

# President 3 times questions whether 9-11 ever happened

IranTimes: President Ahmadi-nejad's expression last month of doubt that the September 11, 2001, attacks ever happened was no slip of the tongue; he has now repeated it two more times and the Foreign Ministry has weighed in to make clear such doubts are now official policy. The State Department is aghast at Ahmadi-nejad's suggestion that the attacking planes seen on film might just have been some Hollywood special effects video. State Department spokesman Sean McCormack called Ahmadi-nejad's remarks "misguided," "misinformed" and "warped." McCormack said, "It leaves one speechless.... I cannot tell whether it is something he truly believes or if this is just an attempt to try to shake up public opinion in Iran or elsewhere." At the Iranian Foreign Ministry, spokesman Mohammad-Ali Hossaini signed on. "Regarding 9-11," he said, "as long as all the aspects have not been clarified, this remains a suspicious incident. Many analysts and observers who have followed this feel that there are many suspicions and ambiguities." In his latest iteration, Ahmadi-nejad told a crowd in Qom, "Four or five years ago, a suspicious event occurred in New York. A building collapsed and they said 3,000 people had been killed." The only evidence he again provided to indicate that no one had been killed was that "they have never published their names." That was the third time in two weeks he had said this, although there has been plenty of time for his aides to tell him the names of the dead are available on the Internet for him to see. The dead included one Iranian-American, one half-Iranian and one American who lived in Iran as a child. Touri Bolourchi, 69, a retired nurse from Southern California was returning home from visiting her daughter and grandchildren in Boston. She was a passenger on the plane flown into the South Tower. Darya Lin, 32, was the daughter of an Iranian mother and a Burmese father, who was born in Michigan but lived in Iran from the age of 3 to 11. She was leading a consulting team at the offices of AON on the 92nd floor of the South Tower when Bolourchi's plane struck. Lin was last seen trying to help a pregnant woman.



Heather Smith, 30, was aboard the United flight that struck the North Tower. She had lived in Iran from the age of 7 to 10 while her father helped set up purchasing departments for Iranian firms. Last September, when Ahmadi-nejad spoke at the United Nations in Manhattan, he said he wanted to visit the World Trade Center site. He was denied that wish. But he didn't question what had happened, and in fact said he wished to pay tribute to the dead. In 2001, after the 9-11 attacks, President Khatami issued condolences. Ahmadi-nejad says the "suspicious event" was used as a "pretext" to invade Afghanistan and Iraq. The 9-11 attacks were, indeed, the justification for attacking Afghanistan after the Taliban rejected an American demand that they turn over the Al-Qaeda leadership for trial by the United States. But 9-11 was not the rationale behind the 2003 invasion of Iraq, which was grounded in the charge that Iraq was pursuing weapons of mass destruction. The questioning of 9-11 follows Ahmadi-nejad's questioning of the Holocaust. In that case, however, the president appears to have read up on the history and to have revised and refined his allegations. He first charged that the Holocaust was a Zionist fraud to justify creating Israel. After the international uproar, however, he backed off and shifted the attack to laws that punish Holocaust deniers. He says that if the Holocaust really happened, people should be allowed to study it and Westerners are hypocrites to ban such studies.

# Sadr faces murder charge in Iran

IranTimes: Iraqi Shiite leader Muqtada as-Sadr is facing murder charges lodged against him in Iran's Special Clerical Court, according to two Arabic news outlets. The reports say that relatives of Abd al-Majid al-Khoi, who was murdered shortly after returning to Iraq just after the fall of Saddam Hussein, have sent papers to

the court accusing Sadr of instigating the bombing that killed Khoi. The reports were carried by the Saudi-owned Alef website and the London-based Qods Press website. Neither gave a

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## Irani Charged...

English centers were not shut down after Zaman's arrest because many of those enrolled were in fact legitimate students who attended classes. According to the indictment, some of the "students" were people from Uzbekistan and Latvia who were ineligible for student visas. Authorities said on one occasion, Zaman allegedly

charged a non-student \$300 a month to report she was enrolled in his school. In another instance, a Thai national reported to authorities she paid \$2,000 a year to obtain immigration status from the International College even though she never attended classes. Investigators also believe several of the people who obtained fraudulent student visas by enrolling in the schools were Russian and Eastern European prostitutes. "Russian and Latvian women prostitutes were posing as English-language students," alleged an affidavit for a search warrant.

# 51st San Francisco International Film Festival

By: Jamileh Davoudi

## 51st SAN FRANCISCO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

The San Francisco International Film Festival opened its 51st year after last year's glorious golden anniversary, in which it was the first film festival in the Americas to reach the half-century milestone. SFIFF51 was kicked off on April 24 and will run through May 8, with nearly 200 films from 49 countries. Opening Night was at the historic Castro Theatre, where the curtain rose on the 'The Last Mistress' (France), an erotic, witty and supremely intelligent period drama by the masterful Catherine Breillat. The

an excursion to the nearby war-torn Chechen town. The close-up shots of the young, expres-



**TIME TO DIE**

sionless soldiers and the Chechen townspeople add to the air of quiet despair. The overriding emotion throughout the film is one of loneliness that culminates in a very tender scene between Alexandra and Denis. They have been apart for too long. Indeed, the conflict in Chechnya has been going on too long.

'TIME TO DIE' (Poland), is a beautiful reflection on old age. Director Dorota Kedzierzawska wrote the screenplay specifically for the 91 year



**The Last Mistress**

acclaimed French director continues her candid exploration of female sexuality in this wicked and sophisticated new chamber piece based on the controversial 19th century novel by Jules-Amedee Barbey d'Aureville, and starring the alluringly vulpine Asia Argento.

One feature film from Iran, '10 + 4' where Mania Akbari, the star of Abbas Kiarostami's '10' (2002), returns, but this time as the director. While preparing for a different project, Mania was diagnosed with breast cancer and Mr.



**10 + 4**

Kiarostami suggested that she make this film instead. The title alludes to the number of years between the two films. Employing the same technique of a fixed camera in a car focused on either the driver or passenger, Ms. Akbari records her conversations with friends and family as they each, in their own way, deal with her illness, treatment, and issues of mortality. Halfway through, she abandons the single person in the shot format and instead includes her and others in the same frame. This brings about a beautiful air of intimacy to the film. Ms. Akbari shows tremendous great strength and courage, but also the need for human interaction, in the face of life's most difficult issues.

'ALEXANDRA' (Russia), the latest from Alexander Sokurov, follows the journey of a feisty elderly woman as she visits her grandson, Denis, stationed at a Russian army camp in



**ALEXANDRA**

Chechnya, and whom she has not seen for eight years. Exquisitely shot in muted sepia tones; the film creates an unworldly atmosphere as Alexandra climbs into a tank with her grandson, strolls around the drab compound, and takes



**Just Like Home**

old Danuta Szaflarska and dedicated the film to her grandmother. Ms. Szaflarska is absolutely marvelous as Aniela living alone in a beautiful, but rundown, wooden villa. She evokes both grace and beauty as she copes with all the changes happening around her in the new post-Communist society. Exquisitely shot in black and white, Ms. Kedzierzawska's film reminds us not to discard the past as we march toward the future.

'Just Like Home' (Denmark), is about trust: the



**One Hundred Nails**

fundamental belief that people you hardly know will want the best for you! says the director, Lone Scherfig. Like in her other movie, 'Italian for beginners' (2000), humour and life are given different forms than a conventional style. Where the problems of each character in the movie can be made into a drama, Scherfig uses a generous tone and focuses on characters and details of a provincial, sleepy town, where the drama is awakened in the middle of the night by something quite harmless: a naked man!



**Traveling with Pets**

'One Hundred Nails' (Italy), the opening scene is nailing of 100 priceless religious texts to the floor of theological library in a university by a philosophy professor (Raz Deglan). In what he declares his last narrative feature, celebrated Italian filmmaker Ermanno Olmi, presents a personal interpretation of Christian faith against both the distancing nature of religious orthodoxy and the value of knowledge in books versus direct experience. In a later scene when the professor is asked by the police if he is part of a terrorist group, he answers yes: the teaching Staff!

'Traveling with Pets' (Russia), truly represents the art of cinema where pictures talk. Vera Storozheva, the former actress, shows excellent skill as director and with the excellent performance by Kseniya Kutepova (Natalija), puts the spark in this invigorating example of feminist cinema. Kutepova brings an outspoken intelligence and warmth to a woman whose heart is finally awakening and whose mind has never been freer! The second week of the festival will be covered in the second part of the report in June issue. For film listing and tickets, please visit the festival web site: <http://fest08.sffs.org/>

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