

Ahmadinejad visits former enemy



BBC: Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's visit to former enemy Iraq is the first by an Iranian president. The two countries fought a long, bloody war in the 1980s. Mr. Ahmadinejad was given a red carpet welcome as he was greeted by Iraqi President Jalal Talabani at his Baghdad residence. Mr. Talabani described Mr. Ahmadinejad's visit as "his-

toric" and said Iraq would try to oust Iranian rebels based on the mountainous frontier between the two countries. Mr. Ahmadinejad said a "united, powerful and developed Iraq" was in the region's interests, adding: "A visit to Iraq without the dictator, Saddam Hussein, is a truly happy one." Security has been tightened in the Iraqi capital for the two-day visit. But US forces did not provide any additional security for Mr. Ahmadinejad. The US accuses Iran of training and arming Shia militias. The Americans are not the only ones wary of Mr. Ahmadinejad's visit; a banner in Kirkuk reads: "we denounce Iran's intervention in Iraqi affairs." However, nearly two-thirds of Iraqis are Shia Muslim and are happy to see closer ties with mainly-Shia Iran.

How I conquered mold and mastered Sabzeh

by Nesta Ramazani

IranTimes: When I was a little girl, there was one thing that entranced me most above all the other preparations made for Nowruz every spring. More than the hustle and bustle of spring-cleaning, more than the large bolts of cloth that were cut and stitched together to make new clothes for every member of the family, more than the pounding of walnuts and rolling out of dough for making baklava. What intrigued me most was watching the handfuls of lentils and wheat berries that Naneh [grandmother] had spread onto platters and covered with a wet cloth to germinate into beautiful mounds of brilliant green just in time to grace the Haft Seen (Seven S) table—the table of the seven items beginning with the letter seen or "S" that is so central to the Nowruz celebrations. Nowruz is the most important holiday of the year for Iranians. It has its roots in ancient Zoroastrian times when originally there were seven celebrations spread throughout the year. But those died out and only Nowruz has survived, an annual celebration of the vernal equinox when the cycle of life begins anew on the first day of spring. Sabzeh is the quintessential symbol of rebirth and is central to the celebration of the festival and to the decoration of the haft seen table—a thing of beauty and heavily fraught with symbolism. A colorful cloth is spread on a table on which are placed candles, a mirror, decorated eggs, a goldfish in a bowl, bowls of nuts and sweets, and seven "S" items, usually sabzeh (green sprouts), seeb (apples), seer (garlic), sonbol (a hyacinth), somagh (sumac), senjed (fruit of the jujube tree), and samanoo (a wheat pudding). Some households will also place coins on the table and others will burn wild rue incense to symbolically drive away evil spirits. A copy of the poems of Hafez usually appears on the table. These stay in place for 13 days, while friends and family visit back and forth, give gifts of money to children and employees, feast, and celebrate. On the thirteenth day, each family takes its sabzeh, goes out to the countryside for a picnic, and throws the sprouted greens into a stream of running water. This assures good luck for the rest of the year. You would think the sprouting of lentils and wheat would not be such a complicated matter, but the first time I tried to grow sabzeh was soon after I had arrived in the United States as a brand new bride. It seemed important to maintain some spiritual connection to our homeland, and the most obvious means, when spring rolled around, was to plant sabzeh—the decorative symbol of rebirth, of nature's reawakening—and to set up a Haft Seen table. But my meticulous attention to the lentils I had spread in a platter and carefully covered with a wet cloth were all for naught. I kept it in a dark place as I had been instructed, kept sprinkling the cloth with water, making sure it did not dry out, kept peeking under the cloth hoping to see green blades germinating out of round and pregnant pulses—all to no avail. I peeked and saw no life. I peeked again and saw life—in the form of white mold, happily growing over and around the lentils and wheat berries, until they were practically covered. Too wet. I tried letting the cloth dry out. Too dry. There was no way they were going to germinate without moisture. Besides, they were practically rotted by now! Before long, they were emitting a foul odor. When Naneh grew sabzeh for us years ago, it did not seem so very complicated. She did what I had just done (or so I thought), and a beautiful, lush, verdant display lifted its proud head just in time to greet the first hyacinth my mother would purchase to grace our Nowruz table. What was I



doing wrong? My sense of defeat was magnified out of all proportion because I was new to this country, new to marriage, new to the duties of running a household, and new to the seemingly unfathomable secrets of planting sabzeh. I wish I could say that my second and third attempts were more successful. They were not. And defeat led me to abandon the effort. I went to the grocery store and bought several boxes of alfalfa sprouts and clumped them together on a platter. There was no Iranian community in our town anyway, no one to share Nowruz with, and not much motivation to keep on trying. It was only recently that my interest in trying my hand at sabzeh was renewed. My nowgrown children were starting to display some interest in their cultural heritage, especially now that they had little children. We have a larger Iranian community here now, more of a sense of celebration in the air at Nowruz. So I set out to try again. I consulted several Iranian friends who I thought could tell me what I had been doing wrong, but each reluctantly admitted that she had not had much success either. I was beginning to despair when I thought to call a friend in a nearby city whose brilliantly green platters of sabzeh I had admired in the past—and hit gold. It is really very simple. Here follows a foolproof method which I guarantee will succeed, thanks to my friend, Mahnaz. Foolproof instructions for growing sabzeh: About 2 weeks before Nowruz, soak 2 cups wheat berries and 2 cups lentils in a bowl of water for 24 hours. Drain separately in colanders and pour off the water. Line each of 2 bowls with a wet tea-towel or cheesecloth. Pour the lentils in one and the wheat berries in the other lined bowl. Lap the edges of the towels or cloth over so that the lentils and wheat berries are wrapped in the wet cloths. Set the bowls aside and allow to stand for 24 hours, keeping the cloth moist. Unwrap the berries and lentils and spread each separately in platters. Cover with a paper towel or light cheesecloth. Sprinkle with water until wet. Place the platters on a windowsill and intermittently keep sprinkling with water so that the paper towels or cheesecloth will not dry out. After a few days (depending on the light exposure, the amount of heat in the room and the amount of sun), you will see a protrusion of growth pushing the paper towel upward off the platters. Continue to be patient for a couple more days. When the paper towel has been lifted about 1/4-inch off the lentils or wheat berries, remove. You should by now have a healthy stand of low-growing green blades (straight and upright from the wheat berries, more feathery from the lentils). Continue to water lightly. Allow a few more days until they have achieved an appropriate height and set on the Haft Seen table, or any other decorative spot in the house. By Nowruz you will have a beautiful display of green sprouts. See the photo and aid-e shoma mobarak.

Pre-Ameri Iranian-Americans all have left Bush Administration



IranTimes: If Goli Ameri is confirmed as an assistant secretary of state by the U.S. Senate, she will become the sole Iranian-American holding a major post in the Bush Administration, as the others have all left. Ameri is the fourth Iranian-American named to a high level post by President Bush. The Iran Times reported last week that two of the others remain in top level positions, but that was in error. Both have already left for careers in the private sector. In the waning days of a president's second term, it is common for political appointees to leave as the prospects of being able to launch any new programs are minimal. The flight from the Bush Administration has been augmented by the president's low approval ratings and by the shift of control in both houses of Congress from the GOP to the Democratic Party after the November 2006 elections. But the two major appointees who have left both departed even before those elections. Nina Shokraii Rees had worked in a number of education positions for Bush and rose to become a deputy under secretary of education, overseeing education innovations being pushed by conservatives and dear to the heart of the Bush White House, such as vouchers and charter schools. But she left the Department of Education for a job in the private sector with the Knowledge Universe Learning Group in January 2006, 10 months before the elections. Faryar Shirzad, once an assistant secretary of commerce, moved to the National Security Council in the White House a few years ago and became deputy national security adviser to Bush handling trade and international economic issues. He often traveled with Bush when the president went abroad. But Shirzad has shifted to Wall Street, leaving the White House in August 2006, several weeks before the elections, to join Goldman Sachs as a vice president and the director of international affairs. A few weeks ago, he was elevated to the rank of managing director. The other Iranian-American with a major post in the Bush Administration was David Hossein Safavian. He also worked in the White House, serving as the director of federal procurement in the Office of Management and Budget. In that post, he framed federal procurement rules, but did not handle any money or sign any procurement contracts. Safavian quit his post when he was arrested in the major scandal of

recent years revolving around lobbyist Jack Abramoff, a friend of Safavian's, and Rep. Bob Ney, Republican of Ohio, the sole member of Congress to speak Farsi. (He had served in Iran with the Peace Corps.) Twelve people, including Safavian, Ney and Abramoff have been convicted in that scandal. Safavian was convicted in June 2006 and sentenced to 18 months in prison for his role. But, unlike Ney and Abramoff, Safavian has not gone to prison yet. He was allowed to remain free while he appealed his conviction. Last month, one judge on the three-judge appellate court questioned whether the trial judge erred in barring some evidence from the trial. The court has not yet ruled, but the public expression by the one judge suggests Safavian's appeal stands a better than normal chance of success. The likely outcome is that a new trial would be ordered. Safavian was accused of lying when he asked for permission to join Ney and Abramoff on a golfing trip to Scotland and stated that Abramoff had no business before the federal agency Safavian then worked for, the General Services Administration. At the time, Safavian was providing Abramoff information about two federal properties that Abramoff wished to buy. Safavian's lawyer argued in the trial court that Safavian used the "doing business" phrase "not as laymen do, but as a government contract professional does"—that is, referring to the contracting process. The properties Abramoff sought were not even on the market at the time, Safavian's lawyer argued. The lawyer sought to bring in a witness to testify that professionals think of "doing business" as referring only to actual contracts. The trial judge barred the witness, saying such testimony might confuse the jury. But in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia last month, Judge Laurence S. Robbins listened to the arguments and said: "I don't know how that's not admissible." The other two judges did not comment publicly. The government attorney said Safavian's experience was chiefly as a lobbyist and Capitol Hill staffer, not as a procurement specialist. Furthermore, the lawyer said, Safavian made other false statements beyond the "doing business" reference, including the key issue of who was paying for the trip. Most of it was paid by Abramoff. Government employees cannot take vacations paid for by lobbyists.

Headache common in people with GI trouble

Routers: The prevalence of headache is higher in people with gastrointestinal (GI) symptoms such as nausea, acid reflux, diarrhea, and constipation, than in people who don't have these bothersome symptoms, new research indicates. Both headaches and GI symptoms are common in the general population and eat up substantial

health-care dollars, note the researchers. "However, the scientific literature about the comorbidity of headache and gastrointestinal complaints is scant," they point out in the medical journal Cephalalgia. To investigate, Dr. Ann Hege Aamodt and associates from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim, reviewed questionnaires completed by 43,732 participants in the Nort-Trondelag Health Study, including information on GI symptoms as well as headache. After adjusting for gender, age, depression, anxiety and other factors that might influence the results, the research team noted a significantly higher prevalence of headache among participants with reflux, diarrhea, constipation, and nausea, compared to those without such complaints. "The association between headache and gastrointestinal complaints increase markedly with increasing headache frequency," Aamodt told Routers Health. These results have implications for the treatment of headache patients. "It is important to consider the total burden of discomfort in these patients and to avoid headache mediation with adverse gastrointestinal effects in those with much gastrointestinal discomfort," Aamodt said.



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Ahmadi-nejad...

liked not only by reformists but by many conservatives who find Ahmadi-nejad bullying and dictatorial and flay him for creating confrontations both domestically and internationally that harm the regime's interests. As his authority to act, Ahmadi-nejad had cited Article 113 of the Constitution, which states: "Af-

ter the office of the Leader, the President is the highest official in the country. His is the responsibility for implementing the Constitution and acting as the head of the executive branch, except in matters directly assigned to the Leader." But the Council of Guardians said his resort to Article 113 "has no legal basis as this article does not allow the president to implement without Majlis authorization actions that must be approved by the Majlis."