

Gas pipeline to cut out Iran is being promoted

IranTimes: A natural gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to India is being promoted as an alternative to the stalled pipeline from Iran to India. The Press Trust of India reported that India will sign up this month to join the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline project. The signing will be of a Heads of Agreement, a document that amounts to an agenda of things to discuss, not a contractual obligation. But many in India see TAPI as a better opportunity for India to get gas than Iran. One issue is capital.

The Iranto-India pipeline will cost more than \$7 billion and banks aren't exactly lining up to fund a huge project involving pariah Iran. But the Asian Development Bank is a sponsor of TAPI and has called a meeting on financing that pipeline for this month. Another issue is the gas supply. The Indian Express says TAPI would give India more gas up front. The publication says Iran is offering India a constant 30 million cubic meters daily for ever. But TAPI proposes to provide India 40 million cubic meters for the first four years and then 31 million thereafter. India likes that because it anticipates domestic gas fields will kick in then and it will need less imported gas, the Indian Express said. Iran's pledges are another issue. The Indian Express said some of Iran's descriptions of what it will provide have been contradictory. It said the India firm GAIL complained that the gas qual-



ity Iran described to it was different from the gas quality described to Pakistan, even though both countries would be taking gas from the same pipeline. Another issue is the transit fee. Pakistan and India are still squabbling over what India should pay Pakistan. But for TAPI, the Asian Development Bank has already laid down a fee structure that all four countries would accept when they signed on. Some other points bother the Indians, the publication said, and suggest Iran is giving preference to Pakistan. For example, the draft deal gives Pakistan 30 days in which to pay its monthly invoices, while India is given but a week. In Tehran, officials have said Iran and Pakistan will sign their pipeline contract even if India doesn't join. Last spring, Iran said the contract would be signed before the end of June.

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Larijani out...

that Ahmadi-nejad had not accepted it until now. While others speculated on the impact the change would have on policy, Elham stated over and over that the personnel shift had nothing to do with policy and that Iran's nuclear policy would remain the same. Larijani, in his first comment to reporters, said the same thing, emphasizing that Supreme Leader Ali Khamenehi makes policy. But Scott Peterson of The Christian Science Monitor summed up his conversations with Iranian analysts by saying the shift in personnel "signals a turn toward a harder line with the U.S. and Europe." However, given the opaque nature of Iranian politics, the world might be better advised to take such firm conclusions with a grain of salt and wait to see what develops over the next few

months. The shift from Larijani to Jalili comes at an inconvenient time. The nuclear issue is expected to hit a watershed moment in one month when Mohamed ElBaradei, director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), is due to issue his next report on Iran and rule on whether it is complying with its latest pledges. Larijani was also scheduled to meet just three days after his resignation with the EU's foreign policy chief, Javier Solana. Iran sent both Jalili and Larijani to meet Solana, a move that suggested Larijani did not resign in a huff and was not fired over policy direction. Many news reports focused on one recent incident and suggested it was the cause of the resignation. Larijani last week said Russian President Vladimir Putin had given Iran a "nuclear proposal" while in Iran earlier this month. The media jumped on this as a Russian proposal to break the impasse over enrichment. But Ahmadi-nejad then told the media Putin had made no proposal

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Clinton on Iran...

as pariahs. Clinton denounced that as naïve, saying presidents don't sit down with foreign leaders before there has been a lot of preparation at lower levels. Of course, Obama never said he would sit down without prior preparation. When Clinton last month said she would talk to the Iranians as president, Obama pulled a "gotcha" on Clinton, accusing her of saying what he had said and what she had just denounced weeks earlier. But Clinton only indicated her administration would talk with Iran, she didn't say she would personally sit down with Ahmadi-nejad. Second, Clinton voted in the Senate for a resolution that proposed tabbing the Pasdaran as a terrorist organization. Critics of the resolution alleged that it would give President Bush a hook to use if he wished to attack Iran.

Obama and former Senator John Edwards, the

third ranked Democratic candidate in the polls, then assailed Clinton for helping Bush's militant policy on Iran. The original language of the resolution could indeed have been interpreted as authorizing U.S. troops to attack Iran. But when that was pointed out, the resolution was re-worded to exclude that. Furthermore, Sen. Joseph Biden, Democrat of Delaware, who is chairman of the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee and also a contender for the presidential nomination, said the re-written resolution doesn't give the president "any authority to do anything." The flap over Clinton's vote on the resolution and her remark about talking to Iran consumed much news space. Obama and Edwards kept the issue in the air by repeatedly referring to it in stump speeches and articles, not to mention in fund-raising letters to supporters. But comments in stump speeches are routinely cryptic and meant to appeal to a crowd. More meaningful are written speeches and articles that appear after the candidate has care-

2010 World Cup

IranTimes: It's only been barely a year since the 2006 World Cup ended, but the Asian elimination rounds for the 2010 World Cup began last month. A total of 43 Asian teams are vying for four slots (and maybe a fifth) in the 2010 World Cup finals to be played in South Africa. There are four rounds being played in Asia, but Iran and the four other top teams—Australia, South Korea, Saudi Arabia and Japan—get to sit out the first two rounds. Here is the system. In Round One, 38 teams are paired in 19 home-and-away series. The top 11 go through to Round Three. In Round Two, the bottom eight left from Round One are paired in four home-and-away series with the winners going to Round Three. In Round Three, the 20 teams, now including Iran and the other four top seeds, are placed into five four-team groups to play round-robin home-and-away matches.

The winners and runners-up advance to Round Four. In Round Four, the 10 teams are divided into two five-team groups to play round-robin home-and-away matches. The two group winners and the two runners-up advance to the World Cup finals. The two thirdplace teams play two games against one another with the winner facing the Oceania champion in a two-legged playoff to determine who will get the last slot in the World Cup finals.

on the enrichment issue. Many in the media saw Ahmadi-nejad as repudiating Larijani and prompting Larijani's resignation. But a look at the transcript of Larijani's remarks show that he said Putin made a nuclear proposal about "the plant," a seeming reference to the Bushehr nuclear power plant, not to the enrichment issue. Putin himself said he spoke at length in Iran about Bushehr. In the 2005 presidential elections, Larijani ran with the broadest support from among conservative political leaders.

Ahmadi-nejad ran as an outsider. Larijani may have had broad leadership support, but he lacked legs with the public. Of the three conservatives running, he came in last with less than 6 percent of the popular vote. It was a surprise when Ahmadinejad picked him to chair the SNSC. Many saw that as a concession to the conservative establishment. Elham said Larijani had resigned for "personal reasons" and wanted to have other activities in politics. That led some to speculate that he planned to run for the Majlis in the March elections. But the deadline for office-holders to resign government posts to be eligible to run expired several weeks ago. Others suspected Larijani seeks to run for president in 2009 and wanted to be free

fully edited the words and crafted the points. Clinton did an article on her foreign policy that appeared in Foreign Affairs. She devoted three paragraphs to Iran in that article. The policy she outlined was almost identical to the Bush Administration policy. She even used the phrase: "All options must remain on the table." The sole difference between Bush and Clinton was that she said she would talk to Iran about its nuclear program without pre-conditions. Bush says he will only talk to Iran after it suspends nuclear enrichment. But Bush actually only adopted the policy of the EU. The EU halted nuclear talks with Iran two years ago when Iran resumed enrichment and it is the EU that says it will not resume talks unless Iran suspends that enrichment. Clinton's proposal is thus not so much a repudiation of Bush as a repudiation of the EU position. Here is the full Iran section of Clinton's article in Foreign Affairs: "Iran poses a long-term strategic challenge to the United States, our NATO allies, and Israel. It is the country that most practices state-sponsored terrorism, and it uses its surrogates to supply explosives that kill U.S. troops in Iraq. The Bush administration refuses

Secret divorce



The saga of President Sarkozy's turbulent marriage to Cécilia, his reluctant First Lady, took an abrupt turn last month when they announced that they had already divorced. After months of rumours and a week of media fever, the Elysée Palace said that the couple, who had been together for 23 years and married for 11, had completed proceedings before a judge. "They settled everything by mutual agreement," Michèle Cahan, their lawyer, said. "Everything went very well, without the least difficulty." The Sarkozys' ten-year-old son, Louis, will live with Mrs Sarkozy but is to keep very close contact with his father, Ms Cahan said.

of a position that limits what he can say. Others speculated that Ahmadi-nejad wanted Larijani out of a post where he gets considerable publicity. Like many analysts trying to read the tea leaves and figure out what Larijani's resignation means, Sadeq Zibakalam, a professor of political science at the University of Tehran, underscored that nuclear policy is not made by Ahmadi-nejad or Larijani, but rather by the Supreme Leader himself. However, Zibakalam emphasized that Khamenehi "does not make decisions in a vacuum." Now, Jalili will be in the room talking to Khamenehi. Larijani comes from a very prominent family. He is the son of a grand ayatollah and is married to the daughter of Ayatollah Morteza Motahari, who was close to the late Ayatollah Khomeini. One of Larijani's brothers, Sadeq, is a cleric and member of the 12-man Council of Guardians. Another brother, Mohammad-Javad, has held several public offices and is now the adviser on international affairs to the Judiciary. Jalili's biography says he has a doctorate in political science from the University of Science and Technology in Tehran—Ahmadi-nejad's alma mater—and is fluent in English and Arabic.

to talk to Iran about its nuclear program, preferring to ignore bad behavior rather than challenge it. Meanwhile, Iran has enhanced its nuclear-enrichment capabilities, armed Iraqi Shiite militias, funneled arms to Hezbollah, and subsidized Hamas, even as the government continues to hurt its own citizens by mismanaging the economy and increasing political and social repression. "As a result, we have lost precious time.

Iran must conform to its nonproliferation obligations and must not be permitted to build or acquire nuclear weapons. If Iran does not comply with its own commitments and the will of the international community, all options must remain on the table. "On the other hand, if Iran is in fact willing to end its nuclear weapons program, renounce sponsorship of terrorism, support Middle East peace, and play a constructive role in stabilizing Iraq, the United States should be prepared to offer Iran a carefully calibrated package of incentives. This will let the Iranian people know that our quarrel is not with them but with their government and show the world that the United States is prepared to pursue every diplomatic option."

more to him! Nobody criticizes him, because of oil." Lessing's anger also targeted former British Prime Minister Tony Blair and President Bush. "I always hated Blair," she said, "from the beginning. Many of us hated Tony Blair, I think he has been a disaster for Britain and we have suffered under him for many years. This man was a little showman who was going to cause us problems—and he did." After criticizing Americans for being naïve about the rest of the world, Lessing, a former communist, said President Bush "is a world calamity. Everyone is tired of this man. Either he is stupid or he is very clever, although you have to remember he is a member of a social class which has profited from wars.

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Lessing doesn't like anybody

IranTimes: Iranian-born Doris Lessing, winner of this year's Nobel Prize for literature, spoke her mind about several world leaders, but saved her sharpest words for President Ahmadi-nejad. Lessing, 87, was born in Kermanshah to British parents, but left at age five and so has little memory of the country. She told the Spanish daily El Pais, "I hate Iran; I hate the Iranian government. It's a cruel and evil government. Look what happened to its president in New York, they called him evil and cruel at Columbia University. Marvelous! They should have said