

Russia-Iraq talks on arms inspections fail

By Vladimir Radyuhin

MOSCOW, NOV. 30. Russia has failed to persuade Iraq to allow U.N. weapon inspectors back into the country in what is seen as a setback for an early lifting of U.N. sanctions against Baghdad.

The Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister, Mr. Tariq Aziz, left Moscow on Thursday after a day of intensive talks, ruling out the dispatch of a new U.N. monitoring mission to his country.

Meanwhile, the Interfax news agency quoted Russian Foreign Ministry sources as reiterating Moscow's position in favour of "a resumption of international monitoring over Baghdad's prohibited military programmes in linkage with clear-cut timetable for lifting the blockade and sanctions against Iraq."

Mr. Aziz's emphatic "no" to reporters' questions if Baghdad would accept a U.N. inspection gave the lie to his description of his talks in Moscow as "very good". "There is a good understanding between the leaders of the two countries and we are discussing the problems associated with the spirit of friendship and mutual understanding," he said.

However, Russian news agencies quoted unnamed diplomats

as saying Mr. Aziz's talks with the Russian Foreign Minister, Mr. Igor Ivanov, had been "difficult" and the two sides had differed over disarmament issues. An announced joint news conference on Wednesday was cancelled "for lack of time" and was not rescheduled for Thursday, even though the Iraqi leader stayed overnight in Moscow.

Mr. Aziz also refuted Russian officials' reports of Baghdad's acceptance of the U.N. Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan's proposal to open talks early next year on ending the stalemate over weapons inspections. He said Baghdad was still studying Mr. Annan's proposal, and said his Government would have to decide when it would be "convenient" to take part in such talks.

Russia has been pressing Baghdad to accept the U.N. inspection as an essential condition for successful lobbying for the lifting of the U.N. sanctions on Iraq. Unless the sanctions are withdrawn early, Russian oil majors may lose their strong positions on the Iraqi market. Baghdad made it clear that Russian companies may lose their stakes in the development of Iraqi oil fields if they did not start large-scale oil production immediately.

THE HINDU

1 DEC 2003

President without powers

IRAN'S PRESIDENT, Syed Mohammed Khatami, has to seek a fresh mandate from his people in May 2001 by when he will be close to finishing his four-year term. While the mental make-up of Iranian society has certainly been stirred and shaken over these four years, Mr. Khatami has not been able to achieve very much that is concrete and his more popular measures have been nullified by his conservative opponents.

It was at the beginning of this week that Mr. Khatami made his most public pronouncement of the frustrations that had beset his term in office. "I must admit that after three years and a half as President I am aware that the head of the state does not have adequate prerogatives to do his job. The President is not capable of stopping the violations of the Constitution or ensuring its implementation. Failure to implement the Constitution weakens democracy and threatens to stir up tension. Among the important structural things we must do is to remove ambiguities so that the President can do his job with total authority and with the support of the legal power."

Such mild language is characteristic of Mr. Khatami who has probably spent more time restraining his supporters from pressing extreme demands than in combating the conservative establishment to get those demands fulfilled. Nevertheless, these statements, made at a conference on the Constitution, denote a change in Mr. Khatami's fundamental approach. The President's powers are severely circumscribed by a system wherein a Supreme Cleric ultimately wields all power and has henchmen posted at all nodal points of authority. But for three and a half years, Mr. Khatami has hardly ever publicly challenged the structure, preferring instead to work within it, tinkering with it where he could and trying to bring change through persuasion.

That approach had run its course and Mr. Khatami's patent inability to deliver had enthused his conservative opponents and disillusioned his followers and apparently even the President himself. A little over a month ago the talk in Teheran was that Mr. Khatami was on the point of throwing in the towel. But for now he appears to have decided that for whatever it is worth, and without deviating in a major manner from his mild and persuasive ways, he will at least say what needs to be said. From their initial response to Mr. Khatami's remarks it appeared that the conservatives had calculated that there was not much fight in the man.

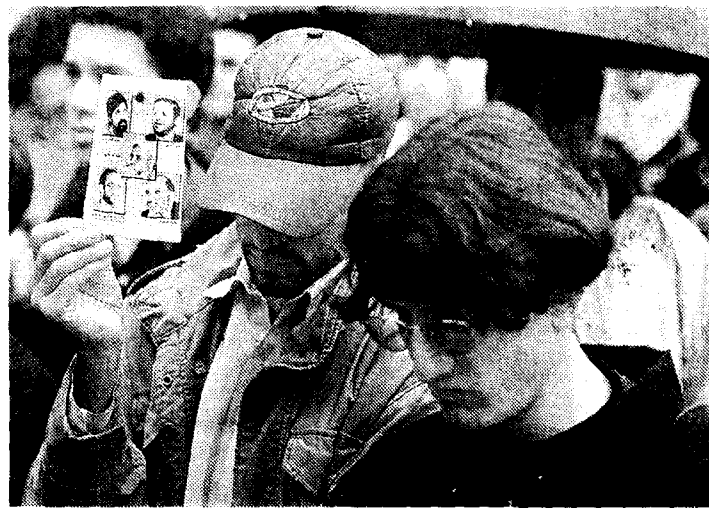
The head of the Iranian judiciary, a person who has posed as a relative neutral despite heading

the institution that has led the conservative campaign for the last three and a half years, was the first to respond to Mr. Khatami's challenge. Although he did not mention the President by name the conservative head of the judiciary, Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Sharoudi, said that any questioning of the existing constitutional

structure was merely an attempt to advance the interests of a particular political faction. There is little doubt that Ayatollah Sharoudi would not have been so bold if he did not have the backing of the conservative establishment and especially of the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Syed Ali Khamenei. While Ayatollah Khamenei has never gone so far as to totally undermine the Presi-

dent's position he has still taken the decisive action to curb some of the bolder initiatives taken by the Khatami administration. Those who have watched him over the years are convinced that Ayatollah Khamenei is instinctively a hard-core conservative. But they also believe that he has a strong streak of pragmatism in his personality. Ayatollah Khamenei's dilemma is that he knows that a Khatami presidency is necessary as a valve for the growing frustration and anger against the clerical establishment among the Iranian public. But Ayatollah Khamenei is also the central figure in a conglomeration of interests which will suffer if Mr. Khatami is actually allowed to car-

Mr. Khatami has enough weapons to fight with. What Iranians want to know is if he still has the will.
KESAVA MENON
on the hardliner-moderate face-off.



Teheran University students hold up pictures of jailed reformist journalists and (below) a portrait of Iran's President, Syed Mohammed Khatami... taking on the hardliners.

ry forward the reforms that he has promised.

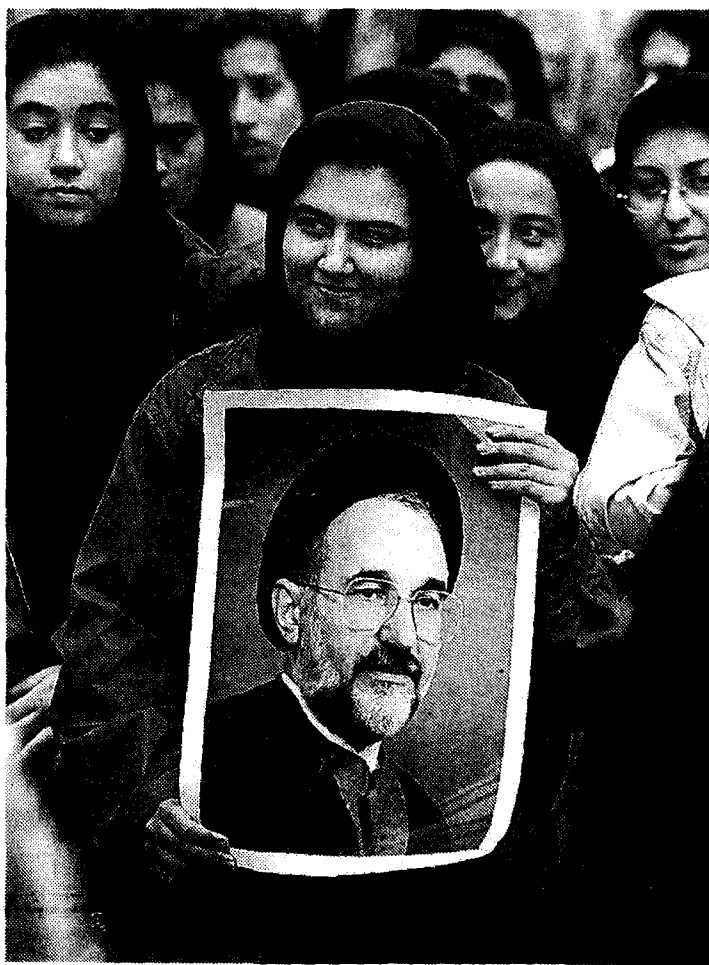
The conservatives lack a single figure who can come anywhere close to matching Mr. Khatami in popularity. At present, their only recourse is to chip away at his standing and also perhaps to try and erode his will to contest.

So far, they have gone about frustrating him at every turn and, as Ayatollah Sharoudi's statement about the unlikelihood of judicial reform shows, are going to continue denying him the opportunity to make meaningful change. As the momentum towards the elections picks up, they are bound to step up their attack on other fronts. The supposed moral looseness of the reform camp is bound to be one of the main planks of the conservative campaign.

Another critique they could have levelled against the reformers was that they had neglected economic reform and instead whiled away, their time chasing unnecessary political and social change. It is, however, difficult to make this charge stick at this period of unprecedentedly high oil prices and the benefits this has brought to the Iranian economy.

Neither can the conservatives deny that it was the availability of the Khatami dispensation that led to a major improvement in relations with the European Union, cracked the wall of suspicion between Iran and the U.S. and caused by and large the end of Iran's isolation.

Mr. Khatami has enough weapons with which to fight. What Iranians would like to know is whether he still has the will.



40-12

A MEASURED ENGAGEMENT

5/12

INDIA'S NEW INITIATIVE to engage Mr. Saddam Hussein's Iraq in a measured but substantive manner is as much an exercise in some enlightened economic diplomacy as an attempt at upholding autonomy in foreign policy. The latest agreement, with two distinctive facets of interaction with Baghdad, provides for Indian wheat supplies to Iraq in exchange for its crude oil. This marks New Delhi's first decisive step in reorienting its ties with Baghdad since the end of the Gulf War in 1991. It is an eloquent testimony to India's empathy for the suffering people of Iraq. But the accord, given the limits of its bilateral character, can be no masterplan for rescuing the ordinary Iraqis from the trap of sanctions which the U.N. Security Council has kept in force for nearly a decade since the U.S.-masterminded eviction of Mr. Hussein's military forces from Kuwait. In simple but profound terms, the cumulative effect of the sustained U.N. embargo is an unmitigated humanitarian disaster for the Iraqi population. It is in this grim context that India will extend help to Iraq under the explicit terms of the U.N.'s prevalent 'oil-for-food' programme. This is a U.N. concession to the Iraqi people so that they can receive food and other essentials of livelihood in barter for the oil that Mr. Hussein's regime could export through an internationally-monitored window.

In addition to this transfer of aid within the modified framework of the U.N. sanctions regime, New Delhi has now said it will consult the Security Council on a separate issue of benefit to both India and Iraq. New Delhi's objective is to explore ways of importing additional crude from Iraq in the context of the cross-currents on the international oil market that had already affected India. Referring to Iraq as an oil source in this situation, India hopes to invoke a specific provision of the U.N. Charter. A planned move of this

magnitude by New Delhi seems to have been a factor in Iraq's new hopes for a long-term "strategic" relationship with India. However, two questions must first be sorted out. The outcome of India's proposed discussions with the Security Council will be determined by not only the facts of the case but also the diplomatic compulsions of the U.S., in particular, in dealing with Mr. Hussein in the short run.

On a different plane, Baghdad may find it necessary to wait until its equation with the U.N. is redefined so that the potential scope of a meaningful India-Iraq "strategic" tie-up can be adequately considered in brain-storming sessions in the first place. Impinging on this new bilateral equation will be New Delhi's current diplomatic exercise, undertaken in conjunction with Teheran, in identifying ways to transport Iranian natural gas to India through or outside Pakistan. More importantly, much will also depend on Iraq's own world view after the sanctions on it are lifted. A diplomatic spin-off effect of the current India-Iraq dialogue is that New Delhi has now joined the ranks of an emerging morality club of sorts consisting of Russia and China, which seem keen to expose the horrific miscarriage of the U.N.'s anti-Hussein embargo. A pertinent point is that the countries advocating a humane exit strategy for consideration by the Security Council in regard to its sanctions on Iraq are also the ones favouring the emergence of a multipolar global political order at this stage. Russia has of course made clear that it is not thinking of a tripartite alliance involving India and China. However, the three have been able to identify some commonalities, not amounting to a partnership as of now, in quest of a more balanced international political dispensation. Their views on Iraq will be of some direct interest to the next U.S. administration too.

THE HINDU

5 DEC 2000

Khatami in a dilemma as tenure nears end

By Kesava Menon

MANAMA (BAHRAIN) DEC. 9. Iran's President, Mr. Hojatoleslam Syed Mohammed Khatami, is certainly sounding more combative these days. But as he nears the end of his first four-year term in office, Mr. Khatami is still stymied by conservatives who want to block his reform programme and also under pressure from those who want more radical changes. Mr. Khatami is at a crossroads and it looks like Iran is headed for a chaotic period no matter which direction the President chooses to move in.

The other day, Mr. Khatami criticised a power structure, and the conservatives who keep it in place, for not providing him with the capacity to bring about meaningful changes. Addressing a huge student rally in Teheran, Mr. Khatami said, "I am responsible for the Constitution and must have the necessary resources to meet this responsibility. When I see the law is broken I should be able to stop it immediately and send it for investigation. But I don't have this prerogative. I should have it to do the job correctly." When Mr. Khatami talks about enforcing the Constitution, he

means those provisions of it that provide for basic rights and the rule of law.

While the Constitution does contain these democratic provisions, the clerical establishment that has ruled Iran since the revolution uses parallel constitutional schemes and provisions to keep them in abeyance. Mr. Khatami's promise to energise those parts of the Constitution that gave people their basic civil rights was one of the main reasons behind his landslide victory in the Presidential elections held three and a half years ago. At the end of this period, all that he has to show in this respect is the realisation that the Constitution also contains many mechanisms to block the people from acquiring these rights and that there are people entrenched within the system who are prepared to use those mechanisms.

Mr. Khatami also spoke out more openly against those who have been using parts of the Constitution to block other parts of the basic law. "The minority that was defeated in elections resort to all means to maintain power. This shows our experience in democracy is undeveloped. We have not yet learned to tolerate each other, to concede

in practice to what the majority wants". The Presidential election was the first of three major polls in the last three years in which the conservatives were resoundingly defeated. But they have managed to retain much of the actual power by using constitutional provisions that provide the unelected clergy with more power than the elected government.

The conservatives have used their control over the judiciary blatantly and the implicit threat inherent in their control over the armed forces to keep the reform movement in check.

Other pro-reform politicians and intellectuals have been willing to openly defy the judiciary as well as run the risk of a military intervention on behalf of the conservatives. (Pro-reformers point out that 70 per cent of the troops in the regular armed forces and the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps have voted for change just like the rest of their countrymen). Unlike them, however, Mr. Khatami bears the constitutional responsibility to ensure that his country does not slide into chaos. Also being a cleric himself, albeit a liberal one, Mr. Khatami is not able to shake himself off

from his roots and go along with the will of the lay majority.

That he continues to be caught up in this dilemma was revealed in another comment yesterday. "We want religion and democracy together. It is fine to criticise the system but not to seek to overthrow it. Those who speak of changing the system are betraying the nation." There is a danger here that Mr. Khatami may have already slipped behind the mood of the lay majority. Three and a half years ago, he had understood that the system had to reform itself if it was to survive. In letting him win and initiate his reforms, the conservatives appeared to have realised that there was a need to vent some of the pressure from the base of society.

But the conservatives have, in the ultimate analysis, refused to heed the call for reform and the ensuing frustration amongst the public will probably harden into a desire for drastic change. If Mr. Khatami decides to throw in his lot with the majority of his people it would lead to an open confrontation with the conservatives. If he tries to continue with his policy of containing public expectations he might soon find that he lacks the means to do so.

THE HINDU

10 DEC 2000

51-6 GREAT GAMES 26 10
Ghosts in India's diplomatic machine

THE sanctions against Iraq appear to be unwinding one way or another, with France and Russia operating humanitarian flights to Baghdad, and Saddam Hussein sick with lymph cancer. If the removal of Hussein from power is a principal objective of American policy, his death would achieve the objective albeit by a natural process. A leading Arabic newspaper has reported that he is readying a family council led by his youngest son to take over when he dies. But his son cannot be expected to possess the unrivalled pugnacity and survival skills Saddam has exhibited during his years in power. His son may arrive at an accommodation with the Americans and the UN, or equally likely be overthrown by dissenters in the Iraqi establishment. The UN Security Council has been split vertically on the sanctions issue — the French, Russians and Chinese favour an early end to sanctions, while the British and Americans are strong votaries of its continuance. What is interesting in this unfolding scenario is that the French team in Baghdad consists mostly of doctors — likely to be attending to Hussein's ailment, and thus frustrating Anglo-American objectives in the region. The French, Russians and Chinese must have been promised a *quid pro quo* by the Iraqis — he bring sanctions to an end, and get preference in business deals when they start to flow.

Amidst all this manoeuvring, Ajit Panja has gotten into the act, flying to Baghdad and drawing American criticism. It is unclear what his objectives are, and what brief he carries from the Indian government. If the objective is to secure business when Iraq opens up, the US, with which India's relations are just thawing, is a much larger trading partner than Iraq and India could lose on the swings what it gains on the roundabouts. Moreover, the US has of late begun to show sympathy to India's strategic interests, but it is unreasonable to expect the Americans, for example, to be very enthused about India's claims to be a permanent member of the Security Council, if it suspects that India will, as a matter of course, line up with China and Russia against them. As for the issue of Iraqi children dying because of sanctions, the Iraqis can now buy food and medicines against oil. It may be salutary to take a look at India's own infant mortality rate, over which the government does not appear particularly exercised. When Saddam Hussein took over Kuwait during the Gulf War, I.K. Gujral went to Iraq and publicly embraced him, leading to the expulsion of Indians from Kuwait when it was freed. India has been in the position before of the small fish, which imagines itself a big player, and gets squashed when the chips fall out. //

THE STATESMAN

1991

Iraq refuses to stay down

Ten years since the Gulf War, Iraq, still under Saddam Hussein, has almost retaken its place at the table of nations, reports
KESAVA MENON.

THE TENTH anniversary of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait occurred this year and the tenth anniversary of its bloody-nosed ouster will occur early next year. These two momentous events and all that happened between and after them were supposed to have changed the international political order in a fundamental way. Ten years hence it is clear that fundamental change in the world order has not occurred. Nothing proves this as much as the fact that Iraq, still under Mr. Saddam Hussein, has almost retaken its place at the table of nations.

Saddam-ruled Iraq was relegated to the doghouse at the end of the 1991 Gulf War. It was believed by a U.S. then just about flexing its status as the sole superpower that it could shape the terms on which the nations of the world would

interact. In this definitional exercise, Iraq was posited as the prime example of unacceptable behaviour. The force with which this view has been projected is evident from the fact that even at the end of the decade a comparison with Iraq is considered ample justification for armed attacks on other recalcitrant entities on the international stage such as Slobodan Milosevic's Yugoslavia.

If the isolation of Iraq was supposed to be the gauge for U.S. success in promoting its New World Order then at the end of this decade it must be said that this project has been a dismal failure. Country after country is lining up to do business with Iraq and some of those who have staunchly supported the policy of "containing" it have begun to waver. Political matters in the U.S. are of course in a flux and it is entirely possible that the people who dreamt up the "containment" policy — Mr. Dick Cheney (who was Defence Secretary in 1991 and could be the Vice-President now), Gen. Colin Powell (then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and now tipped to be Secretary of State) and Mr. George W. Bush (heir of the then President) — could once again take power. This could also mean the return

of 'big oil' to the centre of U.S. decision-making. All this would probably lead to a reinvigoration of the "containment" policy. But is it feasible any longer?

A Russia that is steadily asserting itself has taken the lead in challenging the policy of isolating Iraq. Its Foreign Minister, Mr. Igor Ivanov, has visited Iraq and he and the President, Mr. Vladimir Putin, have issued statements that repudiate the central elements of the isolation policy. They do agree that Iraq cannot escape its responsibility to satisfy the world that it has rid itself of weapons of mass destruction. But they also hold that it is not Iraq alone that is violating the norms of the U.N. In trying to overthrow the Saddam regime by economically squeezing Iraq, the U.S. is violating one of the main principles of the U.N. Moreover, there are no U.N. resolutions or other regulations that allow the U.S. to impose no-fly zones over parts of northern and southern Iraq.

These articulations challenging the U.S. policy on Iraq followed the Russian action of flying a plane into Baghdad's Saddam International Airport in blatant disregard of measures the U.S. has been able to maintain over the decade. The U.S., as usual interpreting the

enabling U.N. resolutions in as broad a manner as convenient for its policy, insisted that the economic embargo on Iraq included a ban on all flights to the country. Humanitarian flights could be allowed, it said, provided those proposing to undertake them both informed the U.N. sanctions committee and obtained its permission. Russia flew its first plane into Baghdad airport with information posted to the sanctions committee but not waiting for its permission. Only commercial flights could be considered to be in violation of the economic embargo and other flights needed no prior clearance was the Russian position.

Others quickly followed suit, usually after informing the sanctions committee but not waiting for permission. Subsequent flights from Russia and other countries have been nominally humanitarian since they carried cargoes of food and medicines but seemingly purely as a cover. Businessmen and officials have been passengers on these flights and some of the countries have indicated that they are about to commence regular commercial flights. Encouraged, Iraq sent some of its own citizens on the first internal civilian flight in ten years when a plane flew from Baghdad to Mosul directly defying the northern no-fly zone.

While the Russians, the Chinese and the Europeans have strong economic reasons for trying to end the embargo on Iraq, the Arab and Muslim worlds have also finally begun to respond to the call from their streets. At the summit of the Organisation of Islamic Conference held this week, Iraq made substantial progress towards its rehabilitation in the Arab and Muslim world. For the first time, the OIC summit declaration did not contain the word "aggression" in the reference to the dispute between Iraq and Kuwait. While the OIC too urged Iraq to comply with the resolutions on weapons of mass destruction it did not set out any ultimatum as it was wont to in the past. Instead, it encouraged Iraq and the U.N. Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, to initiate a comprehensive dialogue on all outstanding issues. The OIC also de-recognised the no-fly zones and condemned the bombing campaign that the U.S. has been pursuing in its enforcement of the zones.

THE HINDU

2000

Iran, Japan clinch key oil deal

Tokyo, Nov. 1 (Reuters): Japan and Iran clinched a landmark deal today that could give Tokyo access to the world's biggest undeveloped oil field, as their leaders agreed to forge better bilateral ties.

The agreement was crucial for resource-poor Japan and gaining access to a stable oil supply is likely to help override qualms about Iran's weapons programme and its strained ties with the United States. Japan reiterated those concerns in a joint statement issued by Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori and Iranian President Mohammad Khatami after their talks.

Japanese firms are interested in investing in Iran, but they are moving cautiously partly due to worries about US sanctions. There has been no new Japanese investment in Iran since 1993.

The extra-territorial Iran-Libya Sanctions Act, due to expire next August, says the US is ready to impose sanctions on foreign firms that invest in Iran and Libya.

THE TELEGRAPH

2 NOV 2000

Iran, Iraq coming closer after bitter eight-year war

DUBAI: Iran and Iraq, who fought a bitter eight-year-old war from 1980 to 1988, seem to be coming closer.

Just about a fortnight after the historic visit of Iranian foreign minister Kamal Kharrazi to Baghdad, yet another senior Iranian minister is in the Iraqi capital, reflecting the importance the two countries are attaching to each other.

Iranian minister of roads and transport Mahmoud Hojjati arrived in Baghdad on Tuesday at the head of a high-level delegation to attend the Baghdad trade fair.

"Iran seeks to develop its commercial and economic ties with Iraq in a way that serves the interests of the two neighbours," news reports quoted Mr Hojjati as saying. Iraqi trade minister Mohammed Mehdi Saleh said Iran's participation in the Baghdad trade fair showed the two countries' desire to promote bilateral ties. The breakthrough in Iran-Iraq relations came when Iranian President Mohammed

Khatami met Iraqi vice-president Yassin Ramadan on the sidelines of the OPEC summit in Caracas in September.

This was followed by the Iranian foreign minister's visit to the Iraqi capital during which the two countries discussed various thorny issues, which have bedevilled their relations. The two sides also reached an agreement on the resumption of Iranian pilgrims' visits to the holy sites in Iraq.

As part of this agreement, Iranians resumed pilgrimage to holy places for Shia Muslims in Iraq on Sunday.

Meanwhile, seven foreign planes landed in Baghdad on Tuesday, bringing officials and business delegations to take part in the trade fair.

One plane each came from Ireland, United Arab Emirates, Turkey and Lebanon while three aircraft arrived from Russia.

The reports said Iraq has attracted a record participation for the fair with 1,554 companies from 45 countries taking part. (UNI)

THE TIMES OF INDIA

2 NOV 2000

Labour MP defies air embargo on Iraq

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, NOV. 11. Much to the embarrassment of the British Foreign Office, a Labour MP, Mr. George Galloway, on Friday defied its air embargo against Iraq and flew into Baghdad in a chartered plane to attend a conference which would demand withdrawal of sanctions against Mr. Saddam Hussein's regime.

This is the first time since the embargo was imposed in 1990 following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait that a flight from Britain landed in Baghdad in what was seen as a direct challenge to the British Government's support to the U.N.-sponsored sanctions.

The Foreign Office, which dismissed it as a "publicity stunt", has in the past clashed with other countries, particularly France, Russia and China — all permanent members of the U.N. Security Council — for permitting flights to Iraq.

In fact, in this week, the Foreign Office Minister, Mr. Peter Hain, sharply attacked the French stand that the sanctions did not include a ban on flights. Mr. Hain called the French line "contemptible". Observers recalled that Mr. Hain had previously blocked attempts by Mr. Galloway and the human rights organisation Mariam Appeal to organise humanitarian flights to Iraq.

Mr. Galloway, who was accompanied by a leading Catholic priest, Fr. Noel Barry, and a Labour Peer Lord Rea, took the flight from Manston airport in Kent on the pretext of heading for a religious conference in Bulgaria. The plane did stop in Bulgaria for refuelling and then went straight to Baghdad. On arrival there, Mr. Galloway called the sanctions "morally wrong", saying these had led to misery and death.

He also questioned the air embargo. "We have always said that the sanctions did not cover civilian flights and the British Government will now be humiliatingly forced to accept that". He challenged the British Government to prosecute him on his return saying, "If they do, then we will relish our days



Mr. Tariq Aziz, Iraq's Deputy Prime Minister, talks to the British Labour Member of Parliament, Mr. George Galloway, shortly before the opening of the Baghdad Conference, an anti-sanctions forum, in Baghdad on Saturday. — AP

in court."

Fr. Barry said he had joined the trip out of a sense of Christian duty, though a spokesman for the Catholic Church in Scotland said they were not aware of his plans and he did not represent the Church.

Commentators here see this as part of the growing impatience worldwide with the sanctions, and point out that Iraq's attraction as a trading partner is hitting the ban. More than 40 flights are reported to have landed at the Baghdad International Airport since it was reopened in August.

An indication that the sanctions could be fizzling out is that 45 countries, including France, Germany and Belgium — besides China and Russia — are attending a trade fair in

Baghdad. Britain and the U.S. are seen to be the odd ones out in enforcing the sanctions, particularly the air embargo.

Meanwhile, a Liberal Democrat MP, Mr. Menzies Campbell, has accused the Government of conducting an "undeclared war" against Iraq. Quoting the Ministry of Defence figures provided to him, he said the RAF had been dropping an average of four tonnes of bombs every month on Iraq. Mr. Campbell, who is the foreign affairs spokesman for his party, is said to be close to the Foreign Office and his views are seen as reflecting the unease in the Foreign Office over the issue.

"There are many in the Foreign Office who believe that the Government's policy towards Iraq is unsustainable", *The Guardian* said.

THE HINDU

NOV 11 1990

IRAQ BREAKING LOOSE

AM The ends and means question 51.6

THINGS are going rather badly for the United Nations in Iraq. First, the sentiment that the embargo is not fair on the Iraqi people is gathering strength. In February, this year, both the UN humanitarian coordinator and the director of the world food programme resigned, the former describing the sanctions as "a true human tragedy" and the oil-for-food programme as inadequate. His predecessor had resigned in 1998 on similar grounds. The figures speak for themselves: between 1984 and 1989, infant mortality for children below 5 was 47 per 1000; it went up to 108 per 1000 in the period 1994-1999. About 500,000 Iraqi children are estimated to have died of malnutrition since the embargo came into effect. News of this and of the general degradation in the quality of life in Iraq has got around and people have openly started expressing their sympathy. The French have sent commercial flights into Baghdad, without Security Council sanction, and so have the Russians, diplomatic relations have been restored with the UAE, the Syrians have sent a plane and a delegation, the Venezuelan President has visited and so have an Italian legislator, a British MP and an American Congressman. More are on their way. This does not mean that the embargo is over and that Iraq can resume normal trading relations with the rest of the world. What it does mean is support for its position on the issue within the Security Council and in the neighbourhood and a faint glimmer of hope at the end of the tunnel.

In March this year, Kofi Annan acknowledged that the sanctions were hurting the Iraqi population and called, once again, for the devising of "smart sanctions" which aim at the leader while sparing his people. This is easier said than done. The leader derives his power from the state which, in turn, serves the people. Short of poisoning him, one doesn't see how one can hurt Saddam without hurting the ordinary Iraqi. This is the crux of the problem. The US is simply not willing to countenance any lifting of the embargo as long as Saddam is around, nor does it have the mandate to dislodge him by force or to peg the lifting of the embargo on his removal. Its attitude, therefore, lends credence to the Iraqi claim that inspections have become a vendetta to be pursued irrespective of the degree of Iraqi compliance.

The only alternative, in such a scenario, is to wait for the man to die on his own. Saddam is said to be suffering from cancer and has designated one of his sons to succeed him. In other words, the regime will remain; but then it might save a few faces to do business with a new face. Meanwhile, the new inspection regime, Unmovic, hasn't been able to move an inch since it was put in place. The Iraqis contend that Resolution 687 has been complied with and now it is time for a direct dialogue with the US and the UK. This is not going to happen.

What may happen is a gradual widening of the scope of humanitarian assistance, strengthening of business ties with sympathetic countries — the Iraqis have stopped trading in dollars — leading to the re-establishment of quasi-normal relations with important players and the relative isolation of the Anglo-Americans on the issue. Finally, some might contend that, with Jerusalem burning, a secular, progressive pole in West Asia is a factor for peace, not conflict.

THE STATESMAN

8 NOV 2000

Clinton's fresh bid for W. Asia peace fails

New York, Sept. 7 (Reuters): No breakthrough was reported yesterday in talks President Bill Clinton had on the West Asia peace process with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian President Yasser Arafat, the White House said.

"As we suggested beforehand we did not expect yesterday to be a day where we had a breakthrough in the process," said White House spokesman Joe Lockhart. "That is true, I have no breakthrough to report." He said however, that the "process has not broken down" and that the parties still were committed to reaching a peace agreement.

Lockhart spoke after Clinton met Barak for about an hour and Arafat for about an hour and 40 minutes.

Chance encounter

Bill Clinton and Cuban President Fidel Castro, whose countries have been separated by 40 years of enmity, shook hands and exchanged a few words during a chance encounter yesterday, a UN source said today.

The source said the two men had just attended a lunch for the roughly 150 world leaders taking part in a UN Millennium Summit and were making their way to a conference room for a group photograph. They found themselves together in a crush of dignitaries and "there was a handshake and an exchange of words," the source said.

Asked to confirm the en-

counter, a US official said, without elaborating: "Castro approached him (Clinton) at the end of the lunch and they exchanged just a sentence or two."

Poking fun

Before accusing wealthy countries of controlling the world as well as the United Nations, Castro poked fun at himself and his decades-old reputation for marathon speeches.

He stepped onto the podium in the UN Assembly hall, pulled out a white handkerchief and covered a yellow light that warns speakers they are approaching the five-minute time limit. The audience of kings, Presidents and Prime Ministers understood immediately and burst into laughter.

As he did at the UN 50th an-

niversary celebration five years ago, Castro stuck to the five-minute limit.

Charming Jiang

Clinton, acknowledged master of the sound bite and media appearance, yesterday doffed his cap to Chinese President Jiang Zemin for his performance on America's most-watched television network news programme. Clinton was chatting to Jiang before lunch.

Jiang appeared on US television this week in a rare interview with veteran anchorman Mike Wallace of CBS's *60 minutes*. "I see you've taken American television by storm... (anchorman) Mike Wallace is so mean to all the rest of us. He's purring like a little child (with you). I saw it, it was great. I'm so jealous," Clinton said.

THE TELEGRAPH

8 SEP 2000

Iran-US ties show signs of a thaw after 21-year freeze

BY GENEIVE ABDO
International Herald Tribune

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Tehran, Sept. 11: Contacts between high-ranking Iranian and US officials in New York last week revealed publicly for the first time that both sides of Iran's factional divide favor an eventual end to the 21-year freeze in relations, analysts and diplomats said on Sunday.

Meetings related to the Millennium Summit of nearly 150 world leaders at the United Nations last week signalled that Iran's conservative establishment is willing to admit in public what until now they had acknowledged only in private: relations with the so-called great satan could produce economic rewards too lucrative to pass up.

The clearest sign of this development came in a meeting that Iran's parliamentary speaker, Mehdi Karroubi, and other lawmakers had with several US counterparts at a reception at the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art. Mr. Karroubi, a veteran revolutionary cleric with ties to both the reformist and conservative camps, described the encounter as accidental.

Analysts, however, said that such a meeting could not have occurred without general, if not explicit, sanction from high-level figures

within Iran's clerical establishment, which has publicly denounced any reconciliation with the United States.

"Karroubi's meeting was totally unexpected. But he must have done this with permission or knowledge from someone at the top," said an Iranian political analyst who is an expert on US-Iran relations.

"This is a departure from the past because although the conservatives want to eventually restore relations, they didn't want it to happen when President Khatami was in power. They didn't want the reformers to get the credit."

Public opinion in Iran overwhelmingly supports reconciliation with the United States, and such a popular move would undoubtedly redound to the benefit of President Mohammed Khatami, who has done more than any other recent Iranian leader to reshape the West's perception of the Islamic Republic.

But Iranian policy has been dominated for two decades by anti-Americanism.

Many of the reformers who now hold positions of influence in Mr. Khatami's movement were among the student militants who held Americans hostage for 444 days in 1979, an event that has remained the greatest single obstacle toward rapprochement.

10-16

WEST ASIA / JERUSALEM REMAINS KEY ISSUE

17/9

Palestinians put off statehood

By Kesava Menon

MANAMA (BAHRAIN) SEPT. 11. Saying it wanted to give faltering peace talks a chance, the General Council of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation honours Mr. Yasser Arafat's wishes and delays yet again the long-postponed declaration of Palestinian Statehood. That is the good news. The bad news is that the negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians finally hit a reef that remained submerged for over 50 years but that had to be traversed at some time if their conflict were to be brought to an end. For this reef to be negotiated there has to be suspension of Faith.

It has become clear by now that the make or break issue in the negotiations is the question of who will control the one square kilometre plot inside the Walled City of Jerusalem that contains the "holy sites". In respect of every other issue, Palestinian Statehood, the alignment of the borders, the return of the refugees, etc., the outlines of the final agreement are already clear or can probably be drawn with some effort. But the question with regard to the holy sites goes down to the fundamental perceptions that each side has of the other and of its own national identity.

The Palestinian Authority President, Mr. Yasser Arafat insists that he will never sign an agreement that does not give his people sovereignty over the Mount which contains the Dome of the Rock and the Temple Mount. He is willing to countenance Jews praying at the Western Wall that forms one of the sides of the Mount. But he is unwilling to concede that world Jewry has any right to pray on the Mount itself. Jewish claims that the Mount covers the site where their Temple stood till 70 year 72 of the Christian Era are just so

many myths and fables, Mr. Arafat asserts, since there has yet been no scientific proof that a temple lies buried under the Mount. As such this particular spot contains only two religious buildings and the plaza in between that together form the third holiest spot in the Islamic world.

Ever since their temple was destroyed and throughout the years in exile, the Jews have prayed for their return to Jerusalem. There is little dispute that the Jerusalem they speak about is this particular city in the Levant. There is also little doubt that Jews throughout the ages have been coming to pray at the Western Wall. Thus far, history and mythology supports an agreement that the religious rights of world Jewry extends up to the Wall. Beyond it is the problem. The secular leaders who have led Israel till now have curbed the zealots who want to pull down the two mosques and build a temple in their place. Israeli religious law also prevents the Jews from praying on the top of the Mount since that site has not been properly consecrated. So the Jews might not be readying to alter the status quo, but they cannot give up their belief that they have a right to the Mount either.

To the Israelis, the giving up of all claims to the Mount is tantamount to the relinquishment of the cornerstone of their existence as a nation. For the Arabs, especially the Muslims, the surrender of their religious site is unthinkable and not just because of its spiritual importance. To concede this site to the Jews would be tantamount to an endorsement of the whole Zionist enterprise. The Arabs might have come to recognise that they have to live with Israel at least for the foreseeable future but they are not about to abandon their deep belief that Zionism is a pernicious ideology.



Mr. Salim Zanoon, Speaker of the Palestinian Central Council, accompanied by officials, talks to the media shortly after the conclusion of the 128-member Council's meeting in Gaza city on Sunday. The Dome of the Rock Mosque, one of Islam's holiest sites, located in East Jerusalem, is in the background. — AP

Creative options are being bandied about. The U.S. has proposed ideas about sharing sovereignty and proposals have been touted about "sovereignty above the ground" and sovereignty under the Mount. The Vatican, and a few other sources of advice, have mooted "divine sovereignty" and Mr. Arafat has spoken about Islamic sovereignty. None of these proposals has enabled the sides so far to traverse the reef of conflicting perceptions.

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11

Protests end in UK, continues in Germany

Iraq, Kuwait row sparks oil price rally

Singapore, Sept. 15 (Reuters): Oil prices stayed firm above \$34 a barrel today supported by brewing tensions in West Asia which prompted the US to warn Iraq that it would use military force if Baghdad threatened neighbour Kuwait.

In Europe, British and Belgian hauliers and farmers headed home after days of nationwide protests against exorbitant fuel costs that had virtually paralysed both countries.

But angry consumers were expected to continue protests in Germany, Spain and Ireland.

In Italy, the government agreed to give truckers new fuel discounts, averting the threat of protests and blockades. Transport minister Pierluigi Bersani and representatives of truckers' unions and the Unione Petrolifera industry body, which groups distributors of refined fuel, signed an accord in the early hours of the morning.

US benchmark light crude futures for October delivery were 45 cents higher in Asia at \$34.52 a barrel, not far below the 10-year peak of \$35.85. October rose 25 cents in New York.

Prices have not touched such levels since the 1990/1991 Gulf crisis when Iraq invaded Kuwait.

The latest rally was triggered by Baghdad's allegation that Kuwait was stealing oil from its fields in the south of the country. Kuwait denied the allegations.

"We haven't stolen anything," Kuwaiti foreign minister Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah told Reuters. "If you take from your own land it can't be stealing," he said.

Iraq accused Kuwait of sabotage and theft of Baghdad's crude by drilling oil wells in a joint zone straddling the border. It said it would take unspecified measures against Kuwait.

Iraq made similar oil-theft claims before marching into Kuwait on August 2, 1990, which led to the Gulf War and international sanctions on Baghdad.

The US quickly stepped into

US holiday stuck in Euro chaos

Amsterdam, Sept. 15 (Reuters): It was supposed to be the holiday of a lifetime, their first visit to Europe. But after planning an 18-day tour around 10 European countries, 63-year-old US farmer Don Marth and wife Eleanor from Gaylord, Minnesota, have spent much of their dream trip on a tour bus stuck in Europe's traffic jams.

They arrived in London five days ago, just in time for the blockade of oil refineries over high fuel taxes that brought much of Britain to a standstill.

After three days the couple took a ferry to Belgium, only to find the country and its capital Brussels gridlocked by more protests involving truckers, farmers and taxi drivers.

Delayed by more blockades on the border between Belgium and the Netherlands, Marth's tour had only a few hours to enjoy Amsterdam.

This morning, the tour bus headed for Heidelberg in Germany — only to encounter yet another truckers' blockade.

the fray, warning Iraq not to threaten its neighbours. It said it was ready to use forces based in the Gulf to retaliate if Iraq took such action.

"We do have a credible force in the region and are prepared to use it in an appropriate way at a time of our choosing," US secretary of state Madeleine Albright said.

Escalating bills

Rising West Asian tensions appeared to start unravelling action by major producers earlier this week to quell oil's blistering price rally.

Opec — which includes both Kuwait and Iraq — agreed to hike official output by 800,000 barrels per day from October to tame runaway prices that have sparked fears of inflation and a slowdown in global economic growth.

And as prices once again head north, smaller consuming nations continue to count the cost of escalating energy bills.

Morocco's cabinet began a series of meetings to take steps to offset oil's negative impact on the fragile economy, and Costa Rica said its oil import bill would probably jump by \$130 million against year-ago levels. The IMF warned yesterday that rocketing oil posed a risk to next year's world economic outlook, saying a price of \$30 a barrel could cut growth rate by 0.3 to 0.5 percentage points.

Meanwhile, oil companies in Britain backed down from planned petrol price hikes, announced at the height of a fuel crisis brought on by refinery blockades by disgruntled hauliers and farmers protesting over hefty taxes on fuel.

THE TELEGRAPH

16 SEP 2000

Kuwait, USA

Warn Iraq

UNI, AFP & REUTERS

DUBAI/SINGAPORE, Sept. 17. — Kuwait and the USA have warned Iraq against attacking its tiny neighbour, where an Iraqi aggression led to the Gulf War in 1991.

The Kuwaiti warning came after Baghdad's recent accusation that Kuwait was stealing its oil. Iraq, however, has said it is not threatening any of its neighbours, dismissing what it called a "baseless" American allegation.

But Kuwait reacted to what it saw as a threat with the assertion that any military action by Iraq would be suitably met. Its deputy prime minister and defence minister, Mr Salem al-Sabah was quoted as saying by Kuna that "circumstances are drastically different today than in 1990 ...we are aware of any attempt of betrayal".

The US defence secretary, Mr William Cohen, told a press conference aboard a visiting USS warship, USS Germantown, in Singapore today that US forces in the Gulf are fully prepared to stop any aggressive action by Iraq.

Iraq charge

Iraq accused Iran of a rocket attack on residential districts in Baghdad today in which one person was wounded and several houses were destroyed.

"A group of killers, agents of the Iranian regime, fired three 122 mm rockets at residential districts in Baghdad," the Iraqi news agency quoted a security official as saying.

THE STATESMAN

18 SEP 2000

Iraq exploits oil crisis

By Kesava Menon

MANAMA (BAHRAIN) SEPT. 19. Is Iraq behaving like a panther or a novice in reiterating long-standing accusations that Kuwait is stealing its oil? At a time when oil prices are ruling at levels not seen in years the Iraqi growl has heightened concerns and Baghdad could hope that panicked buyers would intensify their plea that something be done to solve this problem once and for all. On the other hand, the countries which will suffer more heavily in the event of a further price hike are already among Iraq's sympathisers.

Baghdad has charged over the last three days that Kuwait is stealing oil from three fields on the Iraqi side of their border. At least one Iraqi newspaper has said this quantum amounts to about 3,00,000 barrels a day and a senior member of the Baath party has said that before 1990 Kuwait acknowledged the theft though it disputed the quantum.

The allegation now is that the theft continues. Kuwait has, however, denied the charge and warned Baghdad that it will militarily resist any Iraqi bid to act on the accusation. The U.S. Defence Secretary, Mr. William Cohen,

too has said his country's forces in the Gulf are fully prepared to stop any aggression.

The truth of the accusation and the denial apart, the very levelling of the allegation at this time would further pressure the already super-charged oil markets. Iraq, which is allowed to export two million bpd (barrels per day) under the United Nation's "oil for food" programme stands to benefit from the hike in the price, now hovering at around \$33 a barrel for the benchmark Brent crude. There are concerns

NEWS ANALYSIS

that the prices will continue to be high since western demands for energy will only increase with the onset of winter.

On the other hand, there are reports that a great part of the oil supplies added by the increased production by the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries a few months ago is yet to reach markets. Based on this conjecture some analysts predict that the prices could drop. If this analysis is correct, then Iraq will have all the incentive to keep up the pressure.

A longer-term calculation is that countries fearful of another Gulf crisis, which could further inflate oil prices, would step up their diplomatic pleadings with the U.S. to resolve their issues with Iraq. But there is no realistic chance of the U.S. softening its stand on Iraq.

The U.S. is more immune than most others to the threat of reduced supplies from the Gulf. Although the U.S. is by far the largest consumer worldwide, less than a quarter of its oil requirement is sourced from this part. Then again a price rise will increase the demand for dollars, currency of the oil markets, and also enhance the level of investments in the U.S. stock markets by the oil producing countries.

Whereas a multiplicity of reasons will ensure that the U.S. does not succumb to any Iraqi pressure, it is the countries of the East and Europe which would suffer the most. While the United Kingdom (safe behind its North Sea oil screen) is a staunch supporter of the U.S. policy, almost every other country in Europe and Asia has adopted a more sympathetic view vis-a-vis Iraq's problems with the U.N. It is these sympathisers who are likely to be hurt more than Iraq's real foes.

THE HINDU

20 SEP 2000

Iraq's UN allies launch a move to ease sanctions

ASSOCIATED PRESS
UNITED NATIONS, SEPT 23

IRAQ's UN allies have launched a campaign to chip away at sanctions imposed 10 years ago - sending flights to Baghdad in defiance of the US and Britain and demanding cuts in Iraqi payments to Gulf War victims.

The strategy by Baghdad's three key supporters on the Security Council - Russia, China and France - appears aimed at overcoming the deep divisions among council members that have stymied their efforts to ease the impact of trade sanctions on Iraq.

Russia sent a humanitarian flight to Baghdad today, its second in a week. It received authorization from the UN committee monitoring sanctions against Iraq for the first flight on September 17.

But today's flight, carrying 143 passengers and medical supplies, went ahead without committee approval. Ignoring objections from Washington and London, France sent a passenger flight to Baghdad yesterday, insisting there is no flight embargo, and France's United Nations Ambassador Jean-David Levitte said "there will be other flights."

There was no immediate response to the Russian flight. But

calling the French action "a violation of the sanctions regime," US deputy ambassador James Cunningham said "we would hope it doesn't happen again, but I don't have any confidence in that."

US State Department spokesman Richard Boucher went further, calling France's flight - the first in a decade to land in Baghdad without the approval of the UN - a "blatant violation" of sanctions and established UN procedures.

"London's reaction is one of surprise and regret that the French have not waited for a decision from the committee," said Britain's UN Ambassador Jeremy Greenstock.

INDIAN EXPRESS

24 SEP 2000

French jet defies U.N. on Iraq

LONDON, SEPT. 23. French doctors, artists and sports enthusiasts chartered a "humanitarian" flight to Baghdad on Friday, exposing the most serious rift between Western countries over the future of the embargo against Iraq.

The 75-member delegation of anti-sanctions activists set off with the blessing of the French Government and was given a hero's welcome by officials at the newly re-opened Saddam International Airport. Paris "notified" the United Nations committee overseeing sanctions on Thursday but pointedly did not request permission. It ignored the U.N.'s request for a delay until Friday so that the committee could decide if the flight should go ahead.

France, with Russia and China, says that U.N. resolutions do not specifically ban commercial flights to Iraq. But Britain and America claim they count as an economic activity banned under the trade embargo imposed after

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Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. Britain's Ambassador to the U.N., Mr. Jeremy Greenstock, was adamant: "It is absolutely standard procedure that flights need to be cleared by the committee."

In London, the Foreign Office played down the row. A spokesman said Britain encouraged humanitarian flights to Iraq. Privately, though, British diplomats are furious that France has challenged the consensus over sanctions. "It is very frustrating. This is only going to intensify the aggro over Iraq," said one British diplomat. The divisions would only harden Iraq's stand against U.N. resolution 1284, which offers Baghdad the prospect of a permanent end to the embargo if it permits U.N. arms inspections to resume. "It is difficult to understand what the French are doing, except to annoy the United States," the diplomat said.

Mr. Saddam Hussein's regime sees the charter as an important

step towards the dismantling of sanctions. "We praise any measure taken by our friends to resume flights and we expect to receive more planes in the coming days," said Iraq's Transport Minister, Mr. Ahmad Murtada, as he welcomed the French group, accompanied by officials from the Ministry of Health and Iraq's Olympic committee. Mr. Jihad Fighali, the spokesman for the French group, said the trip was not a breach of the embargo as passengers only carried personal belongings and had been thoroughly searched by French customs officers.

Earlier this week a Russian flight carrying humanitarian supplies — as well as oil executives seeking business deals — was given permission by the UN to land in Baghdad. Russia today kept up the flow of flights into Baghdad, a day after a French plane landed there. — ©Telegraph Group Limited, London. 2000.

THE HINDU

24 SEP 2000

The politics of oil

By C. V. Gopalakrishnan

IRAQ'S LATEST charge that Kuwait has been stealing its crude oil (3 lakh barrels a day) — which the latter has denied — is reminiscent of the situation a decade ago which had led to the Gulf war. Intervention by the U.S. and its allies had ended in the defeat of Mr. Saddam Hussein's plans to colonise his smaller neighbour. The threat of another such expedition by Iraq is indeed unsettling, though it is to be hoped that Mr. Hussein will refrain from any adventurism. He had defended his 1991 invasion with the claim that Kuwait was Iraq's 13th province which had been taken away by the British during the First World War of 1914-18. Mr. Saddam Hussein knew that had his annexation of Kuwait succeeded, it would have given his country control over 20 per cent of OPEC production and make it the dominant power in the Gulf.

As for the charge of oil theft, the possibility of its being true does arise from the fact that the oil fields of Iraq and Kuwait border. If the charge is to be taken seriously, it will have to be substantiated by facts about (i) any decline in Iraq's oil production which could have resulted from pilfering by Kuwait; (ii) a matching increase in Kuwait's production which Iraq can attribute to theft; and (iii) proof of Kuwait's access to and deployment of technology which could bring about such a "theft" from adjacent oil wells.

Earlier reports about annual Iraq's oil production having dropped to 58 million tonnes which is a third of its total output because of damage to its oil fields during its war with Iran suggest that annual production had been as high as 174 million tonnes. Putting this figure down in barrels — seven barrels making a tonne — the annual production capacity should be 1,218 million barrels if Iraq had restored it fully after the war with Iran. The corresponding daily production would be around 3.3 million barrels. Iraq might by now well have reached this level of production. There have been reports about its plans to raise it to 6 million or 7 million

barrels a day within the next six or seven years.

Iraq's charge of oil theft by neighbouring Kuwait has not so far been supported by any credible evidence; though it could allege that the production increases in Kuwait could not have been achieved legitimately. But this would be really hold water. Kuwait has agreed under the latest accord with the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) to step

transfer from adjacent wells in another country sunk to a depth of a few thousand metres would be very expensive. The Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) and Oil India are familiar with this technology. It is an operation which could cost not only several million dollars but also calls for hundred per cent accuracy in drilling which is easier said than done. Such diagonal drilling is very rarely resorted to since the cost of extraction would not be economical compared to

Iraq's allegation that Kuwait is stealing its oil has not so far been supported by any credible evidence.

the value of the oil pumped out.

The geology of the oil reserves could also forestall the need for such a costly operation. The history of oil drilling so far has been that where there is a rich hydrocarbon presence, the drillers strike oil in clusters of pools. If there are groups of oil wells adjacent to each other like on the borders of Iraq and Kuwait, subterranean movements might themselves bring about the flow of oil between them at the cost of one country to the benefit of the other, without either of them having to resort to any theft.

The geological history of such movements spread over thousands, if not millions of years, has revealed that they spread across continents. Everette Lee DeGolyer, the Kansas-born U.S. geologist, had brought to the attention of the U.S. Government way back in 1944 the proven presence of huge oil reserves in Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar amounting to 25 billion barrels. He had believed that they may be much larger, in the region of 300 billion barrels. "The centre of gravity of world oil production," he had said, "is shifting from the Gulf-Caribbean area to the Middle East — to the Persian Gulf area." It turned out to be a prophecy since until as late as the 1940s, the entire Arabian Peninsula was producing only 5 per

cent of world oil as against 63 per cent by the U.S. The hopes of the ONGC striking it rich in the Godavari and Cauvery offshore basins in fact hinged upon hopes mentioned by the former Union Petroleum Minister, K. D. Malaviya, that oil had in fact run away from the land to the sea in these basins.

Iraq, which had long been a monarchy, was signatory to the "Red Line Agreement" signed in 1928 between Calouste Gulbenkian of the Turkish Petroleum Company and Walter Teagle of Standard Oil of New Jersey. The agreement provided for the partners binding themselves not to engage in oil operations within the vast territory excluding Kuwait and Iran except in cooperation with other members of the Turkish Petroleum Company. It is not known whether the exclusion of these two countries was deliberately initiated by Iraq — a possibility which suggests itself because of Iraq being always at loggerheads with them. Along with King Faisal of Iraq, the other signatories to the agreement were Calouste Gulbenkian and Walter Teagle.

The recurring turbulence which the Middle East had been going through had been mainly because of the attention its oil wealth had begun to invite during the last century. It was Everette DeGolyer who predicted in the early 1950s that the Middle East would be replacing the U.S. as the world's major, crucial oil producer. While U.S. production had gone up from 8.7 million barrels a day in 1948 to 42 million barrels in 1972, its share of world production dropped during this period from 65 to 22 per cent. This decline has actually served U.S. interests by making it possible to preserve its own oil reserves at the cost of depleting the non-renewable reserves of the Middle East.

The U.S. in fact calls its unexploited petroleum deposits a strategic reserve on which it could fall back if supply from the Middle East suffers from any prolonged disruption. This makes its selfishness more "strategic" than its oil reserves.

Iraq to stop trading with US dollar 59-10

REUTERS

27/9
BAGHDAD, Sept. 26. — Iraq has decided to stop trading with the US dollar and replace it with the Euro or another currency because of "hostile American policy", the finance minister said.

"The Cabinet has decided to stop trading with the American currency, the dollar, and replace it with other currencies such as the Euro," the deputy prime minister and finance minister, Mr Hikmat Mezban Ibrahim, said in a statement carried by the Iraqi news agency today.

Mr Ibrahim said the decision was taken at a Cabinet meeting chaired by President Saddam Hussein yesterday.

Earlier this month a Cabinet meeting decided to set up a committee of economists to study the possibility of using the Euro or another currency instead of the dollar in the transaction of Iraq's foreign trade.

A statement after the 14 September meeting said the move was to confront the "daily American-Zionist aggression." Mr Ibrahim said

the decision that suspended trading with the dollar was taken after the committee "recommended to stop trading with the American currency."

The USA, along with Britain, is enforcing no-fly zones in northern and southern Iraq to protect a Kurdish enclave in the north and Shi'ite Muslims in the south from possible attacks by government forces.

An Iraqi newspaper said the decision would boost Iraq's volatile currency, which has plummeted in value under UN trade sanctions imposed after Baghdad's 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

Al-Itihad weekly, Iraq's economic newspaper, today said it expected the Iraqi dinar to gain against the dollar which was trading at around 1,950 dinars today from 2,080 two weeks ago.

Baghdad's trade with the rest of the world is governed by an oil-for-food deal with the UN. The deal allows Iraq to sell unlimited quantities of oil to buy food, medicine and other goods for humanitarian needs.

THE FT

27 SEP 2000

27 SEP 2000

Arafat firm on declaring Palestine state on Sept. 13

Dubai, Aug. 1 (Reuters) - Palestinian President Yasser Arafat said in an interview published today that he intends to declare an independent Palestinian state on time on September 13, regardless of outside pressure.

Arafat spoke to the Saudi dailies *Okaz* and *Saudi Gazette* during a visit to the kingdom earlier this week to discuss the failed Camp David peace talks with Israel.

Asked if he intended to delay the declaration of a Palestinian state, Arafat said: "Never, never. There is no retreat on the fixed timetable of the declaration of the state."

"It will be declared at the fixed time, which is September 13, God willing, regardless of those who agree or disagree."

Arafat is on a world tour to drum up support for the declaration of a Palestinian state following the failure of 15 days of US-sponsored peace talks at Camp David.

In France at the start of his tour, Arafat appeared to leave the door open for the declaration to be delayed, saying he would take into consideration the advice of friends.

US President Bill Clinton has said he opposes any unilateral move by Arafat and warned that Washington will review its entire relationship with the Palestinians if such a step is taken.

But Arafat said he had already delayed declaring a Palestinian state once. "An agreement was previously reached with President Clinton on the announcement of a Palestinian state on September 13. The announcement was delayed a full year. This time it will be made on time," Arafat said.

THE TELEGRAPH

2 AUG 2 1993

Khamenei checkmates moderates

By Kesava Menon

MANAMA (BAHRAIN) AUG. 7. A tough new press law, enacted by Iranian conservatives in the eleventh hour before they lost their parliamentary majority earlier this year, had all the potential for becoming a hot topic when the new moderate Parliament began its session recently. It was always on the cards that the moderates would find it difficult to repeal the law. However, their task has now become ever more complicated since the Supreme Religious Leader, Ayatollah Syed Ali Khamenei, has put himself out to protect the harsh statute.

When the Iranian Parliament met in session yesterday, the deputies thought that they would begin discussions on the new press code. Instead, the Speaker, Mr. Mehdi Karrubi, stunned Parliament by reading out a personal directive from Mr. Khamenei forbidding any debate on the press code and ruling out any amendments or modifications. The Leader said that he was protecting the bill to prevent the press from falling into the hands of the enemies of Islam, the revolution and the regime.

Clashes, not excluding the physical, broke out between conservative and moderate deputies for what was probably the first time ever as the latter furiously demanded that the debate be opened. Moderate parliamentarians met late into the night to work out a response to the Leader's directive.

At one level, the very fact that the moderates were discussing ways to counter the Leader's directive is itself an indication of how far the democratic movement has progressed in Iran. Under the Iranian constitution, ultimate power vests in the Leader and Mr. Khamenei is within his powers, as legalistically defined, to issue the directive.

Challenges to his prerogatives have rarely been mounted not only because would-be challengers were well aware of the constitutional position. Since he strides both the political as well as religious dimensions, the Leader is always in a position to say that any questioning of his authority is tant-



Reformist and Conservative MPs scuffle in the Iranian Parliament after the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, ordered deputies to drop plans to ease press restrictions, one of the major election promises of the new pro-reform majority. — Reuters

amount to a defiance of the tenets of Islam and the principles established by the revolution.

Till a year ago, there was almost no occasion when the Leader's views were questioned. But a few bold pro-reform clerics like Mr. Abdollah Nouri broke the taboo and it would now appear that the parliamentary majority is about to launch a similar, though probably much more diluted, challenge.

The bill had been passed by the conservatives who controlled Parliament since the 1979 revolution till they were soundly thrashed in the elections held in two rounds from February to May. Among other things, the bill provides tougher criterion for the assessment of applications by would-be publishers, provides for tougher and wider punishments for infractions of the press code and restrains the Information Ministry from freely issuing press licences as it has been doing since Mr. Mohammed Khatami became President.

This was a piece of pure chicanery on the conservatives part. Even before the electoral result made it evident, it was quite apparent that the conservatives had lost the mandate of the people and had no right to stifle the de-

mand for freedom of expression that has been growing in Iran. It was also blatant political machination since the conservatives have not at all been able to match the moderates in a situation where a competitive press has begun to operate. When the conservatives passed the bill, they also knew that the moderates would find it very difficult to repeal it. All legislation has to be vetted by the conservative-dominated Council of Guardians who would certainly have blocked any attempts to dilute the harsh press code.

What is intriguing is that Mr. Khamenei has chosen to act even before any effort at repeal got through Parliament, leave alone cross the Guardians' road-block. Mr. Khamenei, though he is known to lean towards the conservatives, has tried to maintain a semblance of neutrality ever since the reform movement became potent. By uncharacteristically pushing himself into the front ranks of the conservative counter-attack, Mr. Khamenei has put down the gauntlet. It is a way of forcing the moderates to show their hand. Does their defiance of conservatism extend to the point where they are ready to challenge the Leader?

3 AUG 2000

W W V V
BATTLE OF WITS IN IRAN / CONSERVATIVE'S MEMBERSHIP VETOED

Moderates pay back in the same coin

By Kesava Menon

LARNACA (CYPRUS), AUG. 18. After months spent reeling under the concerted campaign launched by the conservatives, the pro-reform forces in Iran's Parliament have finally begun to string some moves together. These moves include a direct attack on the conservative strength in Parliament, a probe of the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Syed Ali Khamenei's intentions and re-arrangement of their own leadership to blunt the effect of conservative propaganda.

On Wednesday, the reform coalition in Parliament, for the first time, gave the conservatives a measure of what they have been suffering from ever since the first round of parliamentary elections was held on February 18. They used the brute majority they have in Parliament to oust a conservative deputy who had been foisted on the legislature by a conservative controlled regulatory authority.

Resorting to a constitutional provision, that anyone declared elected to Parliament can only occupy his seat if his election is endorsed by at least half the other members of Parliament, the reform group vetoed the membership of the hard-core conservative, Mr. Mottahar Kazemi. They thus partly paid back the conservatives who have used the regulatory authority that they control, the Council of Guardians, to

void the election of more than a dozen reformers in the parliamentary elections.

Under the Iranian constitution, the Guardians are entitled to vet the candidates who stand for election and broadly supervise the electoral process. To be elected, a candidate not only needs to get the endorsement from the Interior Ministry (that actually administers the poll) that he/she has received the requisite number of votes. The Guardians have the final say in whether he is entitled to occupy his seat or not.

In the last parliamentary elections, the Guardians declared void the election of more than a dozen reform candidates and notified instead that their conservative opponents had won. The most blatant act in this series was the manner in which the Guardians declared that the former President, Ayatollah Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, had come twentieth out of 30 candidates in Teheran when the clear impression on the ground was that he would be lucky to scrape through in the first round of voting. The reformers have acted against a decision by Mr. Khamenei with so much circumspection that it needs to be called a probe of his intentions rather than a challenge to his authority.

Earlier this month, Mr. Khamenei had shrugged off his otherwise studied neutrality and come down on the conservative side when

he banned Parliament from opening a debate on relaxing press controls. Parliament was set to begin a debate on a bill that would have repealed a harsh press code imposed by the conservatives when they controlled the legislature till the election. Just before the debate began, Mr. Khamenei issued a directive ordering Parliament to cease its efforts to repeal the press code.

Though they reacted with unprecedented fury on the floor of Parliament, the reformers soon came to the realisation that challenging the Supreme Leader was not an easy matter. In fact, for a while, it appeared that the reformers had lost all heart and were even thinking of dropping one of the main items in their agenda — liberalising the press laws.

The reformers reportedly then thought to supplicate to Mr. Khamenei asking him to clarify what sort of changes in the press code he would allow. It is not clear whether the reformers have indeed spoken to him. But they have decided to table another press bill.

In a move that will definitely highlight the revolutionary credentials of their camp, the reform coalition has chosen a former radical and firebrand of the revolution, Mr. Ali Akbar Mottahar, as their parliamentary leader. It will be difficult for the conservatives to depict them (the reformers) as a bunch of wimps who are out to promote western values.

THE HINDU

19 AUG 2000

Pro-democracy students held in Iran

TEHERAN, JULY 8. Iranian police detained several pro-democracy students in an attempt to disperse a rally in Teheran staged to mark the anniversary of a violent police raid on a student hostel, witnesses said.

About 200 students gathered outside the Teheran university campus, distributing flowers and chanting slogans against hardline Islamic officials who oppose the

President, Mr. Mohammad Khatami's reforms. The police moved in after the students repeatedly rebuffed their request to disperse.

The students, some of whom were carrying pictures of Mr. Khatami, left the scene after several of their colleagues were rounded up.

The rally was held despite appeals for calm by Mr. Khatami and his allies in the face of a Islamic backlash against reform, in-

cluding the jailing of many liberal activists and mass closure of independent publications.

Heeding the call, the main student group, the Office of Consolidation of Unity (OCU), had pledged its followers would not take to the streets for the anniversary of last year's raid on Teheran university hostel by police and hardline vigilantes. — Reuters

THE HINDU

7 9 JUL 2000

Khatami for closer ties with Germany

By Batuk Gathani

BRUSSELS, JULY 10. A security blanket was thrown over Berlin as the Iranian President, Mr. Muhamad Khatami, arrived in the German capital on a two-day official visit on Monday.

The German authorities braced themselves to face 17 protest marches planned by expatriate Iranians against Mr. Khatami. There are about 116,000 Iranians living in Germany, the vast majority of them having sought political asylum there, after fleeing the theocratic state. However, Iran, under Mr. Khatami, is slowly but surely turning around with democratic and political reforms.

Germany has close trade and political relations with Iran. It has emerged as Iran's largest trading partner in the European Union. German industrial institutions have been carefully monitoring the current economic and political developments in Iran which is rated as the largest market in West Asia.

In the wake of the visit by Mr. Khatami, German security forces have stepped up their vigil on the borders to ensure that Iranians from other E.U. countries do not enter the country. Hundreds of additional police personnel have been deployed in key centres in Berlin to ensure order and security during the planned demonstrations and protest marches. The



The Iranian President, Mr. Mohammed Khatami, waves to photographers as he is welcomed by the German President, Mr. Johannes Rau, at Berlin's airport on Monday. — AP

authorities fear that there could be clashes between pro-reform Iranians and fundamentalists opposed to reforms. Religious fundamentalists have criticised Mr. Khatami's visit. For security reasons, Mr. Khatami will be transported to various appointments in a helicopter.

The E.U. Governments — led by Germany, Italy and France — have strong commercial and industrial interests in Iran. Four

years ago, E.U. officials bitterly opposed America's "hegemonic stance" on international trade matters, when Washington proposed penalising foreign companies doing business with Libya and Iran. Germany is the leading trading partner of Iran and Italy has strong commercial relations with Libya. Iran and Libya also supply one fifth of E.U.'s oil.

Major Italian, Spanish, Austrian, Belgian and French compa-

nies already have substantial investments in the Libyan oil sector and they are eagerly looking towards participating in Iranian industrial and manufacturing sectors.

In November 1998, when international crude oil prices crashed and hovered between \$ 11 and \$ 13 per barrel (compared with the current \$ 25) Iran for the first time, sent feelers to its major trading partners seeking loans to avert bankruptcy.

The Iranian Government was financially handicapped two years ago by record low oil prices and mounting debt. Iran negotiated with Japan, German and Italy for an urgent \$ 3,000- million "injection" loan to meet its immediate financial obligations and stave off an embarrassing default on debt repayment. Though Tehran did not get the loan, it is still looking for close financial ties with the E.U. to generate more capital and investments for industrial development.

In October 1999, Mr. Khatami made a visit to France after his trip to the Vatican and Italy in March 1999. Since then, Iran is seen as fast mending its diplomatic and commercial ties with major European economic powers. Mr. Khatami's visit to France is the first of its kind since the Iranian Revolution in 1979.

THE HINDU

11 JUL 2000

Iran stable, committed to progress: Khatami

By Batuk Gathani

BRUSSELS, JULY 11. The current German-Iranian dialogue may highlight pragmatism and economic self-interest on both sides of the fence as the Iranian President, Mr. Khatami, tries to bolster ties with the European Union and the west. This is happening in the background of the warm and cordial reception accorded to him by the German Government of Mr. Gerhard Schroeder, amid noisy protests from Iranian exiles and dissidents.

The genial Iranian President even discussed human rights with senior officials and members of the media. He supported free speech and other democratic rights. He said Germany was correct in treating 'mujahidin' as a dangerous terrorist threat because the Iranian mujahidin had waged a brutal bombing campaign at home and was now seeking to overthrow his Government from abroad. He said: "You cannot try and take over a country with terror and then go abroad and pretend to act democratic."

However, during the current talks, economic relations took precedence over human rights, as Mr. Schroeder called for a 'substan-

10-1207
tial fresh start' in relations between Iran and Germany. The current German strategy is geared to dramatically boost trade and investments in Iran.

Mr. Khatami spoke about a 'new beginning' in Iran's relations with major E.U. economic powers. The Iranian leader visited France and Italy last year and his current visit has produced tangible economic dividends.

Mr. Schroeder pledged 'mutual cultural respect' and said Germany and Iran were also seeking greater cooperation in science and technology. Both leaders plan to 'combine efforts' to contain challenges posed by drug trafficking and cross-border terrorism where ever they exist.

The German authorities have promised a five-fold increase in export credit insurance to further boost German Iranian trade and to help medium-size German firms to consolidate trade with Iran. Germany is already Iran's largest trading partner in the E.U.

Mr. Khatami has assured German authorities that "Iran is a stable country and committed to progress." This week's cordial dialogue at the heads of government level took place, despite a recent resolution by some 175 mem-

bers of the German Parliament to cancel Mr. Khatami's visit on the premise that previous Iranian Governments had sponsored state terrorism.

This may suggest that Germany's warm and amiable approach to Iran is fraught with controversy. The German Parliamentarians may not take precedence over German business and industrial interest in Iran. Mr. Schroeder is more of a pragmatist than a dogmatic leader. He is more concerned about Germany's economic profile in the emergent and reformist Iran. Germany has also acted as a conduit to bring Iran closer to other western countries, including the U.S.

The German Foreign Minister, Mr. Fisher, who recently travelled to Iran to discuss details of Mr. Khatami's visit said: "President Khatami has about 80 per cent of the Iranian population behind him after free elections and young Iranian people have great hopes for reform."

Mr. Fisher argues that for major European powers not to support the reformers around Mr. Khatami, or even to isolate them, would really amount to playing into the hands of anti-reform religious fundamentalists.

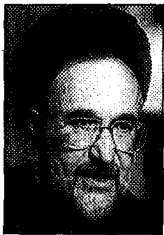
THE HINDU

12 JUL 2000

Khatami bid to forge closer ties with EU

By Jal Taraporevala

MUMBAI: The high-profile visit of Iranian President Mohammad Khatami to Germany has underscored the factors that have prompted both sides to try and build closer ties. The trip forms part of Mr Khatami's strategy of forging warmer links with key nations of the European Union.



Khatami

Mr Khatami's trip to Germany follows close on the heels of his visits to Italy and France. British foreign secretary Robin Cook is also due to visit Teheran in the near future. The Iranian President's proactive approach is aimed at increasing his country's leverage in any future negotiations with the United States, which is very much a part of Mr Khatami's strategy.

The visit also marks another step by Mr Khatami to seek to project a fairly moderate image in the outside world. By continuing to emphasise the principle of pragmatism and demonstrating qualified success in his dealings on the international stage, he is attempting to reduce the pressure on him by his hardline domestic critics.

NEWS ANALYSIS

From Teheran's economic perspective, developing better ties with Berlin makes sense since it is its largest trading partner.

For German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, promoting a bilateral dialogue with Iran is aimed at constructively engaging Teheran and, if possible, exercising a moderating influence on some of Iran's policies. Moreover, although from Berlin's point of view, Teheran may not count for much in economic terms, it is still well positioned to take advantage of any substantial opening up

of the Iranian economy.

There are, however, limits to which Mr Khatami will be able to improve relations with Iran's major West European powers. There is a substantive divide on several crucial issues such as human rights, weapons proliferation and support for radical Islamic groups.

Mr Khatami's position vis-a-vis his conservative rivals at home has been significantly strengthened as a result of the parliamentary elections earlier this year. Nevertheless, he is likely to tread the path of building ties with the EU with caution. After all, Mr Khatami is only a relative moderate within the overall Islamic context in Iran.

In addition, the President can scarcely afford to ignore the fact that the conservatives continue to exercise a significant influence over several key centres of power in his country—which means that they are still a force to reckon with.

Shake-up in Iranian reformers' ranks

By Kesava Menon

MANAMA (BAHRAIN) JUNE 1. Confident that Parliament is now firmly under their control, Iranian reformers have begun shaking down their ranks to define where every member stands. The reform tendency in Iranian politics contains different sets of ideologies and motivations and now that they no longer have to close ranks to fight off conservative pressure, the internal differences are bound to get accentuated.

The election of Mr. Mehdi Karroubi as the temporary Speaker on Tuesday probably marked the last occasion when the reformers acted like a monolith. Though the various parties grouped under the reform banner have together got a solid majority (definitely two-thirds but perhaps as huge as 80 per cent) in Parliament, they believed that they had to hold their ranks tight till the Speakership was decided.

Their conservative opponents have just too many instruments in their control which they may use if the reform ranks showed fissures. So the other parties in the reform group did not put up any candidate to oppose Mr. Karroubi, secretary general of the Society of Combatant Clerics, though they would have preferred a non-cleric to occupy the post.

Mr. Karroubi got 186 votes in the currently 252-member House (some of the results have not been officially certified and second round

elections have to be held in respect of other constituencies), with 63 members abstaining and three not turning up to vote. The failure of the conservatives to even contest the Speakership indicates that they have given up the fight within Parliament, at least temporarily. The conservatives have so many levers of power outside Parliament that their weakness in the House, while annoying, is not debilitating. But with their capture of Parliament now assured, the reformers have begun to shake themselves out.

Loosely speaking, the reformers are all those who support parts or the whole of the President, Mr. Mohammed Khatami's reform agenda. Since the President has never comprehensively defined the list of reforms, there are a number of reformers whose agenda extends well beyond that of the President. In a very general way, it could be said that the Society (Majma), the Islamic Iran Participation Front (Moshareqat), the Mujahedin Organisation (Sazeman Mojahedine) and smaller women's and labour groups are members of the reform group.

The Executives of the Re-Construction (Kargozarane Sazandegi), a party of well-known modernisers, got into the act a little earlier. But their subsequent choice of Ayatollah Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani as their leader in the election temporarily took them out of the reform camp. Mr. Rafsanjani's tie-up with the conservatives did not go down well with the

Iranian voters. The shenanigans that the conservatives resorted to in order to get Mr. Rafsanjani a Parliament seat have not gone down well with his party either. Since this party consists mainly of economic modernisers and non-clerical technocrats, its drift back into the reform camp appears likely.

Actually, the identities of the various parties and the affiliations of members have yet to be defined. Some of the names can be found on the lists of more than one party. Nor is it possible to say that a reform-minded cleric must always belong to the Majma or that the Mojahedin are composed solely of non-clerics bordering on secularists.

For example, the jailed cleric Mr. Abdollah Nouri, who would most certainly have been the Speaker if he had been allowed to contest the parliamentary poll, was the person who tried to extent the limits of reform the furthest.

The shake-down of the reform camp will begin when the final vote for the Speakership and the Presiding Council is taken. Mr. Karroubi's election is assured. But the Moshareqat, which has the biggest block of seats, had hoped that one of their younger non-clerical members would be given one of the deputy Speakerships by the Majma.

Since the reform clerics did not make such an offer, the Moshareqat has decided to contest one of them. If, nothing else, to prove a point.

THE HINDU

2 JUN 2000

W. Azar
①

Take on Israel: Khamenei

4/6

TEHERAN, JUNE 3. The Iranian supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, urged Palestinians not to compromise with Israel in a speech today to tens of thousands commemorating the death of his predecessor, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

HO-16
"The Palestinians should rely on their intrinsic strengths, they should not give up hope... and one day the people will see that Palestine has been returned to its true Muslim, Christian and Jewish owners," he said in a speech at Khomeini's mausoleum.

"What has occurred in Lebanon can happen again, this time in Palestine," Ayatollah Khamenei said amid chants of 'down with Israel' from the crowd, marking the 11th anniversary of Khomeini's death.

Representatives of the Lebanese Parliament and the Iranian-backed Hezbollah guerillas, who have just seen their 22-year struggle to drive Israel out of south Lebanon end in Israeli withdrawal, attended the ceremonies. Some waved Hezbollah banners. Ayatollah Khamenei, who has the ultimate say in the Iranian political,



The Iranian President, Mr. Mohammad Khatami (centre), sits with the former President, Mr. Rafsanjani, and the Parliament Speaker, Mr. Mehdi Karroubi, at a ceremony to mark the eleventh death anniversary of Ayatollah Khomeini in Teheran on Saturday. — Reuters

religious and military affairs, is widely seen to be close to hardliners opposed to the liberalisation plans of the moderate President, Mr. Mohammad Khatami.

But officials from all factions came to the mausoleum to pay homage to the late Imam, the driving force behind the 1979 Islamic revolution that toppled the western-backed Shah.

Mr. Khatami sat next to the former president, Mr. Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, a key ally who was recently forced to give up his newly won parliamentary seat amid widespread rumours that hardline election supervisors had rigged ballots in his favour.

Tens of thousands flocked to the golden-domed shrine in southern Teheran. — Reuters

THE HINDU

4 JUN 2000

Advani for nuclear tie-up with Israel

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

TEL AVIV, June 15. — Mr LK Advani today said that he was in favour of nuclear cooperation with Israel. "I would certainly favour increasing cooperation with Israel in all fields, including this one (nuclear)," he told reporters here.

Earlier, the Indian home minister visited Israel's border with Lebanon for first-hand knowledge of Tel Aviv's border management techniques, and said it would help in effectively tackling cross-border terrorism sponsored by Pakistan. The Indian team studied border fencing and control systems used to prevent intrusions.

"Indo-Pak border management is a growing challenge India is facing in the wake of systematically planned intrusions sponsored by Pakistan," Mr Advani said. "Whatever we have seen and understood today would help us strengthen India's security."

The line between internal and external security in India was getting blurred because of Pakistan-sponsored terrorism, he said, adding that the security environment in the country had assumed grave proportions.

Mr Advani is on a four-day visit here on the first leg of his tour to France and the UK to study security systems. In France, the Indian delegation will discuss terrorism and international crime with Interpol. Today the home minister met former Israeli Prime Minister and now minister for regional cooperation, Mr Shimon Peres and commander of the country's counter terrorism combat unit. "Combating terrorism, defeating designs of our neighbour which has unleashed cross-border terrorism, illegal infiltration and border management are the concerns that have brought me here," Mr Advani said.

THE STATESMAN

1,6 JUN 2000

TYRANT SURVIVES

The UN has to deal with Saddam

WHAT should the world do about Saddam Hussein? The question has come up once again because a newly constituted UN inspections agency, Unmovic, has been unable to get off the ground, in spite of having a more neutral, independent set-up by way of personnel and mode of functioning and a relatively flexible approach which mandates the intermittent lifting of sanctions in proportion to progress made. This hasn't made any difference in Baghdad which remains as adamant as ever that the embargo should be brought to an end and the whole thing called off.

In spite of the spectacular propaganda use made of Iraqi misery by the regime, Saddam has been busy running arms and oil smuggling rackets and enriching himself and his immediate circle. Ten years of attrition have not been able to dent his authority and he has reinvented himself as an Arab champion over his confrontations with Butler, his team and the US. He has even received tokens of support from the neighbourhood. It is not certain that even if Butler had succeeded in his mission, he would have rendered Saddam harmless. He could have rearmed soon enough. The only way out of this mess is to lift sanctions in return for a long-term surveillance regime, but the problem is to get the Iraqis to accept. What is certain is that Saddam cannot be got rid of immediately, and the UN will have to find a way of dealing with this monster without hurting his people. The curious thing about Saddam is that he enjoys the backing of the Iraqi establishment and also of the greater portion of his own people who tend to blame their misfortunes on the West. This has been the biggest failure on the part of the erstwhile allies, principally the US and Britain: they have failed to undermine the credibility of the regime. Even a tyrant cannot rule indefinitely over a hostile population.

THE STATESMAN

17 JUN 2000

Hawks in Iran seek to overawe reformers

110-16 By Kesava Menon 175

MANAMA (BAHRAIN) APRIL 30. "Forget about the Basij (the religious vigilante groups which try to impose codes of behaviour on ordinary Iranians). Everyone is interested in making money, including the Basij," said the driver of one of Teheran's innumerable taxi cabs, responding to a question how activities declared "illicit" by the Islamic regime could be carried on so easily behind closed doors.

This comment, by a very ordinary Iranian, encapsulates some crucial elements of the circumstances that could determine the outcome of the ongoing struggle between reformers and conservatives in Iran.

The first element is the fear or intimidation factor. Having seized the initiative through a wave of arrests and threatening demonstrations and speeches, the conservatives clearly believe that their ability to intimidate their opponents and the vast majority of the public that supports them will be a key factor in the achievement of their objectives.

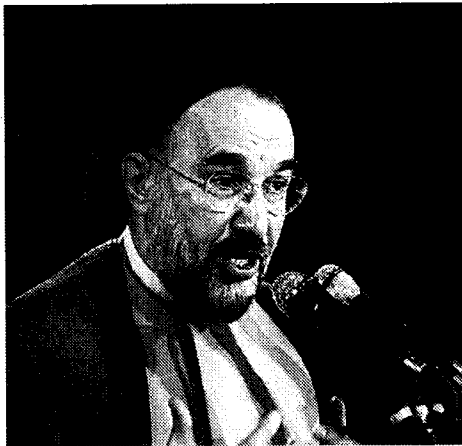
As they demonstrated during the students' protests last July (when the Basij joined policemen and brutally beat up the students) and as they have shown through assassination attempts, the conservatives will not hesitate to use physical violence.

The only questions are how far they can and will go and the likely public response to the threats of physical violence.

Experiences narrated by a number of other Iranians validated the taxi driver's views on the Basij's ideological integrity. These narratives were all about how members of the Basij had been "bought off" when they tried to confiscate illicit bottles of liquor, or tried to break up mixed-gender parties or tried to stop couples dating in the parks.

From these narratives it appeared that most Iranians, though bothered, were not intimidated by the Basij when they broke codes of imposed behaviour in their day-to-day life.

Would the situation be very different when the Basij, co-ordinated and controlled by their ideological masters, acted in concert to defend what they perceive as the interests of the Is-



The reformist Iranian President, Mr. Mohammad Khatami, addressing thousands of workers in Teheran on Saturday. — AP

lamic regime? In several reported instances over the last few months, groups of youths have spontaneously come together to fight off Basij members who have tried to impose dress and behaviour codes.

Pro-reform students and youths have formed at least informal nation-wide networks during the last three years and it is not inconceivable that they could act in concert to counter the threat from the Basij.

However, the Basij only forms the frontline among the forces which the conservatives could marshal. Their real strength lies in the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) directly controlled by the Supreme Religious Leader, Ayatollah Syed Ali Khamenei, who has openly declared support for the conservatives.

IRGC officers were among the first to speak out against the reformers and in the strongest terms threatening that the "hammer of revolution" might soon come down on the heads of reformers.

Just before they too were suspended, the last two liberal newspapers had reported that IRGC officers and senior officials of the Information Bureau, also controlled by Mr. Kha-

menei, had formed a "crisis committee". There was a prompt denial of the newspapers' further claim that the committee was planning a coup. But it was left ambiguous whether the such a committee existed at least informally.

While the IRGC officials are the direct beneficiaries of conservative control on key political and economic institutions, and are probably more ideologically indoctrinated, the commitment of the rank and file is a more open question.

Before the crackdown, pro-reform activists were of the opinion that the rank and file were no different from ordinary Iranians. In support of their assessment, they pointed out that vote results from booths located in IRGC barracks in the last three elections were little different from the nation-wide trend which showed that over 70 per cent of the public supported the reforms. The conservatives have shown a remarkable propensity for self-delusion and it is possible that they have overlooked this factor.

Surprisingly, the regular Iranian army which is also ultimately answerable to the Supreme Leader rather than the President, has declared that it would be neutral in the struggle between the conservatives and the reformers. In the last days of the Shah's regime, the army had adopted a similar posture though the interests of its officers was tied in with the continuity of the regime and though some of them had urged the Shah to order a crackdown.

Reports from that period speak of how one army unit after another was paralysed into inactivity by the demonstrators slogan, "Fellow Iranians, do not shed the blood of Iranians". That 1979 slogan was echoed by the student demonstrators last year.

One distinctly noticeable feature of the last three years has been that ordinary Iranians had shrugged off fear to a great degree. The old habit of looking over their shoulders while criticising the regime was completely absent by February this year. It is highly probable that ordinary Iranians will resist any effort to reimpose the atmosphere of fear and misery.

1 MAY 2000

Iranians back reformists again

By Kesava Menon

MANAMA (BAHRAIN), MAY. 6. Iranian reformers have crossed yet another hurdle by winning 46 of the 66 parliamentary seats involved in the second round of polling held yesterday. According to the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA), identifiable conservatives had won 15 seats with the remainder going to independents. The result has clearly proved that the pro-reform momentum has not been dispersed with the closure of liberal papers and the arrest of liberal ideologues but the conservatives have other measures at their disposal and the strong pro-reform mood among the public is not likely to deter them.

Voters yesterday cast their ballots for 66 seats spread over 52 territorial constituencies (the number of seats each constituency has in Parliament depends on its share of the total Iranian population). Earlier reports suggested that the turnout was considerably lower than it was for the first round held on February 18. But according to later reports, polling had picked up to the extent that the time allotted for casting ballots was extended by an hour in some cases and by two hours in other constituencies. The results are, however, unofficial till they have been certified by the Council of Guardians, a conservative-dominated body which supervises elections.

If the Guardians do not over-

turn the returns from the counting centres, the reformers are already assured of a simple majority in the 290-member House. Reform candidates have been certified as winners in 120 of the 185 seats in respect of which the results were final after the first round itself. With the 46 seats they are said to have won in the second round, they are comfortably over the halfway margin. That is even without counting the 30 seats in the Teheran constituency. Initial results from Teheran confirmed the assessment of all observers that the reformers had handily won these seats. After two separate counts, pro-reform candidates were seen to have won 29 of these seats with the last going to Mr. Hashemi Rafsanjani, leader of the conservative election campaign. However, the Guardians declared they found some discrepancies in the Teheran count and ordered a third count.

If the Guardians do relent and validate the first two rounds of counting in Teheran, the reformers will have a two-thirds majority. Their margin will increase when elections are held for nine seats in which the results had been annulled by the Guardians. The Guardians had overturned 12 of the first round results by handing over three seats, originally said to have been won by reformers, to conservative candidates and by annulling another nine. Now the fate of the 30 Teheran constituencies hangs in the balance.

Ayatollah Ahmed Janati, the head of the Guardians Council, has declared that the Teheran results will be out on May 9. If he sticks to his word one fear will be removed from the reform groups' mind. They had feared that the Guardians would hold back the Teheran result till after Parliament convenes for the first time on May 28.

If the reform candidates from Teheran had not been certified to sit in Parliament they would not have been able to participate in the initial crucial procedures wherein a presiding council is elected. The Teheran candidate make up the most crucial and vibrant elements of the pro-reform leadership and without their presence, the reform parliamentarians would not be able to bring their weight to bear in the new House.

The fear that the declaration of the Teheran result would be postponed till after the convening of Parliament is relatively minor compared to the greater fear that the Guardians might change the pattern of the Teheran result or cancel it altogether.

With the prospect that the reform groups could control a two-thirds majority staring them in the face, the conservatives might be sorely tempted. On the other hand, they have to face the reality that Iranian voters have, for the fourth time in three years, voted overwhelmingly against them and in favour of the reform camp.

MAY 2000

Dubbed as deviant, Press is under siege

Udayan Nambodiri
Tehran, May 26

THE PRESS is under siege in Iran. Over the past month, 18 publications, perceived as deviant by the orthodox Islamic clergy, has been ordered shut.

Their licences have been cancelled and several important journalists have been arrested. Only four newspapers that can be dubbed 'reformist' survive, but the writing on the wall for them too is grim.

Worse is expected to follow if the all-powerful Guardians Council ratifies a draconian press law just passed by the outgoing Majlis (Parliament). It threatens action not only against newspapers perceived as a bit too liberal for the *mullahs'* liking, but makes it mandatory for journalists to reveal their sources.

Journalists booked under the law will find it impossible to find another job. Those thinking of bringing out newspapers will have to seek clearance from the Revolutionary Guards, an institution directly under the nation's supreme leader, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, which is a law unto itself in Iran running a parallel army and air force.

What is surprising to visitors here is that the Press law was passed by a Majlis of which 90 per cent members had just been defeated in the two-round elections which concluded earlier

this month.

Under the Constitution, all the 290 elected MPs will have to be confirmed by the 12-member Guardians Council, half of who had been nominated by the Ayatollah and the other half by the outgoing Majlis.

The hardline clergy is fighting a losing battle against the spirit of freedom, which is sweeping Iran. Their thirst for critical evaluation of national life is driving Iranians to the Internet. Several web sites like Iranmania. Com and Payvand.com, run by expatriates are being visited in thousands each day. While the few remaining Iranian dailies churn out highly sani-

Committee views everything official as highly suspect. Last month Mr Nejad was released on bail, but he knows it's the curtains for him.

The stirrings of dissent originated in the circle immediately around Mr Khatami. His Interior Minister Abdollah Nouri was impeached and jailed last year for publishing in his paper, *Fatth*, "unIslamic" material. Ataollah Mohajerani, the Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, faced a similar motion from hardline MPs last year but scraped through.

Akbar Ganji, once a bold, investigative journalist and a member of the Revolutionary Guards was jailed recently for accusing Hojjetolislam Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, the former president and now chairman of the powerful Expediency Council, of a hand in the serial murder of dissidents.

Even the President's younger brother, Dr Mohammad Reza Khatami, who recently got elected to the Majlis by the highest margin, had to see his popular daily, Mosharekat, closed down.

To the ordinary professional, life has become tough. Though there is great demand for newspapers, supply is short. His livelihood but his passion undaunted, a young Iranian scribe told me in Tehran today: "Please inform our Indian colleagues how we are suffering. *Inshallah*, we will win in the end."

Tomorrow: Status of women

INSIDE IRAN TODAY

tised reports of protest marches, arrests and incidents of intimidation by the Baslej (moral police), the web sites play these incidents up and provoke further dissidence.

Among the notable journalists arrested are Verdi Nejad, the chief of IRNA, the official news agency. How can an official news agency dare to put out anything less than reprints of government hand-outs? Well, that is Iran.

Here, the government and clergy are two poles. President Syed Mohammed Khatami himself if a 'reformer' and so the Guardians

THE HINDUSTAN TIME

27 MAY 2000

Iran parliament inaugurated

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

DUBAI, May 27. — The sixth Iranian Parliament was inaugurated today amid hopes that the reformists-dominated new House would enthusiastically support President Mohammed Khatami's agenda to give a new direction to the Islamic republic in the 21st century.

The expanded 290-member parliament, or Majlis, was formally opened in Teheran this morning with a message from Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Khamenei, regional news agencies said.

The Ayatullah termed the Majlis as an "important pillar of the Islamic revolutionary system and a formidable base for Islam."

The new House, which will have a four-year term, is dominated by young members, most of whom support President Khatami's policies and programmes.

In his three-year term as President, Mr Khatami has so far not been able to bring about many changes in the system as desired by him due to vehement opposition to his policies from the hardliners. It is expected that he might now be able to implement his programme with the solid backing of his reformist supporters in Parliament.

However, the hardliners still hold many of the levers of power, most importantly, the council of guardian, which has to approve laws passed by parliament.

IRNA, meanwhile, said political observers in Iran believe that due to the plurality of political groups in parliament, the process of decision-making would not be easy.

Much will depend on who occupies the key post of the Speaker in the new House. Former President Hashemi Rafsanjani, who has been Speaker twice before, bowed out of the contest when he resigned his seat two days earlier in the wake of demonstrations against him in Teheran.

Hitherto, the Iranian parliament had all along been under the control of hardliners, who have dominated the country's polity since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. With the younger generation overwhelmingly supporting the social and economic reform programmes of president Khatami, the reformists performed exceedingly well in the elections and the new parliament will see a lot of new faces.

23 MAY 2000

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IRAN / PARLIAMENT BEGINS WORK

Rafsanjani can still fight detractors

By Kesava Menon

MANAMA (BAHRAIN), MAY 28. After weeks of agonising uncertainty, the first Iranian Parliament to be dominated by reformers since the 1979 Islamic Revolution has begun its work.

The beginning yesterday was auspicious in one sense because the former Speaker and President, Ayatollah Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, refused to take membership over the week-end and thus rendered the initial shake-out of posts less convulsive than they might have been. However, Mr. Rafsanjani holds on the top post in another constitutional body which can function as a super Parliament and given his cleverness and ruthlessness it is certain that he has merely chosen another means to fight his detractors.

Iran's state radio reported on Friday that Mr. Rafsanjani had declined to accept the parliamentary seat that an election supervising body had allotted to him. He had sought to be elected to one of the 30 seats in the Teheran parliamentary constituency.

On election day — February 18 — it had appeared that he would find it very difficult to get the 25 per cent of the vote that would enable him to get a seat in the first round. Initial counts confirmed the impression formed from the streets but the Interior Ministry which actually conducts the polls was under pressure from the outset. Within a few days, it was reported that after a re-count Mr. Rafsanjani had squeaked in to Parliament with the last of the 30 seats.

At this point, the conservative-dominated election supervising body, the Council of Guardians, got in to the act. Claiming that there had been large-scale discrepancies in the Teheran vote, the Council refused to declare the results from the Iranian capital till three months after the election.

Three-recounts had already



The Iranian President, Mr. Mohammad Khatami (second from left), with Mr. Mohammad Mohammadi-Golpaigani (left), the former President and Speaker, Mr. Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani (second from right), and the Head of the Judiciary, Mr. Mahmoud Hashemi-Shahrudi, during the opening of the new Parliament in Teheran on Saturday. — AP

been undertaken by the Council and they seemed to be readying for more, or for the annulment of the Teheran vote, when the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Syed Ali Khamenei, stepped in and told the Council that enough was enough. The Council declared the Teheran result within a day or so of Mr. Khamenei's intervention.

By the time they had done their job, Mr. Rafsanjani's electoral performance was seen to have dramatically improved.

He was declared to be a winner in the first round itself and the twentieth highest vote-getter in Teheran (that is after almost a quarter of the votes had been declared invalid). Whether Mr. Rafsanjani would have found himself further up the list if the Guardians had carried on with more recounts is now moot.

But the twentieth position was obviously not respectable enough for Mr. Rafsanjani to seriously consider a bid for Speakership.

Technically, he had every right to contest the Speakership and the

conservatives, reduced to anywhere between a third and a quarter of the seats in Parliament, had no other obvious candidate for the post.

More significantly, he was perhaps the only person who could have, on account of his experience in back-room deals and political networking, blunted the effectiveness of the reform majority. With his refusal to accept the post, the conservatives would appear to have given up hope of challenging the reformers inside Parliament.

In a letter announcing his decision, as quoted by the state television, Mr. Rafsanjani said, "I apologise to the people but given the extent of the propaganda against me, I am obliged to give up my mandate. There are still some ambiguities and doubtful points regarding the Teheran election results which enemies of the people could use as excuses for harming the unity of the forces faithful to the revolution".

If nothing else the letter underlines that Mr. Rafsanjani is miffed

at the fact that the Teheran re-count was not completed. If the logic is extended a little further it would even show that Mr. Rafsanjani is also not very happy with Mr. Khamenei, the person who ordered a halt to the re-count.

Mr. Rafsanjani will wield power as the head of the Expediency Council. This Council mediates between Parliament and the Guardians (who can reject legislation if they think it is against Islam or the principles of the revolution) when they are in conflict.

But the powers of the Expediency Council were defined (in as much as they are) through an agreement between Mr. Rafsanjani and Mr. Khamenei when the former was President.

It is not at all certain that the Supreme Leader, who is the overarching authority in the Iranian system cannot cut the Council down to size. But then Mr. Rafsanjani is also a powerful member of the Assembly of Experts, which chooses the Leader.

29 MAY 2000

Churning in Iran

By Qamar Agha

SOON AFTER the landslide victory of the liberals in the recent Parliamentary elections in Iran, they suffered a setback. Their troubles began when Teheran witnessed a series of violent incidents, including an assassination attempt on Saeed Hajjarian, one of the top reformist ideologues, and a close ally of the President, Mr. Mohammad Khatami. Soon afterwards, half a dozen bomb blasts rocked a Teheran residential complex. Violence was mainly directed against the moderate Government by those who did not want to see Mr. Khatami succeed in establishing democracy and liberal values in the Islamic republic. But the bad news for the moderates came along with a bit of a good news as well. The liberals gained major diplomatic success when the United States lifted the ban on imports of Iranian luxury goods and pledged to try and settle outstanding legal claims between the two countries.

world suffered a setback. Later, the Pakistan-sponsored militant Islamic movement further eroded Iranian influence, because it sharpened the Shia-Sunni divide.

Now once again, after 20 years of Islamic revolution, Mr. Khatami has triggered yet another controversy by promising to establish a civil society based on social and political liberties. He has, in fact, pledged to make Iran a freer, more democratic and more law-abiding country where women will also have greater freedom and fewer social restrictions. This has created deep division among Iran's powerful Shia clerics and is also having far-reaching conse-

parallel institutions, created to ensure that Iran does not deviate from the Islamic path, have become more powerful than even the elected representatives. The 12-member Council of the Guardian can veto laws it deems un-Islamic or un-constitutional. And in a dispute between Parliament and the Guardian Council the matter is referred to Expediency Council, a large mixed body appointed by the supreme leader. This council has final say.

The conservative-dominated judiciary also imposes its views on all because it has the monopoly over religious doctrine, which is the "fountain-head" of all the Iranian laws.

Mr. Khatami is not out to dismantle the Islamic setup put in place since the Iranian revolution. Basically, he is trying to adopt policies more compatible with a generation that is demanding moderation.

quences in the neighbouring countries where authoritarian regimes are in power.

Obviously, the conservatives in Iran were upset with Mr. Khatami's liberal agenda and opposed his reforms. They raised the bogey that reforms would water down the revolutionary ideals set by Khomeini. They emphasised that the Grand Ayatollah had laid stress on strict Islamic laws and given a paramount role to the clergy in Iranian political, social and cultural affairs. The present system has granted the clergy unlimited power without any accountability. The war with Iraq and the U.S. policy of containment of Iran had further helped the lesser clergy to consolidate its authority.

The problem in Iran is mainly due to the emergence of two distinct political institutions in the country. Apart from an elected President and Parliament, Iran also has a *Velayat-e-Faqih* or supreme religious leader who is also the head of the army, the security services and the judiciary. He has the final say on both internal as well as external affairs of the country. The supreme leader is selected by a body of senior clerics known as the assembly of experts. However, the constitution of the Islamic republic gives Parliament the sole authority to legislate. But, over the years,

and whenever there was any crisis in the country, Iranian clerics were in the forefront of the struggle. The concept of *azaadi* and the fight against "oppression" is deep-rooted among the Shia Muslims who dominate Iran. They take inspiration from the tragedy of Karbala or Moharram. Even during the Shah's times, it was the clergy which backed the students' movement. And when it captured power, it declared that "dictators" and monarchs had no place in Islam. The emphasis was on representative government. Mehdi Bazargan was then appointed interim Prime Minister and Bani Sadr was the first President of the Islamic republic. Both were moderates. It was during the Iran-Iraq war that the lesser clergy captured power and replaced the moderates.

The moderate Shia clergy has sensed the change in the Iranian mood and is now trying to expand its base by incorporating the people's democratic and liberal aspirations. It is a fight for more openness and Mr. Khatami is not out to dismantle the Islamic setup put in place since the Iranian revolution. Basically, he is trying to adopt policies more compatible with a generation that is demanding moderation. Besides, the fast-changing regional and international situation and the deepening economic crisis at home are also forcing Iran to change its headline policies.

Ever since the moderates adopted the agenda of reforms, they have been winning all the elections. The recent Parliamentary election was the most significant approval of Mr. Khatami's liberal agenda since he swept into office in 1997. Instead of accepting defeat, conservative hardliners have responded with repressive measures to silence dissent in Iranian society. Basically, the conservatives want to preserve the *status quo* and somehow keep levers of power in their own hands, which may ultimately lead to a bloody confrontation. The conservatives have made it clear that they will not give up easily. But, if Mr. Khatami fails in his mission to bring reform in the country, the whole system giving clerics a paramount role in the political setup in Iran will be challenged by the people.

(The writer is a specialist in West Asia affairs.)

There has been a liberal and political tradition among the Shia clerics in Iran

5-MAY-2000

Iran releases 500 Iraqi prisoners to improve relations

AL-MUNDHARIYA (Iraq): With tears and cheers, thousands of relatives welcomed home some 500 Iraqi prisoners of war whom Iran released on Sunday as a unilateral gesture to improve strained ties.

Soldiers on both sides of this border crossing point clapped and waved banners as the Iraqi prisoners, weary from years of captivity, walked with unsteady steps only to be hugged by relatives, some of whom had spent two nights in the desert waiting for the arrival of their beloved ones.

Salma Mahmoud threw her black veil away and broke into ululation when her eyes fell on her infirm, bald husband with a gray beard. "That's Faiq. It is him. It is him," she shouted, pouring kisses on his cheeks, forehead and hands.

Faiq Asem was taken prisoner in the second year of the 1980-1988 Iraq-Iran war, just a week after his honeymoon, most of which he spent at the front.

After 18 years, a faithful Salma, now with a daughter, said they will try to start again. She was pregnant when Faiq was captured.

It was both a happy and sad scene at Al-Mundhariya crossing, 160 km northeast of Baghdad.

The repatriation gave a glimmer of hope to tens of thousands of families in Iraq and Iran that an end may eventually be in sight for the issue, one of the most intractable between the rival nations.

But in the meantime it reminded the authorities on both sides that the wounds opened up by their brutal war have not been healed.

Iran's unilateral gesture in releasing the prisoners of war (POWS) is unlikely to bring the former foes any closer.

Only last week, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, in a cabinet meeting, branded Iran's rulers "a clique of brutal monsters" for what he said were atrocities against Iraqi POWS.

"The means of oppression and torture they used are not even matched by those of the Nazis."

Saddam Hussein has ordered that a novel recounting hardships in an Iranian prisoner camp be serialised in state-run newspapers, radio and television and included in the ruling Baath party's indoctrination programmes.

Iran denies accusations of mistreatment of POWS.

Iranian officers on Sunday carried crippled Iraqi prisoners and handed them over to Iraqi counterparts. Iranian soldiers helped the sick to stretchers and onto Iraqi ambulances.

Songs in praise of Mr Saddam blared from loud speakers on the Iraqi side and Iraqi soldiers brandished slogans of everlasting loyalty.

The Iranians were mute.

Each Iraqi prisoner was given a small rug and a pair of shoes as a gift from Iran. Once in Iraq, each was given 300,000 Dinars (\$ 150), a gift from Mr Saddam.

Iraqi officers who had seen previous repatriations said today's reunions were especially touching as the returnees included many whom were reported missing in action. (AP)

THE TIMES OF INDIA

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10 APR 2000

Changes in Iran may transform the region

By Kesava Menon

MANAMA (BAHRAIN) APRIL 10. Take a transparent plastic sheet and place it over that portion of a world map that depicts West and Central Asia. Forget about the current political borders and trace on the sheet the block of territory which contains fuel resources, proven or potential. What you have is a swathe of territory which runs from the south-west to the north-east and beyond the western boundaries of Pakistan and Afghanistan.

If a few, not extremely unlikely events happen, that fuel-rich swathe of territory could become a powerful economic and political bloc within the time-frame in which Pakistan and Afghanistan have dealt themselves out as serious contenders in international politics.

This swathe of territory is, of course, what U.S. analysts have

labelled as the "New Middle East" for quite some time now. The countries that fall into this bloc have common resources and, therefore, common interests and it does not hurt that most of their people share a common religion and to great degrees a common history and culture as well.

This bloc has not become a reality due to various political and economic complications. But it must be remembered that the mere possibility of such a bloc's emergence arose but a decade ago with the collapse of the Soviet Union. One development, which is almost around the corner, could transform this bloc into something real.

If the democratic transformation in Iran goes through successfully, it could change the entire geo-politics of West and Central Asia. The democratisation of Iran should put an end to the USA's illogical view that could even be

characterised as being contrary to nature that Iran does not provide the best possible bridge between West and Central Asia. If the grid-work of oil and natural gas pipelines, and concomitant political relations, is set up (and logic dictates that this process will not be postponed forever) the world will be a very different place.

When viewed in the very short term perspective, the democratic transformation in Iran is currently in suspended animation. A second round of polling for the parliamentary elections has yet to take place and the world will know in which direction Iran is headed only after the Speaker is elected and the identity of Parliament is clearly established. It is possible that the pro-reform wave could still be stalled and it is certain that the struggle between reformers and conservatives will convulse Iran for quite some time. But massive pro-reform votes in three consecutive elections leaves very little doubt about what the Iranian polity will be like in a few years time. It will be very difficult for the U.S., which has shunned theocratic Iran, to deny democratic Iran its true place in the world and the dance has already begun.

The U.S. Secretary of State, Ms.

Madeleine Albright, made the most recent significant move when she expressed regret for her country's past actions that had led to the estrangement with Iran. More relevantly, the Iranians have not responded with the sort of haughty disdain that they were wont to in the past. Their response, if it can be summarised in a few words, has been something like this "Give us something more, give us an apology, humble yourselves a little".

Certain other dots can be connected on the tracing sheet. Iran has overcome its annoyance with Saudi Arabia over the recent OPEC production hike and signalled that the strengthening of its ties with the Kingdom is more important than the financial loss.

The Iranian Defence Minister is to travel to Saudi Arabia soon in continuation of the swiftly improving relations. Everyone knows that Iran's declared policy of setting up a strategic alliance of the Gulf countries which will exclude the U.S. from the region is a pipe-dream. But the Iranians too probably recognise this and appear intent on establishing a whole network of subliminal ties, leaving the concept of an overarching alliance as something for the future.

THE HINDU

11 APR 2000

Between liberalism & orthodoxy

By Asghar Ali Engineer

The Iranian clergy is politically progressive but socially and religiously quite conservative.

IRAN IS passing through great turmoil, as grave as during the Islamic revolution, and even greater in significance. Iran's revolution had shaken not just the Islamic world but the entire western world. It was led by Ayatollah Khomeini, undoubtedly a man of extraordinary courage and conviction, though orthodox in his orientation. He challenged and humbled the mightiest power in the world — America which he described as "great Satan". The revolution in Iran had baffled all the political analysts of the western world. The western powers were backing the Shah and were confident that his regime was 'stable'. To understand the significance of the reform movement in Iran today it is important to understand the background to the Islamic revolution.

The revolution was no mere accident of history. It took place when the Islamic world was going through a political turmoil. The defeat in the war with Israel in the late Sixties had shaken the ruling classes in the Arab world and discredited the ideology of Arab nationalism promoted by Jamal Abdel Nasser. Nasser had become, in the early Fifties, a cult figure, for the Arab masses as he had challenged western imperialism. However, his gains were wiped out by his defeat in the Israel war. In other words, Nasser failed to humble western imperialism — a task in which Khomeini remarkably succeeded.

The ideology of Arab nationalism gave way to Islamic revival. This was further reinforced by the partial victory of Egypt vis-a-vis Israel in the 1972 war. This also led to an oil crisis in the world as the Arab nations decided to use the oil weapon for the first time to challenge the domination of the west. During this period the pro-West ruling classes in the Muslim countries were being discredited and it was why Anwar Sadat, then president of Egypt, was assassinated by a Muslim youth swearing by revivalist Islam as he followed the policy of *infitah* (opening out to the west).

The Shah was not only pro-west but was pro-Israel too. He was armed to the teeth by America to protect its own interests in oil-rich West Asia. The Shah, in his enthusiasm to follow a pro-west policy, not only ignored the sensibilities of the Iranian

people but also antagonised the powerful Shia Ulema, a highly politicised class since the early 20th century.

The Shah carried out superficial reforms and was applauded for them by the liberals. These reforms were an attempt at westernisation and had a narrow acceptability limited to the westernised elite around the Shah. This and the Shah's blatantly pro-western policy, aroused the ire of the people of Iran and they rallied round Khomeini who acquired greater authenticity in their eyes as he remained firm despite persecution by the Shah's regime. He appealed not only to Shias but also to Sunnis as he made Muslims proud of their Islamic identity.

There is another aspect of the Islamic revolution which has to be kept in mind to appreciate the significance of the reform movement in Iran. In the entire Islamic world, including Saudi Arabia, it is the political class which wields power. It was only in Iran that the ulama came to exercise political power directly. This is unprecedented in the Islamic world. This empowerment of the ulama is under challenge today in Iran. The challenge has come both from moderate ulama and from liberal middle classes. The youth and students are also in the forefront of the battle for reforms. The fact that Mr. Khatami was elected President of Iran with an overwhelming majority itself shows which way the wind is blowing.

As happens after revolutions, Iran has witnessed zealotism and excesses. In a way, the Islamic revolution in Iran was far less bloody but not entirely free of excesses and since the revolution, as pointed out before, was led by the clergy, it was a unique one. All revolutions in the world since the 18th century have been led by progressive forces that fought against church and feudal political power. The Iranian revolution was the first revolution, which was led by clergy itself. It is also interesting to note that the clergy was politically progressive (anti-imperialist, anti-American) but socially and religiously quite conservative. We have such an ex-

layat-e-faqih (authority of the jurist). As long as Khomeini was alive his authority as a jurist could not be challenged. However, after his death rumblings began as no one else could claim such prestige. A council of the jurists was elected for the purpose.

What are the issues involved in the reform movement in Iran? The issue of course is of freedom of thought. The newspapers and magazines have been subjected to strict censorship. The student unrest in fact began with the closing down of a paper thought to be quite liberal and advocating reforms. The students demanded restoration of the paper and clashes with the police began. The other issue is of relaxation in relations with the western countries, especially with the U.S. The third issue is of women's rights. Women were an important force in fighting for the Islamic revolution. They had won some rights during the Shah's regime but these rights were more apparent than real. The women ironically won some concessions such as not having to wear the veil and permission to dress in Western clothes but lost their political freedom. Thus they preferred to wear the "chador" for real freedom.

However, soon after the Islamic revolution, they began to face restrictions they had not opted for. The conservative clergy imposed Shariat laws mechanically. Even Khomeini, perhaps under pressure from other conservative colleagues, went back on his promises to women. Thus women began to fight for their own rights. They did not have objection to the "chador", if Shariat laws, as interpreted by the medical jurists, were changed to keep pace with the changes taking place all around. The "chador" was, after all, a symbol of dignity for them. Many women's magazines such as *Payame Haajjar* advocating women's rights within the Islamic framework began to be published. Women's issues are central to the reform project.

The women have tremendous awakening in Iran after the revolution as they were in its forefront and they are in the forefront of the reform movement as well. Thus the reform movement has generated enough pressures to make the conservative clergy sit up and think.

Council okays Iraq arms inspection plan

W. Asia ①
THE UN chief inspector for Iraq easily won approval by the UN Security Council for an organisation plan but now faces choosing a staff and convincing Baghdad to let arms experts return.

Hans Blix began his job on March 1 as executive chairman of the UN Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission or UNMOVIC, which replaces the UN Special Commission last headed by Australian diplomat Richard Butler. His first report,

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released on April 6, was unanimously approved by Council members yesterday. It is based on the assumption Iraq will accept the new monitoring system.

Baghdad has not allowed inspectors into the country since US-British bombing raids in December 1998, even though its cooperation is key to any easing of sanctions in force since Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait. Russia indicated a change of heart was still a long way off.

~~Reuters, United Nations~~

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

APR 2000

Iranian hawks undeterred by poll reverses

By Kesava Menon

MANAMA (BAHRAIN) APRIL 20. Is it fanaticism, hubris or unenlightened self-interest that drives Iranian conservatives? Over 70 per cent of the people, including almost all the educated and aware sections, have consistently voted for a major overhaul of the post-revolutionary system while accepting that religious principle will continue to exert an influence. But the conservatives, who are entrenched in power, persist in imposing their world-view on society at large, denying opportunities for compromise and creating the conditions for an explosion.

The latest brazen move has been carried out by the members of the now-defunct fifth Majlis, the outgoing Parliament that is on its way out after the election held in February. Most conservatives who held seats till February have been thrown out and the conservative bloc in the incoming Parliament will have something like one seat to the four that will be held by reformers.

Blatantly ignoring these facts, the outgoing Parliament has just passed drastic laws to control the press. A second round of parliamentary elections have yet to be held and it will be weeks before the final shape of the incoming House is known. Whether the conservatives in the outgoing House will set up other hurdles on the path to reform is anyone's guess.

On Monday, the Iranian Parliament passed a new law which could severely crimp the "revolution through the media" that has been going on in Iran for the past many months. (The press, liberated to a great degree by the President, Mr. Hojatoleslam Syed Mohammed Khatami, has taken the lead in widening the scope for public discourse and thus created



Iranian men hold pictures of the late spiritual leader, Ayatollah Khomeini (left), and of the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, during a massive youth gathering in Teheran's biggest religious complex on Thursday. — AP

the demand for political and civic reform). Under the new press laws, the Intelligence Ministry, the police and the courts — all controlled by conservatives — will have a say together with the Ministry of Culture in the issuance of press licences.

After Mr. Khatami came to power, the Culture Ministry, headed by Mr. Ataollah Mohajeri, had not only issued press licences as soon as they were applied for but had also frustrated conservative efforts to muzzle the new publications. Any time a publisher found his newspaper shut down by the conservatives he needed to only approach the

Culture Ministry which invariably issued a fresh licence so that virtually the same paper, run by the same staff, reappeared under another name.

Now, with the Intelligence Ministry and the courts entering into the vetting process, there would be problems in the way of following this procedure. It is difficult to see how the courts, which have been zealous in their effort to clamp down on the press, will readily agree to the issuance of fresh licences.

Other changes to the press law wrought by the recent amendments also stipulate that the press commission must "be faithful to

the Islamic Revolution". This is a catch-all phrase that can be used to justify all sorts of misdemeanours by the conservatives. Then again under the earlier law only the directors of publishing companies could be held for the violation of press laws.

As per the amendments of Monday, journalists and others connected to the matter published can also face action. The state security courts have also been given the power to close down any publication immediately for a period of two months. The sinister nature of this provision can be gauged from the fact that a publication which had questioned the validity of the Islamic jurisprudential principle of retribution has in the past been hauled up for violating state security.

All this could have been dismissed as academic since it was passed by an outgoing Parliament. It is certain that the new press laws will be struck down by the incoming Parliament in which reformers have such a huge majority.

Such a reading ignores the role that the conservative-dominated Council of Guardians would play. The Council, among other things, vets legislation to see whether it is in conformity with the Islamic Constitution. It is a safe bet that the Council will uphold the law passed by the outgoing Parliament and veto any attempt to overthrow it by the incoming one. Backing them up would be the senior officer cadres of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps which recently warned the pro-reform press that "when the time comes these people will feel a blow to the head delivered by the revolution".

Iranian conservatives appear ready to destroy the country in the effort to uphold their own interests.

21 APR 2000

Liberal press undermines Islam: Khamenei

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TEHERAN, APRIL 21. Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, speaking at mass prayers in Teheran, has said the country's liberal press aims to undermine Islam and the Islamic Revolution.

"Some press circles have turned into a centre of the enemies of Islam and the Islamic Revolution with the sole aim to undermine the achievements of the last 21 years (following the 1979 Islamic Revolution)," the Ayatollah said yesterday.

"This is a great danger and if we do not confront this danger, then the enemy will further infiltrate our system," the Ayatollah said in what was widely regarded as his harshest speech to date against the reformists.

Tens of thousands of supporters who had gathered at the prayer venue in northern Teheran expressed their appreciation by shouting, "Death to mercenary writers."

"The world arrogance led by the United States wants to do the same as in Eastern Europe through these press circles," the Ayatollah said, in a comment on the role of western media in toppling the communist systems in Eastern Europe in the late 1980s.

The liberal press, which supports the reform course adopted by the President, Mr. Mohammad Khatami, has been under severe criticism by the conservative opposition which accuses it of aiming to undermine Islam and to eventually topple the ruling Islamic system.

A liberal press emerged in Iran after Mr. Khatami's election to the presidency in 1997 and it has since voiced harsh criticism of almost all traditional Iranian leaders and institutions. Given the religious-political nature of



Iranian women hold pictures of late spiritual leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, and Ayatollah Ali Khamenei (lower left) during a student demonstration by conservatives against the reformist movement in Iran on Tuesday. — AP

the Iranian political system, the criticism also targeted Islamic aspects.

The conservative MPs in the Majlis approved this week a new press law which restricts the liberal press in various aspects. It will no longer be solely under the supervision of the Culture Ministry but also the police, the judiciary and the intelligence service.

Another measure means that not only the

publisher of a newspaper or magazine will be liable to legal charges, but writers will also be summoned before press courts, or even the revolutionary courts which are actually responsible for charges threatening national security.

The press is also now obliged by law to respect Islamic values and regulations and offenders will be legally charged. — DPA

22 APR 2000

Court revokes suspension of 2 dailies in Iran

DUBAI: A Teheran court has revoked the suspension of two Iranian dailies, which along with ten newspapers and four magazines were ordered to be closed by hard line judiciary



M. Khatami

on Monday, the official IRNA News Agency said on Tuesday.

The suspension of the two dailies, including the pro-reformist *Sobh-E-Emruz* and *Akhbar-E-Eqtessad*, was revoked on Monday night with the former coming out with their editions on Tuesday, the news agency said.

The closure was seen as a covert attempt to muzzle the country's reformist press backing president Mohammed Khatami.

Though the judiciary revoked suspension of two dailies, protests against the move by media raged both at home and abroad.

The journalists' guild condemned the suspension of 12 periodicals saying the judiciary's unprecedented move has created fears and tensions among the journalists and in the society, IRNA said.

The Paris-based *Reporters Sans Frontieres (RSF)* slammed the move and urged Iran's judiciary chief Ayatollah Mahmud Sharhudi to use his influence to lift the suspension and release some arrested journalists.

Only two reformist newspapers—*Mosharekat*, run by the president's brother Mohammed Reza Khatami and *Bayan*—escaped the ban. The crackdown came after state TV showed reformist journalists attending the Berlin conference in which exiles criticised Iran's religious government. (PTI)

THE TIMES OF INDIA

26 APR 2000

New UN arms inspector takes tough line on Iraq

ASSOCIATED PRESS

UNHQ, March 2. — The new chief UN arms inspector for Iraq has said he will demand unrestricted access to suspected weapons sites for his arms experts and that it is in Baghdad's own interest to grant it.

On his first day at office, Mr Hans Blix countered critics who claimed he might be too soft on Iraq, saying he intends to exercise the right to aggressively pursue leads about Baghdad's weapons programmes.

"Indeed, I think such inspections are indispensable in order to get to credible evidence about the arms," Mr Blix said

yesterday.

But he stressed it is not his role or intention to "humiliate" Iraqis with the inspections.

Iraq should rather take advantage of the inspections to show the world that it has rid itself of its banned weapons and deserves to have sanctions suspended, Mr Blix said.

"I'm totally aware of the hardships that the Iraqi people are subjected to," he said, "the best, certainly in my view, would be that they cooperate and see the way out of this."

A former Swedish foreign minister, Mr Blix was named in January as head of the UN Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission.

While Iraqi Vice President,

Mr Taha Yassin Ramadan, has said Baghdad would not accept new UN weapons inspectors, other Iraqi officials have left open the possibility for compromise if its amendments are incorporated into the resolution that formed Unmovic.

Mr Blix said one of his first decisions would be to require that the bulk of his staff be on the UN payroll and not paid for by individual governments.

UN official blasts Iraq policy: Mr Hans von Sponeck — who is resigning as the top UN humanitarian official in Iraq because he considers the programme inadequate — has expressed anguish at the condition of sanctions-battered Iraqis.

Gunman attacks top Iranian reformist

TEHERAN, MARCH 12. Mr. Saeed Hajjarian, one of Iran's leading political activists and a close ally of the President, Mr. Mohammad Khatami, was today shot and wounded at close range by unknown attackers, the official Irna news agency said.

It quoted doctors at the nearby Sina Hospital as saying Mr. Hajjarian was expected to live. They



described his condition as "stable."

Irna said Mr. Hajjarian, a pro-reform newspaper editor and member of the Teheran City Council, was hit once in the face and once in the shoulder. "The gunman had aimed his gun at Hajjarian's temple but because his hand was shaking the (first)

bullet struck him the face," Mr. Mahmoud Alizadeh-Tabatabaei, a colleague on the Council, told Irna. He said Mr. Hajjarian was in a coma after the shooting.

Witnesses told Reuters the attackers had been cruising the nearby streets on a 1000-cc motorcycle. This type of machine is outlawed in Iran except for use by police and security personnel.

They said a gunman wearing a helmet approached Mr. Hajjarian as he left the Council offices and shot him with a Colt revolver before fleeing in the motorcycle.

Irna said the attack took place at 8:35 a.m. local time in central Teheran. It said witnesses had provided the police with descriptions of the attackers and their motorcycle.

Top politicians, including the chief of staff from Mr. Khatami's office, rushed to the hospital to be at Mr. Hajjarian's bedside.

Mr. Hajjarian was one of the masterminds of the reformists' big victory in last month's parliamentary polls, and there was widespread speculation he would soon step down as editor of Sobh-e-Emrouz daily to devote himself to full-time political work.

His newspaper has been in the forefront of the pro-reform movement, aggressively exposing what it says is a hardline circle within the Intelligence Ministry involved in the murders of dissidents dating back many years.— Reuters

THE HINDU

13 MAR 2000

Iran seeks help to trace Khatami ally's shooter

REUTERS

TEHERAN, March 13.

Iran's top security body has called on the public to come forward with any leads in the gangland-style shooting of Mr Saeed Hajjarian, one of the country's top reformists, the state news agency Irna said today.

Mr Hajjarian, shot in the face at close range yesterday by unknown assailants, remained unconscious in intensive care, although doctors reported some improved neurological response.

Doctors said he was likely to be unconscious for days and that it was too early to tell the full extent of any damage caused to the brain because of lack of Oxygen in the minutes after the attack.

The shooting of Mr Hajjarian, a prime architect of the reformists' strong showing in last month's parliamentary elections, stunned the Islamic republic and threatened to push the simmering feud between liberals and hardliners towards an open conflict.

In an emergency meeting late yesterday, the National Security Council pledged to mobilise all resources in the hunt for the gunmen, who fled on the kind of high-powered motorcycle reserved exclusively for police and other officials.

The council, meeting without President Mohammad Khatami who was on a visit to his native Yazd province, also promised to keep the public informed of all developments surrounding the murder attempt.

"In this meeting discussions were held about how to use the public's information in identifying the perpetrators," the Irna quoted a council statement as saying.

"It was agreed that swift measures would be taken in the security and police fields so that the perpetrators of this plot would be identified and eliminated.

THE STATESMAN

14 MAR 2000

Violence targets reforms in Iran

By Kesava Menon

MANAMA (BAHRAIN), MARCH 14. While there is a big difference in the calibre of the weapons used in the violent incidents that occurred in Teheran yesterday and the day before, the bullets fired on March 12 have a closer bearing to the political situation in Iran than the mortar shells fired on March 13. Yesterday's incident was perpetrated by an exiled group which is set against the Iranian system as a whole while the Sunday attack on a leading reformer is a manifestation of the on-going struggle between the reform and conservative camps in the country.

On Sunday, two men shot and critically wounded Mr. Saeed Hajarian, editor of *Sobhe Emroz* newspaper and a leading ideologue of the reform camp. The reports are not clear whether Mr. Hajarian was hit by one bullet or two but he has suffered damage to his spinal column and is in a coma. Doctors attending on him at a Teheran hospital do not seem to be holding out much hope that Mr. Hajarian will pull through and are almost certain that he has suffered brain damage. That would be a major blow to the development of journalism in Iran because *Sobhe Emroz* is not merely a major ideological instrument of the reform camp but one of the rare Iranian newspapers that actually breaks the news.

There seems to be virtually no doubt within the reform camp that the attack was ordered and perpetrated by elements in the conservative camp who are still reeling from their comprehensive defeat in the parliamentary elections held last month. Even the usually cautious pro-reform President, Mr. Mohammad Khatami bluntly said the attack was perpetrated by those who were against "freedom". Mr. Khatami did not go so far as to specify that the attackers were against the freedom that he had introduced and that Iranians in their millions have welcomed. But others, including the leadership of the Islamic Iran Participation Front made up of hardcore Khatami supporters, have said without

ambiguity that political elements disgruntled with the election results were behind the attack.

Sobhe Emroz has had a leading role in exposing the misdeeds of past governments and of rogue elements in the intelligence apparatus who have been conducting a clandestine campaign against the reform camp. This newspaper and others supportive of the reforms, have written about the existence of "hit squads" which acted at the behest of senior intelligence personnel who have links with figures in the conservative establishment.

The media's unrelenting campaign was an important factor that led to the apprehension of intelligence officials who killed several intellectuals in 1998. These officials are in prison but the pro-reform media has insisted that the probe did not go far enough and expose the role of conservative politicians and clerics who are believed to be linked to these officials. Similar criticism has been levelled in the investigation into and the trial of police officials who carried out the raids on student hostels last year.

Just before the assassination bid on Mr. Hajarian *Sobhe Emroz* had broken the story that the conservative-dominated Council of Guardians (a body which supervises elections) had annulled the result of the Parliamentary elections in five towns. The seats here had been won by reformers and this development led spokesmen of the Participation Front to voice the concern that the Guardians would annul results in other seats won by reformers which make up the vast majority. If the two developments can be linked together, as they reasonably should be, it would show that the conservatives are prepared to go to pretty desperate lengths in mounting a counter-attack.

In these circumstances, the Mujahideene Khalq, the exiled group which is against the Iranian system altogether and which has claimed responsibility for the mortar attack on a Revolutionary Guard camp yesterday, has not done its cause any favour.

Holy revolution in two minds

4-11 16/3

Iran's elections have strengthened the reformist president in his battle with the conservative clergy over the future of the Islamic revolution, writes Qamar Agha

The Iranian president, Mohammad Khatami, has again established his supreme position in his country's politics. Iran's electorate affirmed its faith in his reform policies when it voted in favour of moderates in the recent parliamentary elections. The majlis elections were the most significant approval of Khatami's liberal agenda since the president was elected to office in a landslide victory 29 months ago.

Khatami and Iranian moderates have been promising a civil society based on the social and political liberties enshrined in the 1980 Islamic constitution. He has pledged to make Iran a freer, more democratic and law abiding country, one where women would also have greater freedom and fewer social restrictions. Khatami has stressed the liberal values of Islam, speaking of "peace, freedom of thought, logic in dialogue and rule of law in social behaviour." This has struck a chord in Iran which is largely urban and has no tribal influences in its cultural values.

Conservatives have strongly opposed Khatami's agenda. They have raised the bogey that reforms would water down the revolutionary ideals of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic republic. Conservatives argue the *ayatollah* had stressed strict Islamic laws and a paramount role for the clergy in social, cultural, political and religious affairs. The Iran-Iraq war and the United States policy of containing Iran had helped the conservative clergy consolidate its authority. Even now conservatives control almost all bureaucratic institutions of the Iranian state including the judiciary, the police and armed forces, the intelligence and security services, radio and television, the election supervisory boards — along with a network of mosques.

This is why the majlis elections will not completely alter the economic and political situation in the country. The conservative dominated judiciary will not be moved. The clergy will continue to pass judgments that reflect its perception of itself as protector of the Islamic revolution. In any case, the conservatives have been in power for too long to be expected to relent without a fight. Differences between conservative and moderate clerics on interpreting Shiite religious doctrine are widening.

Conservatives captured power during the Iraq war when they ousted the liberal government of Bani Sadr. They consolidated their position with the appointment of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei as Iran's spiritual leader, or *vali e faqih*. Khamenei's duty is to ensure Iran does not stray from the path of Islamic revolution. The spiritual leader commands the armed forces and heads the council of guardians. Through the conservatives who control institutional power in Iran as well as mosques, religious and

state foundations, the spiritual leader has far more power than the president.

But moderate clerics and the Iranian population at large now question the authority of the spiritual leader. A grand *ayatollah*, Ali Hossein Montazeri, once a designated successor to Khomeini, has warned the "clerical monopoly of power threatens to turn people against Islam." He argues the Iranian constitution gives the people the right to elect all leaders, including the spiritual leader. At present, he is appointed by a body of theologians. Montazeri says, "From the *Quran*, the book of god, one can deduce government is a public affair."

The concept of *azaadi*, freedom, and fighting oppression is deeply rooted in Shia culture. Shiites take inspiration from the tragedy of Qarbala or Muharram. Shia clerics tapped this when they led a mass struggle against the last Iranian *shah*. The clerics declared dictators and monarchs had no place in Islam and spoke of representative parliamentary government. After the revolution, Mehdi Bazargan was made the interim prime minister and Bani Sadr the president. Both were moderates.

Conservatives came to dominate society during the Iraq war. After the war, however, Iranians started demanding

greater freedom. Even Khomeini made this promise at one point. Moderate clerics have sensed the changing Iranian mood. They are now trying to expand support by promoting democratic and liberal aspirations and arguing they are not contrary to Islamic values.

Khatami is not seeking to dismantle the cleric dominated system put in place since the Iranian revolution. Rather he is trying to adopt policies to make the Islamic republic more compatible with a generation demanding moderation.

The conservative-liberal power struggle within Iran's clerical establishment has triggered a reform wave in the country. This questions the "eye for an eye" justice system and the clergy's right to wield power in an Islamic power. Moderate Iranian clerics have raised even more fundamental issues than freedom of expression, arguing for a separation of religion and state. The current debate in Iran is who should have ultimate power in an Islamic society: elected representatives or the clergy?

The attempt is being made to blend Islam with democracy. The Iranian philosopher, Abdul Karim Saroush, argues that "to be a true believer, one must come to the faith without coercion or pres-

sure — in other words, freely. That principle is the origin of all other freedoms." Saroush believes that the *shariah* can be the basis of modern legislation. But he differs with conservatives in arguing, "Islamic law cannot be static. They should be flexible and adaptable because they have only begun to be understood by imperfect human beings." He warns, "Islam, like any other religion, should never be used to rule a state because it opens the door to totalitarianism."

The goal of the Shia Muslim reformer is to be Muslim without being fundamentalist, to be reverent but free, to find a worldview that is both Islamic and modern. The moderate clergy's views, the elections have shown, are backed by the majority of Iranians.

The conservative lobby is not prepared to compromise. They have sought to confront the reformers violently. Since the demand for relaxing the country's more rigid laws has begun, the closure of newspaper, murder of dissidents and intellectuals has become frequent. People who question the orthodoxy have been accused by Khamenei of "crossing the bonds of freedom."

Montazeri and other moderate *mullahs* like Abdollah Noori and Mohsen Kadivar have been sent to jail in hundreds by special clerical courts that are independent of the judiciary. They have been charged with insulting Islam, the Prophet Muhammad and Khomeini, of disseminating lies and disturbing public opinion by writing articles advocating the separation of religion and political institutions. It is noteworthy that most of those arrested were also diehard followers of Khomeini and played important roles in the overthrow of the *shah*. Khomeini once wrote of Montazeri in 1987, "He is the fruit of my life. My essence is in him, not once or twice, but several times."

Peaceful reconciliation between the two sides seems impossible. However, Khamenei has declared he will respect the "verdict of the people". The problem is the lesser clergy who are often either corrupt or zealous. They believe they are answerable only to god and are thus reluctant to surrender power to elected representatives.

Iran has entered a difficult political phase where people are desperately looking for more freedom, social peace, economic development and an end to Iran's international isolation. Eight years of war and economic sanctions have badly hurt the economy.

Khatami's political skills will be tested as he deals with the situation. So far his policy of nonconfrontation has paid him dividends. If he fails, however, challenging a system that gives clerics a paramount political role will nonetheless be challenged — but this time by the people themselves.

THE TELEGRAPH

16 MAR 2000

UNDECLARED WAR

5x8 Between Khatami and Qom

THE gunning down of Saeed Hajjarian is just another episode in the continuing battle between hardline and moderate elements within the ruling establishment of Iran and one may expect the battle to become more and more bitter as the reformists gain strength. One would have thought that, with a comprehensive modernising mandate in hand, President Mohammed Khatami would now be able to affirm his control over all the organs of government, but that is evidently not true. The Interior Ministry and the intelligence department continue to escape him, remaining in the hands of the hardline clerical faction that considers itself to be the natural guardian of the revolution. Khatami has been able to do little, so far, to stop the assassination of intellectuals and writers and the systematic persecution of the independent press. Hajjarian, one of the creators of the intelligence establishment in Iran, was removed from his post when he started advocating free speech and political freedom.

In November last year, a Special Clerical Court condemned former Vice-President Abdollah Nouri to five years imprisonment and forced his paper, *Khordad*, to close down. Nouri, incidentally, had been calling for the powers of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei to be subject to the rule of law and the constitution. And that is where most of the problem now lies. Other than the civil government and the legislature, over both of which Khatami now presides, there is a parallel structure of power, headed by Khamenei and the clerical faction, which can override both. During student riots last year, following the closure of the reformist paper *Salam*, Khatami was finally forced to call for an end to the rioting and say that the demonstrations had been taken over by people with "evil aims", whereas what *Salam* had been saying was that the people who called the United States "the Great Satan" were "hooligans", which is about as much as what Khatami would have said himself, given the chance. There is a line Khatami has not been able to cross so far, a line defined by the menacing presence of the Qom faction. Now that he has a clearly confirmed majority, he must decide whether he wants to take the battle to the streets or not.

THE STATESMAN

17 MAR 2000

Khamenei snubs U.S.

By Kesava Menon

MANAMA (BAHRAIN), MARCH 27. Ayatollah Syed Ali Khamenei, Iran's supreme religious leader, has pipped his President to the post in responding to the overtures made by the U.S. a week ago.

Earlier statements by other hardline conservatives had indicated that Mr. Khamenei would reject the overture and he did not disappoint them. While the President, Mr. Mohammad Khatami might have taken a more conciliatory line, the circumstances were not propitious for him to do so and with the Ayatollah having stated his position, it will now be more difficult.

A little over a week ago, the U.S. Secretary of State, Ms. Madeleine Albright had outlined a new and softer approach to Iran. This included the lifting of some embargoes and the expression of regret for some U.S. actions in the past which had harmed Iran. In his first comments on Ms. Albright's speech, Mr. Khamenei said such "confessions" of past misdeeds were not sufficient to restore the U.S. in Iran's good books, especially since they did not go so far as an apology.

Almost the same day that Ms. Albright made her presentation to a group of Iranians based in the U.S., the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps condemned it as an attempt to deepen the divide within Iran and vowed to resist this attempt. Other hardline conservatives had also criticised Ms. Albright's speech as an intervention in Iran's internal affairs. While addressing an organisation of Iranians based in the U.S. (a meeting attended by serving Iranian diplomats as well as U.S. diplomats who had served in Iran), Ms. Albright announced that the U.S. administration was lifting the embargo on the imports of Iranian caviar, carpets and pistachios. She also announced that the administration would remove some of the unnecessary impediments to increased contacts between U.S. and Ira-

nian professionals, intellectuals, artists, athletes and NGOs. Iranians have faced irksome procedures while trying for U.S. visas and some unnecessary conflicts have been thrown up in the process.

The U.S. Secretary of State had also announced that the administration was prepared to "increase efforts with Iran aimed at eventually concluding a global settlement of outstanding legal claims between our two countries". This was a reference to the monetary claims that the two sides, or their citizens, have vis-a-vis each other. Iran has for long been incensed that the U.S. froze billions of dollars which they held in U.S. banks or which had been paid for undelivered defence equipment. A part of these sums is understood to have been settled in earlier arbitration agreements.

The statement does leave open the possibility that a more positive response could have been made if there had been greater contrition from the U.S. side. It should also be noted that the Ayatollah chose to hold back his statement till the U.S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton wound up his visit to South Asia. In the circumstances, it is tempting to take the view that Mr. Khamenei was waiting to see whether the U.S. would rekindle friendly ties with an old ally, and in Iran's view an irksome neighbour before he issued his response.

The U.S. had most certainly hoped that the response would come from Mr. Khatami since Ms. Albright's new enunciation on policy came after his supporters had achieved an overwhelming victory in the parliamentary polls in February. Most commentators are agreed that Ms. Albright's intention was to strengthen Mr. Khatami's hand. However, Mr. Khatami's hands will not be entirely freed till the composition of parliament is complete following the second round of voting to be held soon. All manners of tendencies are represented even in the pro-reform camp which has a solid majority.

THE HINDU

28 MAR 2000

Iraq votes to elect new parliament

REUTERS

5-11 7893
BAGHDAD, March 27. — Iraqis began voting today in their second parliamentary election since the 1991 Gulf War.

Officials said about 8.5 million Iraqis were eligible to choose 220 members of Parliament from 522 candidates in voting at 1,572 polling stations here and in 14 provinces.

Some 142 members of the ruling Baath Party were standing for election and most of the remaining candidates were Independents. Iraqi officials said a candidate from the Iraqi Communist Party was also in the fray.

Candidates include President Saddam Hussein's eldest son Uday, who runs the country's most influential newspaper, *Babel*, and is contesting for the first time. Twenty-five women are also in the fray.

Polling booths opened at 8 a.m. and were due to close at 8 p.m. The results were expected either later today or tomorrow.

No voting is taking place in the three northern provinces of Dahouk, Sulaimaniya and Arbil, which are under Kurdish rebel control.

It was not clear whether Iraqis would turn out in force to elect Parliament in a country ruled by a single party and hit hard by decade-old economic sanctions and repeated military confrontation with the USA.

But witnesses said people were queuing to vote in several polling stations here. "I am here to elect those who will defend us and look after us, particularly at a time when we are suffering from hardship from the embargo," said Mr Saleh Nadah Bargan, a school teacher.

In the last parliamentary elections, in March 1996, all 160 candidates of the Baath Party won seats along with 60 Independents. President Saddam Hussein was elected to another seven-year term in October 1995.

THE STATESMAN

28 MAR 2000

40-15

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Iraq non-committal on Blix

w. Asia

By Kesava Menon

MANAMA (BAHRAIN), JAN. 31. As expected, the Iraqi Government-controlled media has fired salvos against the appointment of Mr. Hans Blix as the executive chairman of the new U.N. commission mandated to find and dismantle Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. So far, Iraq has not officially stated that it will not co-operate with Mr. Blix or his commission. Iraq's friends in the Security Council are pressing it to co-operate but Baghdad is apparently holding out till the commission's objectives become clearer.

Last week, Mr. Blix, former Swedish Foreign Minister and former Director-General of the International Atomic Energy Agency, won the unanimous approval of the Security Council to head the U.N. Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC), set up through a resolution passed on December 17 last year. UNMOVIC is mandated to re-start the process of tracking down and eliminating Iraq's potential in the field of chemical and biological warfare and its capacity to develop ballistic missiles. As such, it is a new incarnation of UNSCOM, the commission which carried out this task from the end of the Second Gulf War in 1991 till December 1998. UNMOVIC has yet to start its operations, the delay caused by the inability of the Security Council members to agree on the name of the executive chairman.

Mr. Blix's name was reportedly proposed by France, which, along with Russia and China,

has been sympathetic to Iraq's position on the inspections and sanctions process. Surprisingly, the suggestion won the approval, perhaps reluctant approval, of the U.S. administration as well. The U.S. was apparently caught between its need to project Security Council unity on the subject of Iraq and its desire to have a hardheaded executive chairman.

The U.S. may have succumbed to pressure because it knows that it will be able to make a major input to the working of UNMOVIC. The executive chairman has to draw up a working plan, which will among other things, list what has been achieved thus far through the inspection regime and what remains to be done. There is disagreement within the Council as to what exactly has to be done to ensure that the disarmament of Iraq has been complete. At a base level, it is clear that the weapons actually produced, or the ingredients (precursors in the inspections jargon), will have to be dismantled.

The rest of the Security Council has so far gone along with the view that industrial and research facilities used for weaponisation purposes should be subjected to a strict monitoring regime even if they are not dismantled. However, there is far less unanimity when it comes to infrastructure or processes which can be put to dual uses. The U.S. administration has even refused to endorse the import of pencils for Iraqi school children as it fears that the graphite in the pencils can be used for military purposes. With such ambivalence

about the scope of the "discovery and dismantlement" tasks, it will be difficult for any executive chairman to pinpoint what exactly needs to be done before Iraq can be declared weapons-free.

Mr. Blix takes up the task with a handicap because, when he was Director-General, the IAEA was seen to have been slipshod in its monitoring of Iraq's nuclear programme. Till 1991, the IAEA had regularly certified that Iraq, as a signatory to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, was weapons-free. However, after the Gulf War it was discovered that Iraq had gone much further towards the weaponisation of its nuclear programme than known till then. There will be constant references by U.S. sources to the IAEA's pre-1991 performance to remind Mr. Blix that he is on sufferance.

Jordan defies ban

Reuters reports from Baghdad:

Jordanian sympathisers have donated 3.2 million pencils to Iraqi students in defiance of the U.N. trade embargo, the official Iraqi News Agency reported.

The pencils were taken to the al-Qadissiya border crossing in Traibil in two trucks accompanied by a convoy of more than 200 cars, INA said yesterday. "Every pencil signifies a sign of refusal by one Jordanian of the illegal sanctions against Iraq," Mr. Aida al-Dabbas, a leader of the Jordanian national mobilisation committee of solidarity with Iraq, told Reuters television.

ANV-16 A defining moment for Iran

By Kesava Menon

MANAMA (BAHRAIN) FEB. 6. If there was a defining moment in the Indian elections to the Lok Sabha in 1977, it was surely the massive rally at the Ram Lila grounds called by an Opposition which was still congealing. Thousands of people made light of the restrictions imposed by the emergency regime to present a dramatic augur of the massive wave which was to sweep Indira Gandhi out of power. Such a defining moment may come in the run-up to the Feb. 18 parliamentary elections in Iran because those elections could mark an even more decisive turn in Iranian politics than the "emergency election" did in India.

The significance of the coming Iranian poll just cannot be underestimated. A widespread desire for change has been ignited by the possibilities opened up under the two and a half years of rule by the President, Mr. Hojatoleslam Syed Mohammed Khatami. In turn, the desire for change has created the expectation that the Feb. 18 election will provide the opportunity for the Iranian people to bring it about. It is not as if anyone has produced a blueprint of the changes desired and it is unlikely that the short campaign, which got underway on Feb. 1, will throw up any comprehensive plan either. It would also be simplistic to describe the upbuilding mood as a counter-revolutionary upsurge because not a single candidate in the fray regrets the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Neither has the public at large lost all gratitude for the social and moral upliftment conferred by the Revolution.

Nevertheless, the public mood is in favour of a complete overhaul of the given political dispensation despite the claims of the upholders of the system that they speak for the true revolutionary ethos. It is this very claim that is under challenge as the objective conditions as

well as the popular will dictate that a drastic reinterpretation of the revolutionary credo should be carried out. The system, with supreme authority vested in a senior cleric and other clerics occupying key positions in all social institutions, has ossified over the 20 years since it was set up. Absolute power being the hallucinogen that it is, the clerics entrenched in the system believe that they are also endowed with absolute wisdom. This is simply not true.

Iran's clergy has neither the learning, the experience nor even the basic aptitudes necessary to guide the country while it strives to cope with a fast-changing international situation. Neither do they have the ability to meet the myriad aspirations and anxieties of a developing society. Iranians are a religious people and in the practice of the Shias, who are by far the majority, there is a strong element of loyalty to the clergy, especially the Grand Ayatollahs. Even those strongly opposed to the clerical regime do not propose that the clergy should cease to provide moral guidance. But they demand the scope and space to express themselves in the various dimensions of life free from close supervision by the clerics.

Mr. Khatami might not have been able to improve the lives of ordinary Iranians as much as was hoped for when he was elected in 1997. But he has definitely been able to expand the scope of civil liberties. Freedom of speech and expression have expanded manifold as numerous publications have come forward to give the views of different sections. Social groups — labour, students, women etc. — have organised themselves to promote their interests. Dress codes and behavioural controls have been relaxed and the Government at least states that it is against the activities of the moral vigilantes. People in more developed democracies tend to take conditions

such as this for granted. It is easy to overlook how heady a feeling they produce when they are first introduced.

Anyone who has seen this enjoyment of liberty grow and strengthen in Iran over the last two years would find it difficult to believe that this trend can be reversed. Since Mr. Khatami has been able to bring about this change despite being saddled with an obstructionist Parliament (the outgoing Majlis was overwhelmingly dominated by conservatives) and since he will be President for another year and a half, even the conservatives probably do not believe that they can speedily reverse the trend if they do win the election. The most that they can realistically hope for at the moment is that they will be able to hold the line.

If the Khatami experiment (of the Khorad-2 movement as it is called in Iranian political parlance) can be stopped in its tracks by a conservative victory in the parliamentary poll then the public may become disillusioned. If the public begins to feel that no further progress can be made on the track opened up by Mr. Khatami, they could shift their attentions to other concerns, mainly the poor state of the economy and thus better the chances of a conservative candidate in the 2001 Presidential elections. If they can achieve such a victory, the conservatives can really work at reversing the Khatami experiment. That is about the only gameplan available to the conservatives at this stage.

While the conservatives appear to be the better organised force, the early signs are that there is a spontaneous upsurge behind the reform camp. As happened in India in 1977, impromptu organisation and volunteer effort is what the challengers to the *status quo* have to rely on. Whether they will be able to pull it off as the Indian Opposition did in 1977 is the big question.

Liberal vs hardline in Iran polls today

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA



Mr Khatami

DUBAI, Feb. 17.

Tomorrow's parliamentary elections in Iran is going to be a battle between the reformists, led by President Mohammed Khatami,

and the conservatives. More than 6,000 candidates are in the fray for the 290 seats in the expanded parliament, Majlis.

Media reports here said the polls will provide an opportunity to young Iranians to decide how they want to shape their nation's future.

The hardliners, who were so far the majority in parliament, are looking up to the former President, Mr Ali Akbar Rafsanjani, to counter the reformists' popularity.

What is attracting the Iranian youths' is Mr Khatami's passionate plea for a law-abiding civil society. The

same plea had led to his landslide victory in the 1997 presidential elections.

The reformers have outlined a package of social, legal and political change that they say will realise the promise of the 1979 revolution and create a true Islamic society.

The conservatives, on the other hand, support more gradual reforms but argue the Islamic and revolutionary values must not be sacrificed.

However, the surge in the electoral interest among the pro-reform people may harm their prospects, for the large number of reformers, many of them pitted against each other, are sure to split votes.

The contest that is attracting attention is between the President's brother, Mr Mohammed Reza Khatami, and Mr Rafsanjani, who has appealed to all sides.



Mr Rafsanjani

THE STATESMAN
18 FEB 2000

Iran votes in crucial elections

AP & UNI

TEHERAN, Feb. 18. — As Iran held parliamentary polls today, both the reformists — led by President Mohammed Khatami — and the ruling clergy-backed conservatives said they would win.

Iran's 38.7 million voters today headed to polling stations set up at mosques and schools to decide the fortunes of some 6,000 candidates in the fray for the 290 seats in the parliament, or Majlis.

Though there are no exit or opinion polls in Iran, the reformists are expected to do well because of mounting frustration with the restrictions of clerical rule, especially among the young.

Reports said there was great enthusiasm among women voters — who can expect more freedom under reformist rule — as they formed long queues outside the booths to cast their

votes. Nearly 425 women are trying their luck in the polls.

If the reformists win, it will be the first time in two decades that the conservatives will lose their grip on parliament.

The hardliners want Iran to stick to the ideals of the 1979 Islamic revolution led by Ayatollah Khomeini that ousted

the pro-US Shah and brought the Shia clergy to power. The reformists have promised greater press freedom and rule of law. Some have suggested a national referendum on whether to establish ties with the USA, a move conservatives strongly oppose.

"The conservatives would like to stop all contact with the outside world. They know that the more we know, the more we will dislike them," said Mehdi, a student, who wouldn't give his full name. "They think people are ignorant and only they are intelligent."



Former President Mr Rafsanjani casts his vote on Friday. — AP/PTI

THE STATESMAN
19 FEB 2000

Reformists likely to win majority in Iran elections

Tehran, February 18 HI-19

FOR THE first time in two decades, Iranian voters are expected today to give reformists a majority in the powerful Parliament that has traditionally been a bastion of conservatism.

Iran's 38.7 million voters headed to polling stations set up at mosques and schools to choose between liberals promising social and political reforms and conservatives backed by hard-liners in the ruling clergy.

But turnout was very thin in many polling stations in Tehran in the first 30 minutes after voting began at 9 am (0530 GMT).

Authorities appealed to Iranians in radio broadcasts not to delay casting their votes. Supreme leader Ali Khomeini, the ultimate power in Islamic Iran and the hard-liners' main backer, voted in a mosque near his office in central Tehran. He too appealed to Iranians not to leave voting to the last minute.

19/2
"This is a significant election and I want you to be careful. Elect those who will be helpful to you and to Islam," he told state Tehran radio after he voted.

The hard-liners want Iran to stick to the ideals of the 1979 Islamic revolution led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini that ousted the pro-US Shah and brought the Shiite Muslim clergy to power.

Liberals have promised to work toward greater press freedom, and respect rule of law. Some have suggested that Iranians should decide in a national referendum whether or not to establish ties with the United States, a move conservatives strongly oppose.

The hard-liners' stand puzzles many who were born after 1979, when relations between the two nations were severed after radical students took over the US Embassy and held 52 Americans hostage for more than a year.

"The conservatives would like to stop all kind of contact with the

outside world. They know that the more we know, the more we will dislike them," said Mehdi, a chemical engineering student, standing outside the Tehran university hostel.

Though there are no opinion polls in Iran, reformists are expected to do well because of mounting frustration with the restrictions of clerical rule.

Young people complain that 21 years of Islamic rule by Khomeini's followers and successors failed to bear the promised fruit - jobs and prosperity.

Instead, youth were barred from mixing freely with the opposite sex, listening to pop and western music or watching foreign television programmes.

More than half of Iran's 62 million people are under the age of 25. About 5,800 candidates, including 424 women, are contesting the election, both of which are records. More than 36,000 polling stations have been set up for the polls. (AP)

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

19 FEB 2000

IRANIAN POLL / BRISK VOTING BELIEVES PREDICTIONS

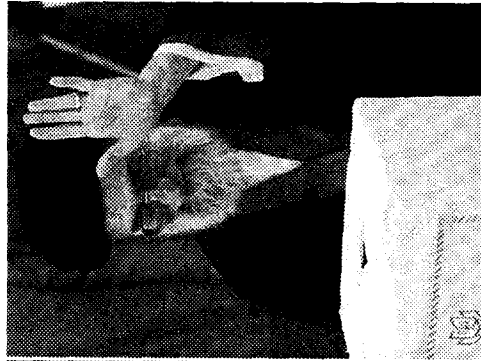
Khatami sitting pretty

By Kesava Menon

TEHRAN, FEB. 18. The Khatami electoral juggernaut appeared to be rolling forward just as inexorably as it did three years ago when Iranians voted for their sixth Parliament today. The reformist forces of the centre-left appeared to be the choice of a clear majority of voters from all classes polled randomly across the city. If the trend in Teheran is repeated across the country, as it should be going by the pattern of the past, the pro-reform forces that support the President, Mr. Mohammad Khatami should have a comfortable position in the next Parliament.

Almost everything that could have worked for the conservative forces, which have repeatedly tried to obstruct Mr. Khatami's reform programmes, did not click. It was feared that reform-minded voters might not turn up to vote in as great a strength as the committed followers of the conservative camp. In the event, the turn-out and polling appeared to be far more brisk in the northern and central districts of Teheran than in the south. North and central Teheran have been traditionally considered pro-Khatami areas while the conservatives are strong in the south by virtue of their clout in the bazaar located in this area. But even this stereotype of voting patterns did not stand up to scrutiny as pro-reform groups were doing badly in the south either.

Pre-poll analysis suggested that



The Iranian President, Mr. Mohammad Khatami (left), and the Supreme Leader, Sayed Ali Khamenei, casting their ballots in the country's parliamentary elections in Teheran on Friday. — AP

the reform groups might not do as well today as they had in the 1997 Presidential election or the local bodies polls held last year as they had not been able to produce a consolidated list of candidates. Discounting most of the 17 parties on the pro-reform platform, there were at least three major parties that were in mutual competition for the pro-reform vote.

It was thought that the pro-reform vote might get dissipated in these circumstances and that the conservatives would thereby have the advantage since they lay claim to a committed vote. This factor too did not appear to be of any great relevance since the voters had exercised their judgment and

narrowed their preferences to a centre-left spectrum of candidates.

It was inevitable that the conservatives, who have dominated Iranian politics for the last decade and more, would get some votes in districts that were otherwise pro-reform. While the odd voter in the northern districts affirmed that he had voted for at least a few conservative candidates, the surprise was that there were not more such voters in the southern districts. The conservative vote will pick up in the rural areas where people tend to vote as per the mullah's instructions. But a surprise in this election was the number of younger voters who said they ticked the

names of extreme-left or left-nationalist candidates from among the panel (usually about 30-strong) in each constituency. (In each constituency the voter can cast votes for multiple candidates and the winners are chosen according to the proportion of the votes they win).

The extreme-left or left-nationalist groups verge on the secular in their ideology (they trace their political lineage from former Presidents Mossadeq and Bazargan) and if this trend is repeated elsewhere the conservatives may well find themselves facing off with these leftist elements in the second round. Most voters polled randomly, irrespective of age group or class, indicated that they had voted for the pro-reform groups which are collectively called Khoradad-2 (commemorating the date on which Mr. Khatami won the Presidential election and thus setting the reform process in motion).

In the north, the clear preference was for the Islamic Iran Participation Front (IIPF), headed by Mr. Khatami's brother, Mr. Mohammed Reza Khatami, followed closely by the Militant Clerics League (MCL), a party of reform-minded clerics. Some of the pro-reform vote also went to candidates of the executives of the Construction party.

This party has traditionally been pro-reform but doubts were cast on its commitment to reform after its leader, Mr. Hashemi Rafsanjani made a pact with the conservatives and agreed to lead their campaign.

Early Iran results boost reformers

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE
and REUTERS

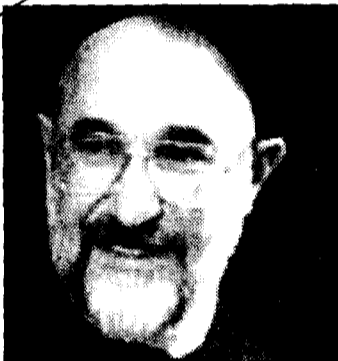
TEHERAN, Feb. 19. — Iran's reformers posted a big upset in the traditionally conservative provinces, gaining 20 out of 41 seats in the first official results of parliamentary elections released today.

Of those 20 seats, at least 10 had been held by conservatives in the outgoing parliament.

Although final results of yesterday's polls are not expected for a few days, President Mohammad Khatami's reform movement seemed to be headed for a crushing victory.

The Mosharekat paper, closely linked to the largest pro-reform party behind Mr Khatami, today predicted the President would have his long-sought majority in the next legislature. "The burden of reforming Iran no longer rests on the shoulders of Khatami alone."

Of the conservatives who lost the polls the notable is Mr Ali Zadsar who contested from from Jiroft, in the southern Kerman province. Mr Zadsar



Khatami: heading for majority

took a leading part in the failed move to impeach culture minister, Mr Ataollah Mohajerani, last year.

In Ardakan, Mr Khatami's hometown, reformist Mohammad Reza Tabesh defeated the conservative incumbent.

"Whatever the results, the most immediate gain from this is a wonderful victory for the great nation, which has added another golden page to the book of its destiny," Mr Khatami said in a message to the voters.

"You cultured people showed

that you are still moving toward strengthening the system, whose pillars remain Islam and spirituality, independence, freedom and progress."

Earlier, officials of the main reformist coalition, the Islamic Iran Participation Front, said their own exit polls in Teheran had found strong support for their candidates.

Similar reports had also come in from the provinces after the close of the poll, widely seen as a referendum on Mr Khatami's liberal reforms which have been stymied by the conservatives in the present parliament, they said.

There was no immediate reaction from the main conservative coalition, which had predicted before the elections that it would retain control of the 250-seat parliament. Mr Mohammad Reza Abbasifard, member of the Guardian Council which supervised the elections, said about 70 to 80 percent of the 38.7 million voters had voted, Iran's news agency Irna reported late yesterday.

THE STATESMAN
20 FEB 2000

Iran says a resounding yes to reform

By Kesava Menon

HD-12

20/2

TEHERAN, FEB. 19. The results of the elections to the Iranian Parliament, held yesterday, will begin to trickle in from late today or early tomorrow and it may take three weeks before the official count is declared. All indications suggest that there will be no major deviation from the impression formed on the day of polling that reform groups are heading for a massive victory. Whether the verdict will deal a death blow to the clerical establishment can be gauged only after the final shape of the next parliament is known (following a second round of voting, if necessary). But a forecast has been delivered in the manner in which the pro-reform vote consolidated itself despite the odds.

From a random survey, covering over a dozen polling stations from the north to the south of this city, it was quite apparent that the pro-reform groups — known collectively as Khordad-2 — were heading for a thumping win. (The second day in the month of Khordad in the Iranian calendar was the date, corresponding to May 23, 1997 on which Mr. Mohammad Khatami won the Presidential election). Sources from across the city seconded the opinion, adding that a similar pattern of voting was discernible in the other major urban centres of Iran. Actually, a study of the voting pattern in Teheran itself can provide an assessment of the nationwide trend since the capital, which has immigrants from all over Iran, is a micro-cosm of the country as a whole.

Polling went on till late last night and even at 9 pm long queues could be seen at the polling stations. By early evening when the trends were assessable, the leaders of the main group within Khordad-2 were claiming that they would get at least 60 per cent of the seats in Parliament. Although the performance of the conservatives may pick up once the rural vote begins to be counted (the official results from rural constituencies could come in before that of the urban areas), this initial assessment by the Khordad-2 leaders may prove to be an underestimate. Mr. Khatami won between 70 and 80 per cent of the vote in 1997 and his followers seem to be doing as well this time.

Just as significant as the size of the pro-reform vote was the quality of it. Every single pro-reform voter this correspondent spoke to appeared to have invested strong emotions into his choice. While the Khordad-2 panel elicited a positive response, anger

and disgust at the conservatives were evident. This was especially true in the case of the former President, Mr. Hashemi Rafsanjani. Mr. Rafsanjani fought the election as the leader of the basically reformist-minded executives of the Construction party, but he personally allied himself with the conservative Jama'e Rouhaniyate Moabarez (Association of the Combatant Clergy) and stood as their candidate for the Speaker's post.

In deciding to contest the elections (after having already served as Speaker for eight years in the Eighties and as President for another eight) and by aligning himself with the conservatives, Mr. Rafsanjani created the impression among the voters that he was about to sabotage the reform process for his personal interest. There is already a widespread public opinion that Mr. Rafsanjani's years in office were marked by corruption and ruthlessness. Though votes were being cast for those candidates on the executives' panel, every voter who did so made it a point to mention that Mr. Rafsanjani was the exception.

The fact of Mr. Rafsanjani being singularly marked out was symptomatic of the widespread anger against the Jama'e and others who have tried to obstruct the reform process. In this context, it is worth mentioning that the few who did admit to voting for the Jama'e were, in contrast to pro-reform voters, defensive in talking about their choice. The nature of the pro-reform sentiment provides part of the explanation for how it consolidated itself despite the odds. The desire for change was so strong that it manifested itself with particularly sharp focus on those candidates who unequivocally stood for change.

Although the Jama'e has not formally constituted itself as a party, it is organisationally far older than the pro-reform parties; it is also the party of the establishment. In contrast, the main Khordad-2 force, the Islamic Iran Participation Front (or Moshareqat in the local parlance) was but recently formed and its main ally, the Majma'e Rouhaniyoun Moabarez (Society of Combatant Clerics) was a marginal force till three years ago. While the Moshareqat and Majma had many candidates in common in all the constituencies, there were discrepancies as well. It was thought before the election that these discrepancies would prove to be a major disadvantage but the pro-reform sentiment was so strong that the fears were belied.

Can Khatami break the shackles?

By Kesava Menon

TEHERAN, FEB. 20. Omar Khayyam might have appreciated the international media's understanding of the desire for change that the people of Iran expressed in voting for a reform-minded parliament. Telecasters have so often dwelt on the themes of "verse, wine and love" that audiences outside Iran might wonder whether the election was akin to a Khayyamesque revolution. People reply to the questions they are asked and the electronic media's job is to punch in the message as tersely as it can. The danger, of course, is that the fundamental elements of the phenomenon that has just occurred in Iran is obscured by the sound bytes.

The "wine, music and love" part of the Iranians' search for a better life is really not that much of a problem. With a little care and the right connections, these ingredients for a good life are accessible. The procedures for procuring a bottle of wine or meeting a mate can be irksome but they are not impossible. In the earlier period of heightened revolutionary fervour, all this was more difficult and what has really eased the situation now is the remarkable reduction in the climate of fear.

The President, Mr. Mohammad Khatami's stewardship of the country over the past three years has contributed both directly and indirectly to this change. The scope for free thought and expression that has been created by Mr. Khatami and his associates has contributed directly to the lessening of the climate of fear.

Under his Presidency, much more than before, ordinary Iranians have been freed from the need to devote a great deal of their intellectual and emotional energies to revolutionary purity at home and the revolution's quarrels with the world outside. Social, economic and political practices, which impact more directly on day-to-day living, have increasingly become the focus of thought and debate.

This has not been as easy a process as assumed to be in most democracies. Since the revolution's theological ideology impinges on every aspect of life, the questioning of any aspect of it was earlier regarded as a challenge to the revolutionary ethos itself and hence anathema.

Those reform-minded Iranians who have engaged in the debates and confrontations of the last three years have had to steadily

push the envelope. At every stage, they have had to test how far they could go, study the response and adjust. Should newspapers only publish government statements or should they enquire into the functioning of State organs, and if so, how deeply? Can the authority of the Supreme Religious Leader be questioned, and if so, to what degree? Can economic reform be undertaken without political reform?

At each stage, the reformists have had to post these questions into a vacuum in a "just do it and let's see what happens" sort of a way. In every instance, the response from the people was positive and each advance in one area contributed to a surge in another. Over the last three years, there has been a steady expansion of the limits of the possible and this has led to the most fundamental change of all — the dispelling of despair and the instillation of the belief that change or reform is possible. The increase in the belief in change has generated such momentum that the fear of the uncertain has been reduced.

The widening of the debate has also indirectly corroded the climate of fear and weakened the organs which enforce conformity. For instance, with economic matters being freely discussed without fear of offending a higher authority, everyone can do more to care for his/her own purse. Financial sacrifices are not seen to be justified by any higher revolutionary imperative. With the searchlight now moving all over the place, it is now easier to see how revolutionary doctrine has been manipulated to distort the economy in favour of the few. Gross mismanagement by the theocratic establishment has created rampant unemployment and inflation and even the sinews of the establishment have not been unaffected. The Basiji — the moral police — has become less of a body which enforces social mores than a force which exploits misbehaviour to extract bribes.

In short, the Iranian situation is all about abnormality. Most things that a person wants to do can be done but in an abnormal way. Students want access to the latest knowledge and have the opportunity to travel abroad or have experts from outside come in to teach them. There is a lot of idle capital in Iran and the country has the human and natural resources to attract foreign investment.

✓ ✓
Eight killed as police fire on protesters

Khatami rides reform landslide

WASH (1) SF 9 2/2

REUTERS, AFP & PTI

TEHERAN, Feb. 20. — Reformist supporters of Iranian President Mohammed Khatami won 75 per cent of the 167 seats gained outside Teheran in the first round of Iran's parliamentary elections, AFP reported today, quoting the main reformist party.

In southwest Iran, police fired at crowds of demonstrators protesting against alleged ballot rigging, killing eight and wounding scores, Reuters said, quoting a newspaper report.

The newspaper *Mosharekat* of the Iran Islamic Participation Front, citing what it said were official results, claimed reformists won 126 of the provincial seats decided in the first round after Friday's voting, AFP said.

The conservative Islamic right won 34 seats and Independents seven, the paper said.

PTI, quoting the Irna, the official Iranian news agency, had earlier reported from Dubai that 67 per cent of winners till now were reformers. Reformists won all five seats in Isfahan in central Iran, and were leading in Mashhad.

The reformists tried to play down their win — the biggest election victory in Iran since 1979 — describing it as the nation's victory. The results would strengthen the hands of President Khatami who can

now pursue his liberal policies more vigorously.

Observers attributed the reformist landslide to heavy turnout — more than 80 per cent. Iran's youth — some 20 million of whom in high school and university feel stifled by strict Islamic laws in personal life — led the rush to the polling stations.

The daily *Kayhan* said eight people, including a child, had been killed today in clashes with police in oil-rich Khuzestan during protests against results in the district.

The newspaper said an angry crowd had set fire to police cars in the town of Shush and attacked banks and public buildings. Five people including the child died in ensuing clashes with police, it said.

It reported riots had also broken out in nearby Dasht-e Azadegan after police fired into a crowd trying to force their way into the governor's office.

These clashes left three people dead and 10 others wounded. The protesters then attacked state buildings and staged demonstrations, the newspaper said.

Irna had said earlier that 15 people had been injured in clashes in Shush and a third town in the province. It said protesters were angry about the re-election of the incumbent, whom they accused of "vote-buying and bribery".

IRRESISTIBLE REFORM

Iran moves towards open society

THE landslide victory for reform in Iran in the first round of polling is welcome. The mandate is particularly significant because it defied the disqualification of close to 100 reformist candidates by a screening committee controlled by fundamentalists. There is need for caution though. All legislation is vetted and passed by a "guardian council" which will in all probability not be as amenable to reform as the President, Mohammad Khatami, is. The reformist themselves have responded to their victory with caution. But clearly the balance is tilting towards a more open society, free of repressive restrictions in the name of Islam. Especially since the present supreme ayatollah, Ali Khomeini, is not as dictatorial or rigidly orthodox as Khomeini. It is evident that there is a widespread longing for a more open and modern society. In September last year students demonstrated against the arrest of two students for "insulting Islam" and in favour of the freedom of expression, an early indication of public mood. Since then female students in a medical school have agitated against segregation and inferior instruction. And in this election, the youth have given reform a boost.

The decadence and arbitrary reign of the Shah created popular disenchantment and anger against America, the symbol of Western values and the Shah was seen to be his puppet. Ayatollah Khomeini cashed in to create the current anti-modernist, theocratic regime. But the current generations did not witness the Shah regime. They are, consequently, unwilling to accept stifling restrictions of a theocratic regime on the ground that the regime of the Shah was decadent. The regime of the ayatollahs could have been in a stronger position had the Iranian economy prospered. But it clearly has not fulfilled its potential, pegged as it is to the fluctuating price of oil. It is this which to a great extent fuels the desire for change. Given the context, it will be difficult for the hardline clergy to stem the tide. It is unlikely that change will be swift and dramatic. It will probably be gradual but lasting — a reassuring prospect. The international community will be relieved that the state which has symbolised Islamic fundamentalism is reforming itself — not under pressure from the global police, but in response to internal stimulus. That is the best way.

THE STATESMAN

22 FEB 2000

Reformists set for majority in Iran

ASSOCIATED PRESS

TEHERAN, Feb. 21. — Iran's voters have rejected the ruling clergy-backed conservatives and given the reformists led by President Mohammed Khatami the largest number of seats in Parliament.

Having won 137 of 191 declared seats and leading in 26 of another 30, the reformists are virtually certain to bag a majority in the 290-member Parliament, 69 of whose seats have gone into a run-off.

With most results known, the vote is likely to strengthen President Khatami's hand in pushing social, cultural and political reforms. Since coming to power in 1997, the President has advocated dismantling many restrictions imposed during the 21 years of Islamic rule since the Ayatollah Khomeiniled revolution in 1979.

Former President Hashemi Rafsanjani, increasingly identified with the conservatives, has been forced into a run-off. Many voters said he had failed to deliver on his promises.

He was the top candidate in the conservative coalition list and had been expected to make a strong bid for Speaker of the Assembly.

About 83 per cent of Iran's 38.7 million eligible voters turned out to cast ballots on Friday in an election widely seen as a referendum on President's reform plans.

Women, who can expect far greater freedom under the reforms, and students — who don't care for the current Islamic curbs on personal life — turned out at the booths in large numbers.

Till today, reformists had won 137 of the 290 seats in Parliament, easily eclipsing their conservative rivals, who won only 44 seats.

Independents took 10 seats, and 69 others were to be decided in run-offs.

The remaining 30 seats are in Teheran — considered one of Iran's most liberal regions — where counting has been slowest because of the large number of voters.

State television announced that reformists were leading in 26 of the 30 seats in Teheran. The announcement was a strong indication that the reformists will have a majority in the next Parliament, or majlis.

Reuters adds: With two-thirds of the votes counted, candidates of Islamic Iran Participation Front, the main pro-reform faction, held some of the leading places in Teheran's list of 30.

The front-runner is Mr Mohammad Reza Khatami, the President's brother and leader of the IIPF, which is spearheading the drive for expanded freedoms and democracy in the Islamic country.

Only a few conservatives are expected to be among the winners in the capital.

Conservatives have already conceded defeat in Teheran, but said they were supported by voters in the provinces.

Officials have privately spoken of ballot rigging in favour of Mr Rafsanjani in a southern district, but there has been no official confirmation.

Election officials have come under pressure to release early results for Teheran as soon as possible — a difficult task when more than 3 million voters were choosing 30 candidates.

The executives of Construction, a centrist party which supports Mr Rafsanjani, protested the delay in results. "The delay could provoke rumours in society," one of them said.

THE STATESMAN

22 FEB 2000

IRANIAN VERDICT / KHATAMI'S BROTHER LEADING

Reformists surging ahead in polls

HD-14
22/2
TEHERAN, FEB. 21. Reformists are leading the polls for Iran's parliamentary elections in the important Teheran constituency with 87 per cent of the votes overall, State-run television reported today.

Of the 30 candidates of the Social Democratic Islamic Iran Participation Party (IIPP) for the 30 Teheran seats, 26 were elected outright, evicting from the legislature not only many renowned conservative figures but also reformists of the moderate G6 party.

The top individual vote-getter in Teheran was Mr. Mohammad-Reza Khatami, brother of the President, Mr. Mohammad Khatami, with 56 per cent of votes, followed by Ms. Jamileh Kadiivar, a woman activist and wife of the Liberal Culture Minister, Attaollah Mohajerani.

Third-placed was Mr. Hadi Khamenei, the estranged, leftist brother of Iran's su-

preme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, with 38 per cent.

The conservative party JRM suffered a historic defeat in the capital. The only candidates it managed to place in the first 37 places in the rankings were the joint nominees it shared with G6, Mr. Rafsanjani and the Deputy Speaker, Mr. Hassan Rowhani.

The JRM's own men were far down the list. The party is closely associated with the clergy who have dominated Iran for two decades.

The IIPP has already gained more than 150 seats in the provinces and the Teheran results indicate it has won more than 60 per cent of the total vote nationwide and has a comfortable parliamentary majority. The IIPP itself claims to have gained more than 70 per cent of the vote. — DPA

THE HINDU
22 FEB 2000

Mirroring the changing face of Iran

By Kesava Menon

TEHERAN, FEB. 20. What happens in a democracy in which political parties are in their infancy and therefore organisationally feeble? How does opinion get formulated, communicated and operationalised through the identification of personnel who will implement the people's choice of programmes? In Iran, where the February 18 parliamentary polls have conclusively proved that it is a democracy, a part of these functions have been taken over by the newspapers.

As with the nascent political formations which support the reform programme of the President, Mr. Mohammad Khatami, the newspapers which promote the cause are collectively termed the Khordad-2 media. Like the parties these papers too were born in the liberal atmosphere ushered in by the President after he took office in 1997. Some of these newspapers are the official organs of liberal parties while others are managed or run by leading members of the reform parties. More pertinently, however, these papers have introduced higher standards of professionalism in reporting news and analysing developments.

Another characteristic that these newspapers have in common is that they have gone through several incarnations. They came into being under the liberal press laws introduced by Mr. Khatami and his Information Ministers and officials. Almost without exception, these publications ran foul of the conservative-dominated judiciary which appeared to be on the look out for the most minor infraction so that the publishers could be tried and the newspapers shut down. Showing remarkable resilience these papers have, in almost all cases, managed to bounce back within a few weeks mostly under

new names and banners but brought out by the same staff and appealing to the same set of readers. In their present form, the more important liberal newspapers are *Moshareqat*, *Fat*, *Sobhe Emrooz* and *Asr-e-Azadegan*.

These papers could not, of course, have survived without the support of its readership but that only shows that they fulfil a strongly felt need. In contrast, pro-establishment publications like *Jamhuri Islami* have never had a formidable print order and are bought wholesale by government departments under compulsion. A common scene on Teheran's streets is the sight of hawkers desperately trying to sell the pro-establishment papers while the liberal papers are snapped up at the kiosks. Programmes on State-run television no longer consist solely of martyrdom stories but they do not contribute all that much to public enlightenment either.

Although centred mainly in Teheran, the pro-reform papers do reach the other major cities as well. Staff working on these papers point to the necessity of ensuring that the day's paper hits the stands in Shiraz, Isfahan, Tabriz, Mashad and other cities, even if a few hours late. These papers reach remote areas like Zahedan only a day later. This outreach was of crucial importance in the elections.

While showing a strong commitment to reform, the two main Khordad-2 political formations, the Islamic Iran Participation Front (*Moshareqat* in its Farsi short form) and *Majma'e Rouhaniyoune Moabarez* (Society of Combatant Clerics), were unable to agree on complete lists of common candidates in each constituency. For instance, in Teheran, which sends 30 members to parliament, the *Majma*

and *Moshareqat* had 20 candidates in common. To that extent, they had secured the pro-liberal vote from being distributed haphazardly. The Khordad-2 newspapers helped by publishing the *Majma* and *Moshareqat* lists next to each other on the front pages so as to clarify which names and associated numbers pro-reform voters should write down on the ballot paper. The effectiveness of the newspapers' performance can be judged from the fact that a majority of voters came to the polling stations with either the relevant clipping from the papers or with written lists carefully culled from the advertisements.

This method also enabled groups which are outside the system, like the Freedom Movement of Iran, to indirectly get on to the ballot. A cleric dominated screening committee had rejected all the candidates nominated by the Freedom Movement. This party, which does not accept rule by the Supreme Religious Leader, has not been given official recognition but is allowed a bare minimum scope to function. With their candidatures rejected, the Freedom Movement adopted candidates from the Khordad-2 forces (16 in Teheran) and called on its supporters to vote in these candidates. A not insignificant number of voters in Teheran said that they had voted for the Freedom Movement's panel.

It is not as if the newspapers have been the sole harbingers of change. A first-time visitor might not notice it but the transformation of the social, cultural and intellectual ethos in this city over the past three years has been stupendous. This transformation in the capital could hardly have escaped notice in other cities.

THE HINDU

22 FEB 2000

Iran Shows the Way

Even as President Clinton considers stopping over at Pakistan — despite secretary of state Madeleine Albright's acknowledgement that terrorists were transiting through that country — comes news of the Islamic Republic of Iran adopting democracy through the ballot box. The supporters of reformist President Mohammed Khatami are about to gain an absolute majority in the national assembly which is a fitting answer to the obscurantism of Iran's clergy. The country that had often been denounced as an extremist state by successive US Administrations has demonstrated its unimpeachable democratic and moderate credentials. For the Clinton-led US Administration, this is a test of its diplomacy — the choice between moderate Islam as represented by Iran and Islam's fanatical variation generated and exported from the Pakistan-Afghanistan region. Should Mr Clinton go ahead and stop over in Pakistan, he will be doing so at the cost of moderate Islam. The reformists need to be engaged more encouragingly than those threatening disruption. The right place for President Clinton to stop over, if he is serious in fighting religious fanaticism and terrorism, will be the democratic and reformist Iran and not Pakistan.

The Iranian anti-Americanism was rooted in nationalism which justifiably resented the CIA overthrow of Mossadeq in the 50s and the strong US backing given to Shah's authoritarian rule over the next 25 years. Then came the Western encouragement to Saddam Hussein to invade Iran, tolerance of his use of chemical weapons, the shooting down of the civilian Iranian airbus and the cynical sale of US arms to Iran to sustain the contra-insurgency in Central America. Iran supported various Shia Islamic militant groups in West Asia even as the US nurtured the extremist Wahabi and other Sunni Islamic groups in Afghanistan. Iran's policies led to its isolation for a period of time. US policies, on the other hand, have had a more lasting impact on the world in terms of international terrorism sustained by incomes from large scale narcotics generation and traffic. Iran successfully countered Saddam Hussein's aggression. It also saw the US paying for its folly of nurturing him. In the aftermath, then, Iran largely focussed on consolidating its autonomy in the region and optimising Islamic values with the imperatives of modern representative governance. The Iranians have a strong civilisational and national identity and are not much interested in exporting universalist *Jehadi* of the kind favoured by Sunni ideologues spawned during the anti Soviet-Afghan war and who continue to be concentrated in the Pakistan-Afghanistan area. Iran's elections have set that country on the road to integration with the international democratic norms. Iran is therefore central to any project aimed at promotion of Islamic moderation and containment of Islamic extremism and narcoterrorism. Much depends now on the sobriety and judgement of the Clinton Administration. Encouragement to military rulers who patronise terrorists can hardly go hand-in-hand with any struggle against terrorism and religious fanaticism.

THE TIMES OF INDIA
23 FEB 2000

Khatami may step up pace of liberalisation programme

By Jai Taraporevala

MUMBAI: The outcome of the parliamentary elections in Iran marks another significant boost for the reformists. President Mohammed Khatami can now be expected to step up the pace of the liberalisation programme, not least because of the backing he will enjoy in the Majlis. This was what he had lacked in the previous parliament.

Besides, Mr Khatami has staked his political credibility on pushing the reform agenda forward. This being so, he will seek to accelerate its pace since he will not want to antagonise those who form his popular support base on which he has relied so heavily.

The demographic factor is also moving in the President's favour. Over 60 per cent of the population of the country was born after the 1979 Islamic revolution. This means

that an increasing number of Iranians do not have memories of the earlier forced revolutionary period in which matters relating to ideology were accorded a much higher priority than material considerations.

In fact, the younger generation is growing increasingly impatient with problems on the economic front as well as some of the policy

NEWS ANALYSIS

prescriptions of the conservatives. It is this section of the population that largely supports Mr Khatami.

At the same time, Mr Khatami is likely to proceed down the path of reforms with caution. After all, the conservatives still exercise a significant influence over such key institutions of power as the Council of Guardians (a body which has the power to veto legislation), the armed forces, the Revolutionary

Guards, the intelligence network and the judiciary. Any rapid move down the road of liberalisation could, therefore, prove counterproductive since it could spark a conservative backlash.

It is for this reason that the tactically shrewd Mr Khatami has favoured the option of gradually chipping away at the powers of the hardliners rather than confronting them directly. The substantial, though undoubtedly slow headway which he has achieved as President, testifies to the success of this approach. How far Mr Khatami succeeds in pushing forward the programme of liberalisation will hinge on a correlation of factors.

Among these are the skill with which he reduces the influence of the hardliners in key institutions of power, the country's performance on the economic front and the impact of international factors on Iran.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

23 FEB 2000

Iran's hardliners are down, but may yet block reform plans

By Vijay Joshi

TEHERAN: After their rout in parliamentary elections, the question is whether Iran's hardliners will fight to preserve their power or accept defeat.

The first confrontation could come over the reformists' plans to open Iran to foreign television. As the reform momentum gathers speed, the hardliners will be forced to back down to avoid angering people, said Saeed Laylaz, a political analyst and columnist for several reformist newspapers.

Ultimately, the hardliners will have to choose between accommodating the reformist agenda and retaining at least some popularity, or confronting the reformers outright and losing all credibility.

Despite losing control of Parliament for the first time in 21 years in Friday's polls, the hardliners retain key positions that they can use to frustrate reform.

They control the 12-member Guardians Council, which has the power to reject any legislation deemed unconstitutional or un-Islamic. They also dominate the Expediency Council, which is supposed to mediate disputes between the Guardians Council and Parliament.

The Islamic Iran Participation Front, the biggest party in the reformist coalition, has said one of its priorities in Parliament will be to lift a six-year ban on satellite dish antennas. The hardliners could reject that. The ban is supported by the country's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who has the final word on all matters.

"This is a conflict between traditionalism and modernism," said Mr Laylaz. "The moderates of today were conservatives of yesterday."

Pragmatism, however, may prevail because most of those in power today are those who led the

1979 Islamic Revolution that ended the monarchy and brought the clergy to power. They remember that the power of the people toppled the Shah and cannot be trifled with.

After the reformist President Mohammad Khatami's 1997 election, the hardliners used vigilante groups to intimidate reformers. But with the tide clearly against them now, it is less likely the vigilantes would dare to show their faces in public.

Khamenei himself could be a calming influence among the hardliners. He has shown in recent months that he would rather avoid a confrontation with the reformists.

Earlier this month, he ordered hardline clerics to end their protest over a newspaper cartoon lampooning a cleric. Last month he pardoned former Teheran mayor Gholamhossein Karbaschi, a prominent reformist who was jailed for alleged corruption in a trial widely seen as politically motivated.

In October, he criticised hardliners who called for the death of two playwrights who wrote an allegedly blasphemous play. On Wednesday, the newspaper *Entekhab* reported that Khamenei had pardoned the playwrights.

The reformists' election victory was an endorsement of the social and political reforms programme launched by Khatami. His allies have won 141 of the 195 seats for which results have been declared. But analysts say the reformists are much more likely than the hardliners to have trouble in presenting a united front.

The reformists are split into 18 parties, including leftists who will oppose economic liberalisation for a country desperately in need of investment. (AP)

USA may ease sanctions on Iraq

REUTERS

WASHINGTON, Feb. 25. — The Clinton administration, under growing domestic and international pressure to lift sanctions on Iraq, is considering ways to ease restrictions on the import of oil industry spare parts, pesticides and other products, the *Washington Post* reported today.

As a member of the UN Security council, the US frequently exercised its right to block Iraq from acquiring items such as pesticide sprayers, which can be used not only to help farmers grow food, but for biological warfare as well.

But Britain, France and other US allies have questioned whether restrictions on such "dual use" technology are

undermining efforts to ease human suffering in Iraq.

Washington, however, has now begun to quietly review its screening of imports under the sanctions regime, the *Post* said.

In considering Iraq's import requests, "we're trying to change the presumption from passive denial to something with a little more forethought in it," a senior state department official told the *Post*.

Earlier this week, US officials agreed to release their hold on an \$80 million electrical repair contract, on condition that UN workers verify that the parts are used as intended, a spokesman for the UN Iraq programme told the paper.

On Wednesday, UN secretary general Kofi Annan said, sanctions against Iraq could be

refined to limit the suffering of the civilian population. Two UN officials resigned this month because of their concerns about the impact of sanctions.

Mr Annan said discussions were on about how the council and the UN as a whole, could use "smart sanctions". Smart sanctions can take the form of closing foreign bank accounts of the leaders concerned, refusing to give them visas to travel and other restrictions that could directly affect them.

Clinton administration officials have not advertised the change in US policy. They are trying to draw a fine line between accommodating security council allies, and doing anything that might be perceived as helping Saddam

Hussein, the *Post* said.

But officials said they would still tend to err on the side of forbidding imports.

"At the end of the day, if we're going to make a judgment, I'd prefer to make that judgment conservative and take the heat for it on the security council," one of the officials told the *Post*.

Before the review began, the UN sanctions committee held up \$ 601 million in contracts for repairing Iraq's power grid, the *Post* said.

The sanctions committee also placed "holds" on the import of \$ 297 million in spare parts, intended for Iraq's oil industry. Iraq uses its oil revenue to pay for humanitarian imports under the UN-sponsored "oil-for-food" programme.

5-11-26

Rafsanjani's election rings alarm bells

By Kesava Menon

MANAMA (BAHRAIN), FEB. 26. There is something fishy in the news that the former Iranian President, Mr. Hashemi Rafsanjani has managed to win a seat to Parliament in the elections held on February 18. According to agencies, the Iranian Interior Ministry has officially declared that Mr. Rafsanjani has won the last of 30 seats allotted to the Teheran constituency with the bare minimum of 25.8 per cent of the vote. This could be bad news for the reformers despite the overwhelming majority they have otherwise obtained.

Mr. Rafsanjani's chances had hung in the balance while his election managers and officials from the reform camps re-checked the ballots in a number of booths time and again. On election day itself, it had appeared that Mr. Rafsanjani had no chance of getting a seat in the first round and this impression seemed confirmed when days passed without his name appearing on the board of successful candidates. According to reports from Iran, Mr. Rafsanjani's election managers had pressed for a re-count in south Teheran polling stations insisting that he could not have polled as low a share of vote as initially shown. Poor and working-class southern Teheran was considered a traditional bastion of the conservatives who supported Mr. Rafsanjani in these



elections but as the nation-wide trend showed, the poor and working class could no longer be considered "vote banks" for the conservatives.

Apparently some of Mr. Rafsanjani's managers had also contended that some of the votes actually cast for him had been

mistakenly counted as being in favour of his daughter, Ms. Faezeh Hashemi who also contested these elections. Voters had to write down the names of their favoured candidates on the ballot paper and it is possible that some wrote just Hashemi or Rafsanjani without giving the full names. But the voters also had to enter the serial numbers of their candidates and therefore it is unclear as to how any confusion could have occurred.

Ms. Rafsanjani was marginally more popular than her father, especially among women and younger voters. The unexpected result seems to show that a vote transfer between father and daughter did take place but whether it was before or after the poll will perhaps never be known.

To an extent, the reform camp which now controls the executive and Parliament might have thought it more prudent to re-lent rather than transform Mr. Rafsanjani's election into a major issue. If they had, it could have played into the hands of conservatives who would have complained about poll fraud. But the decision must have been a difficult one for the reformers to make since Mr. Rafsanjani has great potential for mischief should he enter the legislature. This, despite the fact that they obtained about 75-80 per cent of the vote and are likely to have a comfortable majority even after a second round of voting to be held

probably next Friday.

After the remarkable show of unity, cohesion and impromptu organisation on February 18 the pro-reform camps will have to repeat the performance when Parliament convenes in May for its first session and the election of the Speaker. The pro-reform groups do not have an obvious candidate for Speaker while Mr. Rafsanjani has been the unanimous choice of the right-wingers. It might be thought that this consideration is immaterial given the majority which the pro-reform groups enjoy but to do so would be to overlook the nature of the pro-reform parties. These groups encompass people with various outlooks united only in that they want a relaxing of the hold which the clerical establishment has over society.

Many among the reformers espouse the graduated and controlled change which Mr. Rafsanjani says he endorses. Inside Parliament, Mr. Rafsanjani, who has connections and networks in all camps, will begin to weave his web and has the skill to manipulate himself into the Speaker's chair. Going against him is the anger that has been manifested by the public, especially younger voters. If Mr. Rafsanjani were to become Speaker, it would be a travesty and to prevent that from happening the President, Mr. Mohammad Khatami will probably have to bring his influence to bear on the members of Parliament.

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Winds of change in Iran

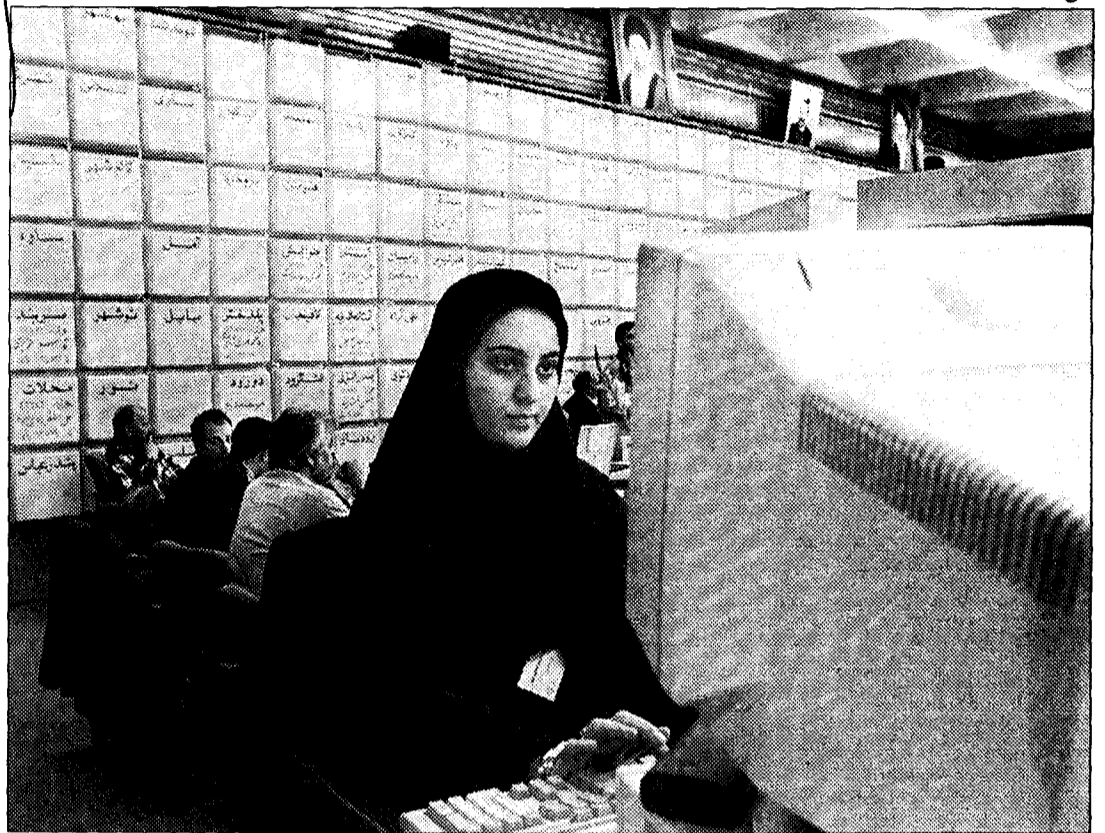
EVERYONE OUTSIDE Iran is currently trying to evaluate the meaning of the parliamentary election held on February 18. The West, perhaps still caught up in the triumphant contemplation of its achievements of the past half millennium, is eagerly anticipating a friendly Iranian attitude now that both the Legislature and the Executive are controlled by reformers. However, the main focus in these elections was on the internal situation in Iran and the developments can perhaps best be understood by tracing the campaign and humiliating defeat of Ayatollah Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani.

Actually even the use of the term Ayatollah in referring to the former President and Speaker of Parliament is problematic. As per the traditions of Iranian Shiism, this term should only be applied to those who have made a significant contribution to religious studies and have been accepted by lay followers as well as theological students as a worthy teacher. The most learned of the Ayatollahs becomes a Grand Ayatollah and a "source for emulation". It is no one's case that Mr. Rafsanjani, or even Iran's Supreme Religious Leader, Ayatollah Syed Ali Khamenei, for that matter, has made any theological contribution. But Mr. Khamenei obtained the rank of Ayatollah when he became the Wali Faqih (religious leader); Mr. Rafsanjani appears to have been extended a similar courtesy when he stepped down from the Presidency and took up the relatively less powerful post of Chairman of the Expediency Council.

This assumption by Mr. Rafsanjani of the Ayatollah position might have passed criticism if not for the fact that the clerical establishment's steady encroachment into all sphere of life has built up resentment against it. With the emergence of political Ayatollahs such as Mr. Khamenei and Mr. Rafsanjani, religious-minded Iranians, who appear to form the great majority, found even their most sacred spaces being debased.

It is small wonder then that only that section of the press and public which remains loyal to Mr. Rafsanjani refers to him as Ayatollah; the rest accord him only the lesser title of Hojatoleslam. This assumption by Mr. Rafsanjani of a title, to which he is not entitled in the opinion of most Iranians, did not figure as a significant issue in the elections, but it discloses the extent to which the conservative establishment in Iran has distanced itself from public perceptions.

It was incongruous, if not downright absurd, that a person who has already held the Speakership



An election official adds up the votes in Iran...changes in the offing?

A mood of change has gripped the Iranian electorate, more than half of whom were born after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, says

KESAVA MENON.

for eight years and the Presidency for another eight should offer himself to the electorate as a candidate for Parliament once again. The clerical establishment thought that it had played a smart move by winning Mr. Rafsanjani over to its side. He, or so they thought, had credentials as a reformer and could thus appeal to the mood for change that has gripped the Iranian electorate, more than half of whom were born after the 1979 Islamic Revolution and are thus no longer imbued with the revolutionary spirit. At the same time, Mr. Rafsanjani was very much a part of the establishment and would certainly not jeopardise those with whom he had so many connections. Mr. Rafsanjani's candidature was considered to be particularly potent since he was the conservatives' unanimous choice for Speaker, while the pro-reform groups had no such obvious candidate on their side.

In the event, the whole scheme backfired. By choosing Mr. Rafsanjani to lead their campaign, the conservatives presented the reformers with a target against whom they could concentrate

their ire — the accumulated anger at the manner in which the conservatives had thwarted the President, Syed Mohammed Khatami's reform programme. Pro-reform journalists, such as Mr. Akbar Ganji and Mr. Abbas Abdi, went after Mr. Rafsanjani with a vengeance. They brought up charges of corruption, ruthlessness and incompetence, and in most instances he had no answer. Mr. Rafsanjani, who claims credit for Iran's economic reconstruction after the Revolution and the war with Iraq, could not explain how so many projects initiated during his Presidency remained uncompleted.

Before the Revolution, say most Iranians, the Rafsanjani clan held only a minor land-holding in their ancestral village. Now they are widely believed to own an oil company, a huge pistachio export empire and other important chunks of the Iranian economy. Mr. Rafsanjani did not, or perhaps could not, explain how tens of billions of dollars had disappeared from the funds allotted to the construction projects. Neither could he explain the deaths in custody of over 80 dissidents when he was the boss

man in the country. People also did not fail to note that one of the main candidates on his panel was Mr. Ali Fallahian, former Minister for Intelligence, who is widely believed to be implicated in the deaths of several dissident politicians and writers during the last two years.

All this was, however, in the background. What really turned Mr. Rafsanjani into the focus for public rage was the perception that he had entered the contest with the sole purpose of sabotaging Mr. Khatami's reform programme.

Mr. Rafsanjani stood in Teheran which sends in 30 members to the 290-member Parliament. At the end of the first round, 26 candidates had obtained at least the 25 per cent of the vote necessary to secure them a seat in Parliament; Mr. Rafsanjani was not among them. It seems incredible that Mr. Rafsanjani does not have enough pride to withdraw from the race after such a humiliating rejection by the people. But then he has much to lose if a reform-oriented Parliament begins enquiries into the shenanigans of the last 21 years. If Mr. Rafsanjani does stand and if the pro-reform voters turn up in large numbers just to ensure that he is not among the four who could still enter Parliament from Teheran (and this is a distinct possibility), it would underline the ferocity of the desire for change in Iran.

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IRAN'S NEW REVOLUTION

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IRAN'S PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION results signify much more than the triumph of reformist forces. The verdict marks a bold attempt by the people to correct the distortions that had crept into the Islamic Republic proclaimed in 1979 by Ayatollah Khomeini. It is a strong and clear rejection of the disastrous mix of religion and politics, even if not of political clerics, and an unambiguous vote for democratic plurality. Coming from an Islamic country that had remained totally enveloped in clergy-run revolution for two decades, the verdict is certain to leave a long and lasting trail in the region. It may of course be too early to see visions of people's power emerging in the region which has successfully kept democracy at bay for half a century. It may even be premature to hail the arrival of pluralism and the decisive victory of the democratic polity over theocratic misrule in Iran itself. The distortions that resulted from the dual role which the father of the Islamic revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini, played as political supremo and theologian in chief, will continue to brake the pace of socio-economic reform. But the Iranian people, evolving their own peaceful way of removing the hurdles, have sown the seeds of an entirely new revolution.

For a people denied the basic freedoms for much of the latter half of the 20th century, the breath of fresh air must be too real to believe. Free speech, free press, democratic elections and reforms had all been absent from Iran's political vocabulary for decades, first under the autocratic rule of Shah Mohammed Pahlavi and then under the Islamic Republic which succeeded it. The popular 1979 revolution which toppled the Shah resulted from the coming together of diverse forces, from leftist groups with sizeable followings to the right extreme occu-

pied by the Ayatollah and his men operating from the safe refuge of Paris. The success of the uprising aroused hopes, which were soon enough belied. The clergy headed by the Ayatollah unleashed obscurantist forces that brooked no rivalry, resorting to excesses and displaying an intolerance that matched the rule of the Shah. The first contrary trend in the post-Khomeini period emerged three years ago with the surprise victory of the current President, Mr. Mohammed Khatami. But the gain for the moderate forces was nullified by a clergy-dominated Parliament, shackling him as he attempted to reform the system. The student protests of last summer and the brave salvos fired by independent-minded editors, who risked harsh jail terms and closure of their publications, signalled that the democratisation of the Islamic revolution had acquired a certain momentum. The trend has been confirmed by the election results. Unless the unforeseen happens, there can be no going back. Mr. Khatami has a reform-friendly Parliament that can be his partner as he takes his potentially rich country forward.

The democratic process itself is as much of a tribute as the election verdict to the emerging forces in Iran, reviving hopes for the entire region. There may be no immediate impact in the Islamic world around but the Iranian verdict will certainly strengthen the forces of democracy therein. A vast stretch of the Islamic world surrounding Iran, from Saudi Arabia in the west to the Taliban-ruled Afghanistan in the east is still shrouded in undemocratic darkness, with kings, sheikhs, presidents-for-life and mullahs unwilling to hand power to the people. None of them will remain unaffected for long by the forces of change symbolised by the victors in the Iranian parliamentary election.

Sanctions failed to dislodge Saddam Hussein

Baghdad, January 3

"WHAT DO Europeans think we are -- do they think Iraq is a powerful country" the man posing the questions, Abu Ahmed, may sound naive but the former civil servant who now earns his living as a hired car driver has had no news from outside the country for years.

Saddam Hussein's Government strictly forbids the use of television satellite dishes, and the newspaper sellers offer only local publications, like that put out by Saddam's notorious son, Udai.

This newspaper, Babil (Babylon), reports daily on the "great victory of the brave and patient Iraqi people."

Foreign telephone conversations are closely monitored by the security services, which in turn spy on each other.

One indication of how things really are in Iraq is the value of its currency.

Before the Gulf War, the Iraqi dinar was worth three dollars, whereas one dollar now buys almost 1,900 dinars.

Salaries for the civil service have not been raised for years which is why people with university degrees, like Abu Ahmed, who has to feed a family, have turned to taxi driving or selling cigarettes.

"Given the level of spying, a change of government can only come about from within the regime's inner circle," one opponent of the government says. He insisted on anonymity.

The recent announcement from the US that it intends to train members of the opposition in exile for when Saddam Hussein's Government falls, is nothing more than a fig leaf to hide the lack of direction in US policy, he says.

The Iraqi people has not risen against Saddam Hussein under the pressure of sanction imposed nine years ago, contrary to the hopes of western politicians.

"What a cynical strategy. The United Nations Security Council should rather leave the Iraqi people in peace. We will know soon what is best for us," Joseph Habby, a Christian theologian, says.

Habby, who was involved in planning for the Pope's visit, which has now been cancelled, studied in Rome. Today he runs a small college of theology in Ad Dora, a Baghdad suburb.

In the church the Christian faithful are forced to conduct their prayers in utter darkness, as the electricity has once again been turned off. "Now you can see what this embargo means to us," Habby says scornfully. (DPA)

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

- 4 JAN 2000

China to push Iraq for cooperation with UN

ASSOCIATED PRESS

BEIJING, Jan. 6. — China will urge Iraq to cooperate with UN arms inspectors, during meetings with visiting Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister, Mr Tariq Aziz, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman said today.

“Our position is consistent and clear-cut — Iraq must cooperate with the UN and effectively and comprehensively implement all resolutions of the Security Council, the spokesman, Mr Zhu Bangzao said.

For strategic and commercial reasons, China is keen to see the sanctions against Iraq lifted. But Beijing abstained the Security Council resolution last month.

China insists that the rest of the world judge Iraq's implementation of the UN resolutions fairly, gradually ease the sanctions and eventually end them, Mr Bangzao said.

Iraq wants the sanctions abolished and has tried to exploit a rift among the five permanent members of Security Council who wield veto power. Iraq has courted Russia, France and China against the United States and Britain.

Mr Aziz also plans to visit Malaysia which abstained in the December resolution.

While in China, Mr Aziz also will visit Shenzhen, a booming economic zone near Hong Kong and Sanya on tropical Hainan island.

'Sanctions eroding': Mr Saddam Hussein today said sanctions on Iraq were eroding and asked his people not to expect the UN to lift the trade embargo that has choked their country for nearly a decade, adds Reuters.

“We have said with certainty that the embargo will not be lifted by a Security Council resolution but will corrode by itself,” he said.

THE STATESMAN
- 7 JAN 2000

Baghdad to allow inspection of its nuclear facilities

Dubai, January 13

IRAQ HAS agreed to allow the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to carry out inspections in the country, media reports said here today.

Reports said a team of four to five inspectors would conduct inspections in Iraq for a week, beginning January 21.

Mr Nizar Hamdoun, under secretary at Iraq's Foreign Ministry, was quoted as saying that the inspection came under the terms of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

He, however, clarified that IAEA's inspections of its nuclear facilities had nothing to do with the United Nations Arms Verification Programme, which has since been suspended.

"The IAEA team will carry out routine activities in Iraq," Mr Hamdoun said.

IAEA spokesman David Kyd was quoted as saying in Vienna that the inspection had a limited objective, driven by the traditional safeguards system.

"These are IAEA's safeguard inspectors, conducting an annual check," he said.

Meanwhile, France has welcomed the decision by the Iraqi authorities to allow the IAEA inspectors to carry out inspection of its nuclear facilities.

A Foreign Ministry spokesperson in Paris said the Iraqi decision was "positive".

It said Iraq's decision was in line with France's calls to allow the IAEA to perform its tasks in Baghdad.

Meanwhile, Security Council members are deadlocked on

choosing the head of a new arms inspection agency for Iraq.

Member countries have raised objections to more than a dozen candidates, diplomats said yesterday.

Secretary General Kofi Annan said that consultations with council members were more complicated than he had thought.

But he said he still hoped he could make a decision by tomorrow on nominating a chairman for the new UN Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC) that the council established in a December 17 resolution.

However, some Security Council members thought there was only a "50-50" chance of an agreement this week.

They predicted that the January 16 deadline originally set by the 15-member United Nations body might have to be extended.

Others members believed some of the candidates rejected might be revived as the deadline neared.

Annan had a long list of 18 names and a shorter list of seven probable candidates.

Five candidates were not available and objections were raised to all the others by one or more of the the Security Council's five permanent members — Russia, United States, France, China and the United Kingdom.

Russia was said to be against any candidate from a Nato country, which would exclude disarmament experts Mark Moher of Canada and Istvan Gyarmati of Hungary, two names that survived from the UN Secretary General's original list.

(Agencies)

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

14 JAN 2000

Iraq slams Annan over new arms agency

Baghdad, January 15

A LEADING Iraqi newspaper blamed Washington today for the UN Secretary-General's difficulties in finding an acceptable chairman for a new arms inspection agency.

Kofi Annan has not been able to lift the current deep darkness prevailing in the United Nations, commented Jabel, the newspaper of President Saddam Hussein's eldest son Uday.

"Frustration and failure is the character of the world body, caused by pressure from the United States and the Zionist entity (Israel)," the paper said in a front-page editorial.

Annan has been trying to decide on a new chairman to supervise disarmament in Iraq. The United States has insisted that the new chairman should strictly enforce the Security Council's resolutions. Swedish diplomat Rolf Ekeus has been apparently ruled out as head

of a new arms agency for Iraq as UN Security Council members were deadlocked in choosing a candidate ahead of their tomorrow's deadline.

The discounting of Ekeus, who was the first chief UN Inspector from 1991 to 1997, appeared to leave other main candidates in the running, but there was no agreement on them either, diplomats said.

Mr Annan had hoped to announce yesterday his choice of a

new chairman for the UN Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC) created by a Security Council resolution on Dec. 17 as a successor to the UN Special Commission or UNSCOM. Names frequently mentioned are: Pasi Patokallio, Finland's Ambassador to Israel, Celso Amorim of Brazil, Mark Moher of Canada and Istvan Gyarmati of Hungary.

(Reuters)

Russia, China block Annan choice of Iraq arms inspector

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ⁵⁹⁻⁷

UNHQ, Jan. 18. — The UN secretary-general, Mr Kofi Annan, has named Swedish diplomat Mr Rolf Ekeus as the new UN chief arms inspector for Iraq, despite being told by Russia and China that he would not be acceptable to Iraq.

But the Security Council must pass his name before it becomes effective. Russia and China have rejected the proposal, while the USA has welcomed it.

Iraq has responded with ridicule to the proposal, describing it as "old wine in new bottle". Its Deputy Prime Minister Mr Tariq Aziz said: "If they are supposed to be setting up a new committee, how could they bring back the person who founded the old committee and make him chairman of the new committee."

The deadline for suggesting the name to the 15-member council expired on Sunday, and

19/11
Mr Annan sent a letter with his nomination yesterday to the council president Mr Richard Holbrooke, the US ambassador to the UN.

Mr Annan's spokesman, Mr Fred Eckhard, said 25 names were floated during consultations but Mr Annan considered Mr Ekeus to be best candidate.

Within hours of Mr Holbrooke formally informing the members about the selection, Russia too sent a letter to the him informing him that it "cannot agree" to the nomination to the UN monitoring, verification and inspection commission.

Diplomats fear the development could lead to repeated confrontation between the secretary general and Russia on different issues.

Meanwhile, the USA has declared support for Mr Ekeus's nomination with state department spokesman Mr James Foley yesterday saying that he meets all the "rigorous criteria" for the post.

Mr Ekeus was the first execu-

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tive chairman of the UN special commission (UNSCOM) established in 1991 to oversee elimination of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear, chemical and biological, and long range missiles along with related facilities and set up a monitoring system to ensure Iraq does not produce or acquire such arms.

He gave shape to the commission and left in 1997 to become Swedish ambassador to USA.

Reuters adds from Beijing: The Chinese foreign ministry spokesman, Mr Zhu Bangzao signalled objections to Mr Ekeus: "In order to avoid the Council following the road to ruin again, China believes the new chairman should have the necessary political resolve, certain experience in arms control, democratic management and strict discipline. He should also be able to objectively and truthfully report to the council and not make decisions on important matters without authorisation."

THE STATESMAN
79 JAN 2000

UN fails to agree on arms inspector

REUTERS

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UNHQ, Jan. 19. — The Security Council has failed to agree on a new UN chief weapons inspector for Iraq after Russia, France and China opposed the Secretary-General, Mr Kofi Annan's candidate, Mr Rolf Ekeus of Sweden.

Following a two-hour meeting yesterday, Council members decided to continue consultations among themselves until they could agree on a candidate for the Unmovic.

There was no "artificial" deadline, said US ambassador, Mr Richard Holbrooke, this month's Council president — an indication that the process could take weeks as the the Council's key members have, for years, been divided over Iraq policies.

The USA backs Mr Ekeus, the first executive chairman of the UN Special Commission and now Sweden's ambassador to Washington. While Mr Holbrooke insisted that Mr Ekeus' candidacy is still in play, others said this was no longer the case. US secretary of state, Ms Madeleine Albright would discuss the issue by phone with her counterparts, Mr Holbrooke said.

"This issue will have to get resolved, but I'm not going to say how or when," he said, "we are not sending this back to the secretary-general. It remains in the Security Council."

Russia, France and China have said they want to make a new start but without Mr Ekeus whom they had strongly backed during his tenure from 1991 to 1997.

THE STATESMAN

20 JAN 2000

Conservatives step up onslaught

By Kesava Menon

MANAMA (BAHRAIN) JAN. 29. Iranian conservatives have pulled out all stops in their bid to win the parliamentary election to be held on Feb. 18. They have disqualified the leading contenders from the pro-reform camps, won over a centrist formation to their side and launched a no-holds-barred propaganda campaign. There are a few more tricks they can pull before the voting and the question now is whether the reform groups can cope with this onslaught.

A month or two ago, the answer would have been "yes". The reform groups had the public momentum completely in their favour as the conservatives seemed to be taking one misstep after another. But now, the election process has moved into the detailed phase. Voters have the panel of opposing candidates right in front of them and here the fact that the reformers have been forced to pick relatively lesser known candidates can be a disadvantage. Pro-reform groups have sought to partially overcome this problem by putting a Khatami and a Nour on the top of their slate. One of them, Mr. Mohammed Reza Khatami, is the brother of the reformist President, Mr. Hojatoleslam Syed Mohammed Khatami, and the other Mr. Ali Reza Nouri, the brother of the jailed dissident cleric, Mr. Abdollah Nouri.

It is not as yet clear who the reform groups will project as their choice of Speaker and the head of the legislature. If the reformers achieve a big victory, this might be a minor problem since they could ask one of their winning candidates to step down in favour of Mr. Abdollah Nouri who was the automatic first

choice till he was sentenced to imprisonment by a clerical court. Mr. Nouri had asked the chief public prosecutor to permit him to appeal to the regular judiciary against the conviction but the prosecutor refused to oblige. Even if the reformers win they might not be able to immediately revoke Mr. Nouris' conviction but a big reform victory could unleash a sea-change in Iranian politics and some of the edicts of the conservative-dominated establishment will not survive.

The pro-reform groups will project their loyalty to the President and his policies as their main feature. But it is probable that Mr. Khatami will not be able to campaign very effectively for his loyalists since the conservatives are bound to protest against what they would describe as partisanship by the President. It is, of course, clear what sort of result will help the popular President carry forward his reforms and, therefore, a very vigorous campaign by Mr. Khatami might not be necessary. Besides the lack of an identifiable leader, the reform groups also face another problem.

Well before the election process got underway, it was clear the conservative-dominated Council of Guardians, which vets candidates and monitors the poll, would disqualify as many prominent reformers as they possibly could. To meet this threat, the pro-reform groups had filed multiple candidacies. Though the Council did as expected, there are still a lot of pro-reform candidates remaining in the fray and they are not all on one list. Unless the pro-reform groups can reconcile their panels and get some to withdraw they might confuse the voters and scatter the pro-reform vote.

Confusion within the pro-reform camp could be lethal in the circumstances in which

the elections are being held. The conservatives have managed to get the former President, Ayatollah Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, and his executive of the Reconstruction Party over to their side. Mr. Rafsanjani and his executives had, in the Presidential election of 1997, projected themselves as a moderate group of pragmatists but now the former President is the conservative group's choice for the Speakership.

Their campaign would be further strengthened by the release from prison of the former Teheran mayor, Mr. Gholamhussein Karbaschi, who can influence powerful groups even though he is not allowed to contest the polls.

Mr. Rafsanjani has launched a very vigorous, even a vituperative, campaign against the reform groups. The main conservative argument against the reformers is that they have neglected economic development while focusing excessively on cultural, social and political freedoms.

The charge has been embellished with the usual litany that the reformers are in cahoots with the CIA etc. Conservatives also point out that the leftist clergy, now with the reformers, includes persons who were responsible for some of the worst human rights abuses in the early days of the revolution.

A month or so ago, it had appeared that even a lamp-post could win if it stood on a ticket endorsed by Mr. Khatami. There seems little reason to doubt that the public mood is still with Mr. Khatami and that not even Mr. Rafsanjani will be able to shake the President's support among the masses. But whether the reformers are up to the task organisationally-speaking is the big question.

THE HINDU
30 JAN 2000