



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



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Highlights of the week:

- ✓ “New Zionist plotline against Iran”: Iranian reactions to terrorist attacks on Israeli missions
- ✓ Reformist opposition leaders have now been under arrest for one year; sporadic confrontations between opposition supporters and security forces
- ✓ 30 million Iranians without e-mail: authorities block access to leading websites
- ✓ Despite government efforts, dollar’s exchange rate goes up again; prices of food and housing continue to increase
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“New Zionist plotline against Iran”: Iranian reactions to terrorist attacks on Israeli missions

This week Iranian officials emphatically denied Israel’s claims that Iran was involved in the two terrorist attacks on Israeli missions in India and Georgia, and accused Israel of masterminding the terrorist attacks to incite world public opinion against Iran.

Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast categorically denied any Iranian responsibility in connection with the attacks, saying that they were planned by the Zionists to cause damage to Iran and compromise its relations with India and Georgia.

Javad Jahangirzadeh, a member of the Majles Foreign Policy and National Security Committee, said that the bomb attacks at the two Israeli missions reflect the world's revulsion towards the Zionists, and were carried out either by Israel itself or by a group that despises Israel. Addressing PM Netanyahu's claims about Iranian involvement in the terrorist attacks, the Majles member said that Israel is concerned about Iran and is trying to influence the future nuclear talks between Iran and the West. He added that the Zionists, having failed in their attempts to incite the world against Iran, are willing to spill their own blood to redirect the hatred the world has for Israel at Iran.

Avaz Heydar-pour, also a member of the Majles Foreign Policy and National Security Committee, defined the Israeli PM's claims about Iran being involved in the attacks as drivel designed to lay the groundwork for more terrorist attacks by Israel or a military attack on Iran.

The Tabnak website also warned about Israel's intent to exploit of the terrorist attacks for anti-Iranian incitement. The website argued that the attacks were planned by Israel as part of the psychological warfare campaign it is waging against Iran. The Western media's portrayal of the attacks as reminiscent of the assassinations of the Iranian nuclear scientists is designed to let Israel claim that they were planned by Iran in retaliation, the website said.

Reformist opposition leaders have now been under arrest for one year; sporadic confrontations between opposition supporters and security forces

On February 14 reformist opposition supporters held peaceful protest rallies in several cities in Iran to mark one year since the rallies held by the reformist opposition to support the popular uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia, and one year since reformist opposition leaders Mir-Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karubi were placed under house arrest.

During the day opposition supporters reported sporadic confrontations between demonstrators and internal security forces in downtown Tehran, as well as a number of detained demonstrators. Security and Intelligence Ministry reinforcements were deployed in downtown Tehran and the University of Tehran to prevent violations of public order.

On the eve of the one-year anniversary since the two reformist opposition leaders were placed under house arrest, opposition sources reported increasing pressure by the authorities on the families of Mousavi and Karoubi. Mousavi's daughters were contacted by the security forces and threatened that they would be arrested and sent to an undisclosed detention site. In addition, one of Mousavi's daughters was forbidden from continuing her work as an arts lecturer at the Al-Zahra University for Women in Tehran.

Last week Mousavi and Karoubi's children released a public statement to protest their parents' continuing house arrest and called for their immediate release. In addition, Fatemeh Karoubi gave an interview to the reformist website Jaras in which she noted that her husband is optimistic about the future of the Green Movement in Iran. She reported that her husband is in isolation, and that the doctors who treat him are closely involved with the Intelligence Ministry.

30 million Iranians without e-mail: authorities block access to leading websites

Last weekend the Iranian authorities blocked access to several leading websites, including all services provided by Google (e.g. its search engine and Gmail, its e-mail service) and Yahoo. Many Iranian bloggers reported that the blocking of SSL-secured websites also caused difficulties in accessing Facebook and a number of banking and e-commerce websites.

The reason behind the blocking remains unclear. Blocking the access to websites may have to do with the ongoing preparations for the launch of the closed national internet network, which according to Iranian authorities will take place in the next several months. Sources affiliated with the regime's opponents and the reformist opposition have speculated that the restrictions on accessing leading websites have been imposed by the authorities due to considerations having to do with the regime's preparations for the Revolution Day events on February 11, the February 14 protest rallies, and the Majles elections slated for March 2. Earlier this week it was reported that some of the restrictions have been removed in various parts of Iran.

Sources in the national telecommunications company and the Information Technology Organization denied any involvement in the blocking, saying that they are unaware of the problem. In an indirect reference to the internet access problems encountered by Iranians in the past several days, a member of the

committee in charge of filtering websites said this week that the Iranian authorities have reservations about the extensive use made by civilians of Google, since the search engine is used by Iran's enemies, particularly the CIA.

The blocking of internet access provoked considerable anger from Iranian web users, who complained about the problem having a severe impact on their work and causing considerable financial losses. One web user cynically suggested going back to using runners or homing pigeons, saying it is a faster and safer way to send messages than surfing the Iranian internet.

A number of Iranian websites also strongly criticized the conduct of the authorities during the weekend, demanding that they provide an explanation as to why more than 30 million Iranians were locked out of leading websites. The Asr-e Iran website argued that, by shutting down e-mail services without issuing a prior notice, the government has shown disrespect towards millions of citizens, and that the authorities should have informed the public about their intent to block internet services, just as they do when there is a controlled blackout.

Ahmad Tavakoli, chairman of the Majles Research Center, also criticized the website blocking, saying it is detrimental both to ordinary citizens and to the regime. In an interview given to Mehr News Agency, the Majles member said that, for Iranians, blocking websites and services without prior notice is a cause for dismay, which motivates them to use technologies to overcome the blocking, thus compromising its effectiveness.

Despite government efforts, dollar's exchange rate goes up again; prices of food and housing continue to increase

Despite the authorities' efforts to curb the sharp increase of the dollar's exchange rate against the rial, the American currency has gone up once again this week and is selling for 19,200 rials. Mehr News Agency reported that while currency traders display the dollar's official exchange rate (12,260) at their exchange offices, they refuse to sell dollars at this rate.

The daily Jomhuri-ye Eslami speculated that the dollar's gains have to do with the increasing demand for foreign currency from importers, who are forced to pay in cash for imported goods as a result of the international sanctions imposed on the Iranian banking sector.

Meanwhile, Davud Manzur, the head of Planning Department in the Vice President's Office of Strategic Planning, said that the government's plan to remove four zeroes from the national currency is now complete and will be carried out in early 1393 (March 2014). The government's Economy Committee delivered a final revision of the program for the president to sign. It will then be submitted to the approval of the Majles.

In the meantime, prices are still soaring. In recent days the price of red meat in north Tehran has reached an all-time high of 40,000 tomans per kilogram (about 15 dollars per pound). This week Mehr News Agency released up-to-date figures about the price increases since the beginning of the current Iranian year (March 2011). According to the figures, food prices have doubled or even tripled, the price of clothing has gone up by 30 percent, transportation services have become at least twice more expensive (the prices of bus tickets have increased tenfold), and housing prices have gone up by 10 to 20 percent. The Aftab News website wondered this week how the government is planning to deal with the sharp increase in prices if it keeps denying the increase.

“New Zionist plotline against Iran”: Iranian reactions to terrorist attacks on Israeli missions

This week Iranian officials emphatically denied Israel's claims that Iran was involved in the two terrorist attacks on Israeli missions in India and Georgia, and accused Israel of masterminding the terrorist attacks to incite world public opinion against Iran.

Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast categorically denied any Iranian responsibility in connection with the attacks, saying that they were planned by the Zionists to cause damage to Iran and compromise its relations with India and Georgia. He stated that the “Zionist regime” is employing terrorism and dangerous adventurism to extend its “illegitimate life”. He added that Iran is the biggest victim of terrorist attacks and that Israel is trying to divert world public opinion from the terrorist activity it conducts in the PA-administered territories and against Iranian scientists (Mehr, February 13).

Javad Jahangirzadeh, a member of the Majles Foreign Policy and National Security Committee, said that the bomb attacks at the two Israeli missions reflect the world's revulsion towards the Zionists, and were carried out either by Israel itself or by a group that despises Israel. Addressing PM Netanyahu's claims about Iranian involvement in the terrorist attacks, the Majles member said that the “Zionist regime” is afraid of Iran and is trying to influence the future nuclear talks between Iran and the West. In an interview given to Mehr News

Agency, Jahangirzadeh said that in recent years the Zionists have tried to incite the world against Iran, and having failed that, they are willing to spill their own blood to deflect the blame at Iran. Israel is trying to conceal the hatred felt towards it by the world's nations and redirect it at Iran (Mehr, February 13).

Avaz Heydar-pour, also a member of the Majles Foreign Policy and National Security Committee, defined the Israeli PM's claims about Iran being involved in the attacks as drivel designed to lay the groundwork for more terrorist attacks by Israel or a military attack on Iran. He added that Iran is opposed to terrorist attacks, which go against Islamic religious law (Mehr, February 13).

The Tabnak website also warned about Israel's intent to exploit the terrorist attacks for anti-Iranian incitement. An editorial published by the website following the terrorist attacks on the Israeli missions said that they were planned by Israel as part of the psychological warfare campaign it is waging against Iran. The Western media portrayed the attacks as reminiscent of the assassination of the Iranian nuclear scientists (attaching IEDs to cars) so that it can be argued that they were planned by Iran as retaliation for the assassination of its scientists. When nobody believed the American allegations about Iran's involvement in the plot to assassinate the Saudi ambassador in Washington, a new, more convincing plotline had to be found to incite public opinion against Iran. The editors of the website called on the authorities to continue monitoring the developments in the affair, since the "plotline" is likely to move forward (Tabnak, February 13).

Reformist opposition leaders have now been under arrest for one year; sporadic confrontations between opposition supporters and security forces

On February 14 reformist opposition supporters held peaceful protest rallies in several cities in Iran to mark one year since the rallies held by the reformist opposition to support the popular uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia. The rallies also marked one year since reformist opposition leaders Mir-Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karoubi and their wives Zahra Rahnavard and Fatemeh Karoubi were placed under house arrest, which happened around the time of the rallies held last year.



Left to right: Karoubi, Mousavi, Mousavi's wife, Karoubi's wife

During the day, opposition supporters reported sporadic confrontations between demonstrators and internal security forces in downtown Tehran. According to the reports, a number of demonstrators were detained. It was reported before the rallies that large numbers of security personnel were deployed in key sites in downtown Tehran and outside of the University of Tehran. The presence of intelligence personnel was reported in buildings throughout the campus. Last weekend Tehran's Governor Morteza Tamaddon threatened to use force against any attempt to violate public order on February 14. He noted that the calls to demonstrate heard from the "anti-revolutionary opposition" were intended for propaganda purposes and were made in connection with the widespread popular participation in the Revolution Day rallies on February 11. He further added that the security forces in Tehran are prepared to deal with any possible development (Jaras, February 11).



Security forces deployed in Tehran (<http://irangreenvoice.com>, February 14)

One the eve of the one-year anniversary since the two reformist opposition leaders were placed under house arrest, opposition sources reported increasing pressure by the authorities on the families of Mousavi and Karoubi. Kalemeh, a website affiliated with Mousavi's supporters, reported that his daughters were contacted by the security forces and threatened

that they would be arrested and sent to prison or another detention site where nobody would have any information about their whereabouts. In addition, one of Mousavi's daughters was forbidden from continuing her work as an arts lecturer at the Al-Zahra University for Women in Tehran (Kalemeh, February 9).

Last week Mousavi and Karoubi's children released a public statement in protest of their parents' "illegal" house arrest and called for their immediate release. The statement said that, save for a limited number of telephone calls and supervised visits, Mousavi and Karoubi are completely cut off from the outside world. Mousavi and Karoubi's children expressed concern about their parents' well-being and security, and called on Iranians and freedom-loving people all over the world to work for their release (Kalemeh, February 7).

At the same time, Fatemeh Karoubi gave an interview to the reformist website Jaras in which she noted that her husband is optimistic about the future of the Green Movement in Iran. Karoubi believes that the age of tyrannical governments is over, and that they have no choice but to implement deep reforms directed towards transferring power to the citizens. She reported that her husband is in isolation, and that the doctors who treat him are closely involved with the Intelligence Ministry (Jaras, February 9).

30 million Iranians without e-mail: authorities block access to leading websites

Last weekend the Iranian authorities blocked access to several leading websites, including all services provided by Google (e.g. its search engine and Gmail, its e-mail service) and Yahoo. Many Iranian bloggers reported that the blocking of SSL-secured websites also caused difficulties in accessing Facebook and a number of banking and e-commerce websites.

The reason behind the blocking remains unclear. Blocking the access to websites may have to do with the ongoing preparations for the launch of the closed national internet network, which according to Iranian authorities will take place in the next several months. Sources affiliated with the regime's opponents and the reformist opposition have speculated that the restrictions on accessing leading websites have been imposed by the authorities due to security considerations pertaining to the regime's preparations for the Revolution Day events on February 11, the February 14 protest rallies, and the Majles elections slated for March 2. Earlier this week it was reported that some of the restrictions have been removed in various parts of Iran.

Sources in the national telecommunications company and the Information Technology Organization denied any involvement in the blocking, saying that they are unaware of the

problem. Mehr News Agency reported Saturday, February 11 that all its attempts to obtain explanations from government telecommunications bodies on the website blocking were met with no success. Sa'ïd Mahdiyun, chairman of the Information Technology Organization, said that he is unaware of the problem, and that the issue is the responsibility of the national telecommunications company. A senior official in the telecommunications company said that he is also unaware of any problems in accessing e-mail services. He noted that the company is not involved in any way in internet content problems, and that the issue is the responsibility of the Information Technology Organization.

In an indirect reference to the internet access problems encountered by Iranians in the past several days, Mohammad Reza Aghamiri, a member of the committee in charge of filtering websites, said this week that the Iranian authorities have reservations about the extensive use made by civilians of Google, since the search engine is used by Iran's enemies, particularly the CIA (Mehr, February 13).

The blocking of internet access provoked considerable anger from Iranian web users. A number of Iranian websites also strongly criticized the conduct of the authorities during the weekend, demanding that they provide an explanation as to why more than 30 million Iranians were locked out of leading websites (Tabnak, February 11). The Asr-e Iran website argued that, by shutting down e-mail services without a prior notice, the government has shown disrespect towards millions of citizens. Just like the authorities inform the public before blackouts, they should have informed it about their intent to block internet services (Asr-e Iran, February 13).

Many web users were angry at the authorities for the severe disruptions they experienced as a result of the website access blocking, saying that they suffered considerable financial losses as a result. University students and researchers claimed that the inability to access e-mail services has a severe impact on their work and prevents them from engaging in vital correspondence with foreign researchers and research institutions. If this happened in the United States, a web user wrote, all Iranian media would be reporting the harm done to the people of America. Another web user cynically suggested staying off e-mail and going back to using runners or homing pigeons, which he said is a faster and safer way to send messages than surfing the Iranian internet, and one that guarantees that nobody will open letters sent by the citizens.



Ahmad Tavakoli, chairman of the Majles Research Center, also criticized the website blocking, saying it is detrimental both to ordinary citizens and to the regime. In an interview given to Mehr News Agency, the Majles member said that even if the blocking is justified on security grounds, the authorities must provide explanations to the people to avoid undermining public trust. For educated Iranians, blocking websites and shutting down services without prior notice and without providing them with local substitutes is a cause for dismay, which motivates them to break the law and use technologies to overcome the blocking. The result is that the effectiveness of the blocking is compromised, Tavakoli said (Mehr, February 12).

Despite government efforts, dollar's exchange rate goes up again; prices of food and housing continue to increase

Despite the authorities' efforts to curb the sharp increase of the dollar's exchange rate against the rial, the American currency has gone up once again this week and is now trading at 19,200 rials to the dollar on the free market. Mehr News Agency reported that while currency traders display the official exchange rate as set by the Central Bank, they refuse to sell dollars at this rate. One currency trader told a reporter for Mehr that most customers who come to currency exchange offices do so to inquire about the price of dollars rather than to purchase or sell them (Mehr, February 12).

In late January the Central Bank announced an 8.5 percent depreciation of the rial and set the dollar's official exchange rate at 12,260 rials to the dollar. The governor of the Central Bank said that foreign currency traders on the free market can sell dollars for no more than 3 to 5 percent higher than the official exchange rate. He warned that traders who are found selling dollars for a higher price could lose their license. In addition, the Central Bank announced an increase in the interest rate to encourage Iranians to invest in bank savings programs rather than purchase foreign currency.

The daily Jomhuri-ye Eslami speculated this week that the dollar's gains have to do with the increasing demand for foreign currency from importers, who are forced to pay in cash for imported goods as a result of the international sanctions imposed on the Iranian banking sector. The daily called on the Central Bank to cooperate with other state authorities to

guarantee the importers' needs and avoid injecting foreign currency into the market for anything other than vital state interests (Jomhuri-ye Eslami, February 14).

Meanwhile, Davud Manzur, the head of Planning Department in the Vice President's Office of Strategic Planning, said that the government's plan to remove four zeroes from the national currency is now complete and will be carried out in early 1393 (March 2014). The government's Economy Committee delivered a final revision of the program for President Ahmadinejad to sign. It will then be submitted to the approval of the Majles. Manzur expressed his hope that the program will make it easier to perform financial transactions in Iran, and will allow Iranians to do business without requiring large amounts of bills and coins (Alef, February 12).

The plan to remove zeroes from the local currency was brought up about two years ago as part of the efforts to deal with the inflation crisis that has severely devalued the Iranian currency in recent years. In April 2011 Economy Minister Shamseddin Hosseini announced that the government intends to implement the plan in the coming year. Supporters of the plan claim that the removal of the zeroes will have a positive effect on curbing inflation, similarly to other countries that implemented a similar program, like Turkey. Opponents of the plan claim, however, that without a change in the government's economic policy the reform would have no real effect on curbing inflation



This past year the Central Bank conducted a public opinion poll on its official website to find a name for the new post-reform currency. The results of the poll show that most Iranians prefer the name "parsi" to replace "rial", as the Iranian currency has been known since the 1930s. It is still unclear, however, whether this will actually become the currency's new name.

In the meantime, prices are still soaring. This week the price of red meat in north Tehran has reached an all-time high of 40,000 tomans per kilogram (about 15 dollars per pound). In recent days the Iranian media reported a continuing increase in the prices of basic foodstuffs,

including dairy, rice, and cereal products, as well as housing prices. Figures released by Mehr News Agency this week show that, since the beginning of the current Iranian year (March 2011), food prices have doubled or even tripled compared to some products, the price of dairy products has increased by 35 percent, the price of clothing has gone up by at least 30 percent, transportation prices have increased by 100 percent compared to some public transportation services, while bus ticket prices have increased from 20 tomans in the beginning of the year to their current level of 200 tomans. In housing, rent prices have gone up by 19 percent while sale prices have increased by at least 10 percent (Mehr, February 14).

It was also reported that foodstuffs are in short supply as a result of the increase in the dollar's exchange rate, the import difficulties, and the growing demand for basic foodstuffs ahead of the Iranian New Year (March 21). The Aftab News website wondered this week how the government is planning to deal with the sharp increase in the prices of goods if it keeps denying the increase (Aftab News, February 13).

Pictures of the week: procession marking 33rd anniversary of Islamic revolution in Tehran



Photo : Mohammad Azizi

FARS NEWS AGENCY



Photo : Hamed Jafarnejad

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Photo:Mahmood Hosseini

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Photo :Amir hashem Dehghani

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Photo : Hassan Mousavi

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Photo :Amir hashem Dehghani

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