

## Iranian is beaten badly in New York



IranTimes: An Iranian-American nail salon owner on Long Island was terrorized by thieves who beat her and called her a terrorist. Two men attacked Zohreh Assemi, 52, as she was opening her Givan Nail and Skin Center in Matinecock, a village in Nassau County on New York's Long Island. They kicked her, pounded her hand with a hammer and slashed her with a knife and left with about \$2,000 in cash. She said they had been waiting for her in a bathroom across the hall from her shop.

One man carried a gun that he pointed at her head. It wasn't clear if the men were primarily thieves who took the occasion to rough her up, or primarily bigots who took the occasion to steal from her. But police said they are treating the case for now as a bias crime. Assemi said she fled Iran illegally in 1982 with her five year-old daughter to escape the Islamic regime and was granted asylum in the

United States. She said her father-in-law was a general under the Shah's regime and was imprisoned after the revolution and her family threatened. She said her husband later got out of Iran and joined her and their daughter in the United States. He died in 1993. Assemi, who said she has owned the shop for 12 years, told WNBC-TV she felt "terrorized... not by American people, but by a very small group and prejudice. And it hurts." Her face, hands and arms were crisscrossed with cuts and bruises. She said one of the men "was just beating me with a stick and the other one was cutting.

She said the attackers cursed her, telling her to "go back to your country"—she is a naturalized American—and calling her a "terrorist." They seemed uncomprehending that what they were doing constituted terrorism to most people. Assemi said she began getting threatening calls a month before the attack. The callers called her a terrorist and told her to leave the shopping center. After damaging the shop and scrawling anti-Islamic hate messages on the mirror, they emptied her cash box and fled.

In Tehran, Foreign Ministry spokesman Mohammad-Ali Hossaini said the ministry is pursuing the attack "very seriously and with much sensitivity." He said Iran's diplomats in New York and Washington would do their utmost "to defend and restore the rights of Iranian nationals residing in the United States."

## Robert Levinson's wife allowed to travel to Iran



IranTimes: The Islamic Republic says it will allow Christina Levinson, the wife of a man missing in Iran since before Now Ruz, to travel to Iran to probe his whereabouts.

The announcement was a reversal and was made by the Iranian mission to the United Nations, suggesting it was part of public relations approach to the American public to coincide with President Ahmadinejad's visit to New York. Robert Levinson, 59, spent a career with the FBI, retiring in 1998 to become a private investigator. Reportedly working for a tobacco company, Levinson flew into Kish Island—for which entry visas are not required March 8 to meet with an American black Muslim, David Belfield, who fled to Iran a quartercentury ago after murdering a vocal supporter of the monarchy in Mary-

land. Levinson wanted Belfield to help him make contact with Iranian tobacco officials. Belfield says police came to the room where he was meeting Levinson.

They took Belfield in for questioning. When they established who he was, they freed him. When Belfield returned to the hotel room, he says Levinson was gone. Iran's UN mission said Mrs. Levinson would be given a visa to enter Iran "even though there is no information that would corroborate the presence of Mr. Levinson in Iran." Iran says it has no record of Levinson ever entering Iran, which is reasonable since no visa is required for Kish.

But it says nothing about the fact that an airplane manifest shows Levinson flew to Kish and Belfield says he met face-to-face with Levinson, not to mention that Belfield says the last time he saw Levinson the Iranian police were in the room with him. A few days before the UN mission said Mrs. Levinson would get a visa, she said she was traveling to New York to try to confront Ahmadinejad. That could have generated a lot of bad publicity for Iran over the Levinson matter and reminded Americans of the 1979-81 hostage episode. In Washington, State Department spokesman Tom Casey said, "We can't really recommend to any American citizen that they travel there at this time."

## French submit 'Persepolis' for Oscar award



In a clear rebuff to the Islamic Republic, a French commission has selected the film "Persepolis" as the French submission for the Oscar in the Best Foreign Language Film category. "Persepolis" was written and co-directed by French-Iranian dual national Marjane Satrapi and is an animated version of her best-seller of the same name, a graphic novel that describes her life in Iran as a young girl at the time of the Iranian

revolution. The film drew the largest number of cinemagoers in France this summer. It won the Jury prize at the Cannes Film Festival several weeks ago after Iran loudly denounced the festival for entering "Persepolis" in the competition, labeling it anti-Iranian. The film is being dubbed into English with an anticipated North American release in December. "Persepolis" was submitted last month to the Hollywood academy that awards Oscars by the Centre Nationale de la Cinematographie, a body whose members are named by the French minister of culture. Each year, about 40-odd countries submit non-English films to the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in Hollywood. A screening committee will view those films and then nominate five late this year to compete for the coveted Oscar to be awarded next February. More French films have been nominated for Oscars than films from any other country. Iran has not yet submitted any film this year, although it has until October 10 to act. Of Iran's past submissions, one, "Children of Heaven," directed by Majid Majidi, received an Oscar nomination, but not an Oscar for Best Foreign-Language Film. That was in 1999. With the exception of 1996, the Islamic Republic has submitted films each year since 1994.

## Shakeri, Tajbakhsh freed



IranTimes: The Islamic Republic freed the last two Iranian-American dual nationals it had imprisoned since May, but neither is yet allowed to leave the country. The regime announced that Kian Tajbakhsh, 45, had left Evin prison on payment of bail of 1 billion rials (\$107,000). The regime said Ali Shakeri, 59, a California mortgage broker, had left Evin on payment of bail of the same amount. Couple of months ago, Haleh Esfandiari, 67, was freed on payment of bail of 3 billion rials (\$320,000) and allowed to leave the country. Parnaz Azima, 59, was not imprisoned but required to pay bail of 4 billion rials (\$430,000) to stay out of prison and was finally allowed to leave Iran earlier this month. Some analysts thought the four may have been pursued in retaliation for the imprisonment of five Iranians captured by the U.S. Army last January in Iraq. But Esfandiari's passport was seized and she was prevented from leaving the country two weeks before the five Iranians were arrested. And Shakeri was freed, just three days after the Americans detained a sixth Iranian in Iraq. The most common view is that the four were taken chiefly to pressure the Iranian intellectual community not to scheme against the regime. Some analysts, however, think that many in the regime actually believe the regime's propaganda line that Western think-tanks are plotting a "soft revolution" in Iran and that the arrests were viewed by the people who car-



ried them out as a defensive measure to spike such plots. They point to the lengthy grillings Esfandiari faced over months about how the Wilson Center for International Scholars in Washington, D.C., functioned and was budgeted. Esfandiari runs Middle East program for the center. Saeed Laylaz, an analyst in Tehran, said, "Iran did not achieve what it expected from their imprisonment. It was not welcomed inside the country, and it worked against its interests on the international level. Their detention was abandoned as a failed project." But Hadi Ghaemi, an Iranian human rights advocate in New York, said Iran did achieve one of its goals by discouraging Iranian American academics and democracy advocates from traveling to Iran and making contact with like-minded people in Iran and thus isolating reformers inside Iran. Iranian officials said Shakeri and Tajbakhsh cannot yet leave the country. They must file a request to leave and receive judicial permission before their passports will be returned. Shakeri was the most surprising of the four Iranian-Americans arrested. He is a California mortgage broker and not very active politically. He is on the Board of the Center for Citizen Peacebuilding and has voiced opposition to the current regime, but made clear that change must come peacefully and from within Iran. Tajbakhsh was probably arrested because he worked for the foundation funded by George Soros, the American who helped democracy advocates overturn the government in Georgia. But Tajbakhsh was overseeing Soros programs in Iran that the Iranian government had approved, the foundation has said. Tajbakhsh now has an offer to teach at Columbia University. The offer was made publicly by Columbia President Lee Bollinger Monday as he introduced President Ahmadinejad at a speech in New York. "We hope he will be able to join us next semester," Bollinger said pointedly to Ahmadi-nejad. Shakeri, Esfandiari and Tajbakhsh were all thrown into jail in the first half of May. Tajbakhsh was living in Tehran with his wife at the time of his arrest. The other two and Azima were all visiting Iran to care for aged mothers. Shakeri's mother died while he was visiting but before his arrest.

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### Abizaid: We may...

rior military capability. "There are ways to live with a nuclear Iran," Abizaid said in remarks at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a Washington think tank. "Let's face it, we lived with a nuclear Soviet Union, we've lived with a nuclear China, and we're living with [other] nuclear powers as well." Abizaid stressed the dangers of allowing more and more nations to build nuclear arsenals. He said it is likely Iran will make the technological breakthroughs needed to obtain a nuclear bomb, but "it's not inevitable." Abizaid was born in Coleville, California, to a Christian Lebanese-American father and an American mother, who died when he was young. He was raised mostly by his widowed father, and is fluent in Arabic. Until his retirement in May, he was the senior-most U.S. military officer of direct Arab descent. Abizaid suggested military action to pre-empt Iran's nuclear ambitions might not be the wisest course. "War, in the state-to-state sense, in that part of the region would be devastating for everybody, and we should avoid it—in my mind—to every

extent that we can," he said. "On the other hand, we can't allow the Iranians to continue to push in ways that are injurious to our vital interests." He suggested that many in Iran—perhaps even some in the Tehran government—are open to cooperating with the West. The thrust of his remarks was a call for patience in dealing with Iran. He said there is a basis for hope that Iran, over time, will move away from its current anti-Western stance. Abizaid expressed confidence that the United States and the world community can manage the Iran problem. "I believe the United States, with our great military power, can contain Iran—that the United States can deliver clear messages to the Iranians that make it clear to them that while they may develop one or two nuclear weapons they'll never be able to compete with us in our true military might and power," he said. He described Iran's government as reckless, with ambitions to dominate the Middle East. "We need to press the international community as hard as we possibly can, and the Iranians, to cease and desist on the development of a nuclear weapon and we should not preclude any option that we may have to deal with it," he said. He then added his remark about finding ways to live with a nuclear-armed Iran.

