

Prez gives Ebadi guards

IranTimes: Iranian Nobel laureate Shirin Ebadi said she has received a new round of death threats warning her "death is near." In a statement, Ebadi said, "On April 3, at the entry to the building of my office, there was a note written 'Shirin Ebadi, your death is near.'" Within hours of the publication of Ebadi's remarks, President Ahmadi-nejad's office announced he had ordered an investigation of the threats and told the police to provide security for Ebadi. Ebadi, 60, a lawyer who is known for representing clients in some of Iran's most sensitive human rights cases, previously reported receiving death threats in 2006. "The threats against my family and me have recently intensified. Those who wish me dead do not have any personal animosity. They are those who are against my ideas, so finding the person or people who have sent me the threatening letters is not a difficult task," she said. Agence France Presse reported Ebadi noted several threats including one that warned her against making speeches abroad. Ebadi spends a great deal of time speaking abroad; she will shortly be visiting Montana and speaking there. That threat said: "We have warned you many times to watch your tongue. But, despite the warnings, you are talking. So, for the last time, correct your behavior or you will be avenged." Another threat came from a group of self-described anti-Baha'is; Baha'is advocate the unity of religions and were by far the biggest non-Muslim religious minority in the country before the 1979 revolution. The Islamic Republic views Baha'is as apostates and denies them fundamental rights. Ebadi and her human rights group have repeatedly expressed concern about the situation of Baha'is remaining in Iran. The handwritten let-

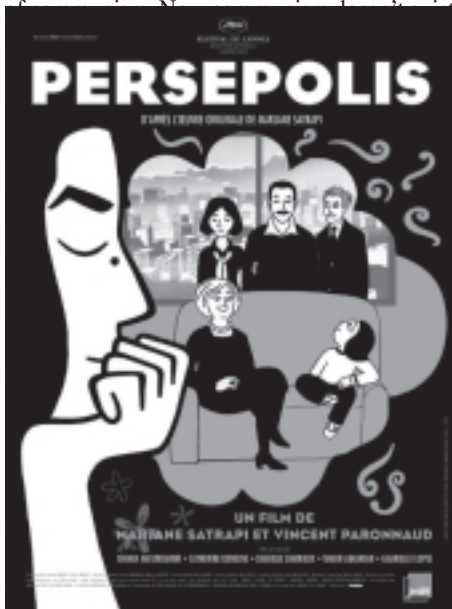


ter, signed "The Associated of anti-Baha'is," read: "Mrs. Shirin Ebadi, we told you to give up your un-Islamic and Baha'ibased faith, but you have continued serving the foreigners and the Baha'is and even your daughter is involved. So we will kill her, so you understand." In her memoir, "Iran Awakening: One Women's Journey to Reclaim Her Life and Country," Ebadi wrote that after she received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2003, she wondered what the consequences would be. "What would the Iranian government think? Would I be safer, somehow protected by this prize in the name of peace? Or would it aggravate those in Iran whose tolerance for me was already limited, who had planned to have me killed when I was infinitely less prominent."

'Persepolis' about to leave American theater screens

IranTimes: The film Persepolis has so far grossed \$4.4 million at the U.S. box office, but its run now appears to be coming to an end. The award-winning film, nominated for best animated picture at the Oscars, has grossed \$4.4 million since the start of its run 17 weeks ago. The film played last month in only 46 theaters in the United States, down from 147 the previous weekend, suggesting its U.S. run is about to wrap up. The Irish Times reported that at its premier in Cannes the film received a 2,000-person standing ovation that reportedly lasted for 25 minutes. Marjane Satrapi, 39, the writer and co-director of the film, said, "When the applause started I was shocked. I tried to keep in the tears, but I couldn't. That ovation was fantastic. We were all crying." Persepolis is adapted from Satrapi's autobiographical graphic novels. The story is about a young and outspoken Satrapi coming of age during Iran's tumultuous Islamic Revolution. The film has received worldwide acclaim but was banned by the Islamic Republic except for a censored version shown briefly in two cultural centers in Tehran. Satrapi told The Irish Times she misses her childhood country, but that she now lives a happy life in Paris. "Of course," Satrapi said when she was asked if she missed Iran. "Because it is my country. At the same time, I have the life that I want. I am a successful person. I live in Paris, the city where I want to live. If I start complaining, what should the people in the rest of the world do? So many other people have unhappy lives." Satrapi said her film was "not a political leaflet," and seemed as critical of Washington as she was of Tehran. "That is the difference between art and politics. Politicians think they have answers for everything. We artists, we only have questions. We don't

have any answers. That's why we're artists," Satrapi said. "America had the role of being the cop of the world because everyone was scared



anymore, and we know the UFOs are not going to come from Mars and hit us, so we need another enemy. "What does this expression, 'the axis of evil,' mean? All the terrorists on September 11 were from Saudi Arabia or Pakistan [actually, none were Pakistani], but they're not called the axis of evil. "There's something very dangerous in that. It plays with the emotions of people, and even some intelligent people embrace these fanatical ideas. Evil is international. It's universal. It's everywhere," Satrapi said.

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Sadr faces...

source for the allegation, but the information appeared to come from Khoi family members. The key question is whether the Special Clerical Court will act on the accusations or just ignore them. Sadr is widely believed to spend most of in Qom, avoiding the chaos in Iraq and pursuing theological studies to boost his limited academic standing. Khoi and Sadr were both sons of top Shiite clerics in Iraq before the ouster of Saddam. Khoi lived in exile in London and returned to Iraq on an American military aircraft. He was seen by many as an American and British choice to lead post-Saddam Iraq. But only days after his return, he was stabbed to death in Najaf. The widespread belief at the time was that Sadr was behind Khoi's murder, though serious evidence has not been offered. However, in 2005, the Iraqi government issued a warrant for the arrest of Sadr, who now rarely appears in public. The Alef website said several Iranian families have also lodged complaints against Sadr in Iran's Special Clerical Court. They charge Sadr with launching the gun battle in Karbala last August that caused the deaths of seven Iranian pilgrims among dozens of others. That charge was presumably meant to show a direct Iranian interest in prosecuting Sadr. The United States asserts that Iran's Qods Force arms and trains



numerous militant cells that have broken away from Sadr's Mahdi Army. The Islamic Republic's relationship with Sadr himself is still not clear. But Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki recently launched an effort to suppress Sadr's militia. Iran could show its support for Maliki by prosecuting Sadr. Iranian conservatives have mixed views of Sadr. Some are quite hostile to him, with Mohsen Rezaei, the secretary of the Expediency Council and former commander of the Pasdaran, reportedly denouncing Sadr as a "killer of Shiites."

Bush says flatly he has no plans to attack Iran

Iran Times: by Warren L. Nelson

President Bush says he has no plans to attack Iran and "chuckles" at the frequent news reports that have him plotting a war against the Islamic Republic. It was the second time Bush had said he doesn't plan an attack on Iran. The comment—made last month in an interview with ABC News—received minimal media attention, as did Bush's first denial last year. ABC asked Bush if it was correct that he had no plan to attack Iran. "Exactly," Bush replied. He then gave his usual formulaic policy description: "I have always said all options need to be on the table. But my first effort is to solve this issue diplomatically." After saying no attack was being planned, Bush said, "I'm chuckling because, you know, from my perch, my perspective, these rumors happen all the time.... I wouldn't say they're amusing. It's part of the job, I guess." Bush has used the phrase, "all options are on the table," for some years. Many people view it as a thinly veiled threat to attack or invade Iran. But taken literally, if all options are on the table, then one option would be abject surrender, which no commentator ever suggests is on the table. In reality, the phrase is handy political rhetoric that is used to convey toughness to Americans without actually saying anything of substance. The Tehran equivalent is the popular line, "Israel must be wiped off the map," which conveys toughness to the Iranian polity while avoiding saying who will do the wiping off. Bush previously denied any plans to attack Iran last October. Until then, no reporter had ever asked him directly if he was plotting a war. But in an October White House interview, an Arab reporter with Al-Arabiya, the Dubai-based television station, asked: "Is it true you have issued orders, Mr. President, to your senior generals to prepare for a major and precise strike [on Iran]?" Bush said, "I would call that empty propaganda. Evidently there's a lot of gossip in parts of the world that try to scare people about me personally or my country or what we stand for. And that kind of gossip is just baseless gossip." Al-Arabiya asked if there was a deadline by which negotiations with Iran must conclude or Bush would attack. And it asked if Bush was willing to leave office with the Iran issue unresolved. Many American commentators have written that they believe Bush will not leave office with the issue still open because he does not trust a Democratic successor to keep the pressure on Iran. But Bush repudiated that view and



indicated he was willing to leave the issue open for his successor in 2009. "I'm dedicated to the proposition that they [Iran] should not continue to enrich—as will be the people that follow me in office. There is a universal concern about Iranian ambitions here in America. This is not a party issue.... When the Iranian president announces to the world that he is going to destroy an ally [Israel], or announces to the world that he will end up defying the world, no matter who the president is, there is going to be a continued focus and effort to resolve this issue." Bush emphasized that diplomacy is his first choice. "I, of course, said all options are on the table," Bush told Al-Arabiya. "But I made a pledge to the American people that we will work diplomatically to solve the problem. And that's why you see us at the United Nations working with the EU countries and China and Russia to send that clear message. And we're going to continue to impose sanctions and make it harder for the Iranian government to operate in the world until they change their mind [on enrichment]." Bush said, "I've also spoken to the Iranian people. And I want to make it clear to the people of Iran that the United States respects Iran, respects the people, respects the proud tradition, and that the government of Iran has taken decisions that make it harder for them [Iranians] to live their lives." Bush also repudiated the view of some conservatives in the United States that Muslims pray to a different god, to a god of evil. "I believe there is a universal God," Bush said. "I believe the God that the Muslim prays to is the same God that I pray to. After all, we all came from Abraham."

Al-Qaeda says Iran seeks to annex Arab neighbors

IranTimes: In yet another videotaped message to the world, Al-Qaeda's Number Two man has accused the Islamic Republic of seeking to annex southern Iraq, the Persian Gulf Arab states and a swath to the Shia lands of Lebanon. In a 16-minute message, Ayman Az-Zawahiri said, "Iran has clear goals, which is the annexation of southern Iraq and the east of the [Arabian] Peninsula, and to expand in order to be able to communicate with its followers in southern Lebanon." But he also painted the Islamic Republic as the handmaiden of the United States. He said the entire Middle East region was on the verge of exploding because of the plot against Iraq by Iran and the United States. Zawahiri said, "If an understanding with it [Iran] is reached on the basis of accomplishing all or some of its goals in return for keeping a blind eye on the American hegemony in the area, this understanding will add fuel to the fire.... The situation will explode an already enflamed region." Zawahiri's remarks received minimal attention inside Iran. And, where Zawahiri tried to paint Iran as a puppet of



Washington, Iran tried to paint Zawahiri as an American puppet. For example, Iranian state radio said, "[Zawahiri] has claimed that Iran is trying to make Iraq part of its soil. The Americans have also made the same suggestion; it is an effort to cause a rift between Iran and Iraq." Only a single newspaper, the reformist Etemad-e Melli, was seen to carry any story about Zawahiri's tape. And that story said nothing about Zawahiri's allegations on Iranian goals. It only reported his attacks on the United States.

Library of Congress screens top Iran films

Three well-known Iranian films will be screened at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., between April 25 and May 1. "The Color of Paradise," directed by Majid Majidi, "Under the Olive Trees," by Abbas Kiarostami and "The Sun Behind The Moon," by Mohsen Makhmalbaf are scheduled to be screened at the library that began actively recording international films in 1942. "The Color of Paradise," released in 2000, is about Mohammad, an 8-year-old blind boy, who lives in a school for blind children in Tehran. When summer arrives, he is left behind, but his poor, coalminer father eventually arrives to take him back to their village. The countryside is magical, with fields full of colorful flowers; even though Mohammad cannot see them, he is happy to experience them. "Under the Olive Trees," released in 1995, is probably Kiarostami's most famous work. The film explores the relationship between a movie director and the actors in his film. The actors play a couple that get married right after an earthquake; in reality, the actor is in love with the actress and is trying to persuade

her to marry him. The 2001 film, "The Sun Behind the Moon," also known as "Kandahar," is about an Afghan refugee in Canada who receives a letter from her sister in Taliban-run Afghani-



stan informing her that she is going to commit suicide on the approaching eclipse of the sun. In a desperate bid to save her, the sister travels back to Afghanistan. The film, which encompasses themes including poverty, hunger, treatment of women, and landmines, fuses fiction with reality to produce some astonishing imagery and surreal scenes on the reality and horrors of war.