimed that the Iranian authorities succeeded in stopping the flow of funds from Iran to Europe, on which the channel depended for its operation, and even in tracking down and blocking some of RASA TV's information sources in Iran.

An article published on the Jaras website this week said that RASA TV is essential for the ongoing operation of the reformist movement given the severe limitations imposed by the Iranian authorities on the activity of non-government media. According to the author of the article, RASA is an alternative, independent information source that can make the voice of Iranians heard at a time when the government broadcasting authority enjoys a total monopoly on the media. Iranians residing in Iran and elsewhere were called to mobilize through the station's website or Facebook and donate as much as they can to keep RASA in operation (Jaras, October 20).

The conservative media was satisfied to report the economic distress of the reformist media. The daily Keyhan reported the "bankruptcy of the green media in London and Paris", arguing that this is yet another example of the reformist movement's defeat. The daily reported that the Jaras website has been in a state of total stasis for the past several months, and even lost its credibility with the public by releasing wrong, false information on happenings in Iran. The daily made mocking comments about the claims brought forward by the website that its operators do not receive financial assistance from foreign countries, arguing that top anti-regime activists behind the activity of Europe-based reformist media get millions of dollars' worth of financial assistance from American and Western elements (Keyhan, October 23).

Coming soon: special bicycle for women

Mohammad Royanian, head of the Transportation and Fuel Management Office, reported this week that development is currently underway of a special bicycle women can ride without

fear of violating the Islamic dress code. In an interview to ISNA, Royanian said that the new bicycle is designed to let women ride it while adhering to the rules of Islamic conduct.

The bicycle is also designed to be useable by women in the cities, being part of a policy encouraging the use of this means of transportation in the big cities. In recent years authorities in Tehran have attempted to encourage the use of bicycles and installed dedicated bicycle lanes in some areas of the city as part of the efforts to deal with the transportation crisis and air pollution in the capital. The deputy mayor for transportation recently defined the current year as “the year of promoting the use of bicycles”, reporting that by the end of the year the municipality intends to complete the installation of over 300 kilometers of bicycle lanes and the deployment of 1,000 bicycle racks across the city (ISNA, October 24).

For many years the issue of women using bicycles has been the subject of a fierce public debate in Iran. In the 1990s, Faizeh Hashemi, the daughter of former president and Expediency Discernment Council chairman Ali-Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, encouraged women to ride bicycles as head of the Olympic committee for women. Her views provoked strong resistance among conservative clerics, which has persisted throughout recent years.



Last year Seyyed Ahmad 'Alam al-Hoda, the Friday prayer leader in the city of Mashhad, strongly criticized the participation of women in bicycle competitions. He announced that Islamic religious law strictly forbids women from participating in this branch of sports, and that the broadcasting of bicycle competitions for women is an offense to the values of an Islamic society.

In 2007 the Iranian media first reported the development of a special “Islamic bicycle” for women, designed to allow riders to conceal their lower body in a special compartment.

Pictures of the week: President Ahmadinejad's visit to South Khorasan Province





ISNA

ISNA/PHOTO:HAMID FOROOTAN