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A Nuclear Armed Iran Poses an Intolerable Threat, Senator Says	1
U.S. Independence Day a Civic and Social Event	2
Pakistan's Efforts on Trafficking Cited by United States.....	3
Lower Mekong Initiative Conference Targets Disease Threats	4
Teaching Students "Carbon Consequences".....	5

A Nuclear Armed Iran Poses an Intolerable Threat, Senator Says

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — A nuclear armed Iran would “pose an intolerable threat” to the Middle East and undermine global efforts to halt the spread of nuclear weapons, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman John Kerry says.

That is why the U.N. Security Council found it necessary June 9 to level its fourth round of sanctions against Iran’s nuclear program, and why the United States further expanded U.S. sanctions on many of Iran’s groups and individuals on June 16, Kerry said during a hearing June 22 on the sanctions. The European Union and Australia announced efforts June 17 to further strengthen measures against Iran in the wake of the Security Council decision.

“These steps to increase pressure are necessary not because we want to target Iran, but because Iran itself has decided to continue to defy the international community, the International Atomic Energy Agency, and the U.N. Security Council,” Kerry said.

Estimates indicate that Iran has approximately 2,400 kilograms of reactor-grade, low-enriched uranium in stocks at its Natanz enrichment facility, which is enough material for two nuclear weapons. And estimates are that Iran has begun producing small quantities of uranium to a concentration of about 20 percent, crossing a nuclear threshold that experts believe could lead to nuclear weapons production, Kerry said.

The primary purpose of the latest Security Council sanctions is to target Iranian military purchases and trade and financial transactions carried out by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, as well as banks and maritime companies.

Senator Richard Lugar of Indiana, the senior Republican on the committee, said that while it is difficult to know exactly where Iran’s nuclear development program stands, it is clear that the regime in Tehran is not complying with international nonproliferation agreements and has stymied efforts to work with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and its inspectors.

William Burns, the State Department’s under secretary for political affairs, told senators that the June 9 Security Council decision imposes the most comprehensive international sanctions that the Tehran regime has faced to date, and aims to hold Iran accountable for its obligations.

The essential reason for so much international concern about Tehran’s decision to pursue a nuclear weapons development program is the instability it creates in the Middle East and the threat it poses to the global economy and security, Burns testified.

“These risks are only reinforced by the wider actions of the Iranian leadership, particularly its long-standing support for terrorist groups, its opposition to Middle East peace, its repugnant rhetoric about Israel, the Holocaust and so much else, and its brutal repression of its own citizens,” Burns said. “In the face of those challenges, American policy is straightforward.”

Burns warned the senators that Iran’s destabilizing actions in the region and beyond must be countered while efforts are made to advance broader interests in democracy, human rights and development across the Middle East. Over the past 18 months, the Obama administration has pursued a combination of “tough-minded diplomacy” that included engagement and pressure, and active security cooperation with partners in the Gulf and beyond, he added.

“We’ve sought to sharpen the choices before the Iranian leadership. We’ve sought to demonstrate what’s possible if Iran meets its international obligations and adheres to the same responsibilities that apply to other nations,” Burns said. “And we’ve sought to intensify the costs of continued defiance and to show Iran that pursuit of a nuclear weapons program will make it less secure, not more secure.”

However, Burns said it was the Tehran regime’s “intransigence” that left no other choice but to use restrictive economic and political pressure.

Congress is considering legislation that would impose even greater pressures on Iran and those who trade with it. White House press secretary Robert Gibbs said in a June 21 statement that President Obama will continue to work with Congress as it completes work on the bill.

Treasury Under Secretary Stuart Levey told senators that the efforts by the Obama administration on Iran work along two fronts. The first is governmental action that includes the United Nations and other governments and efforts to build on four Security Council resolutions to impose sanctions. Talks are already under way with other governments on robust actions to implement the latest Security Council sanctions, he added.

But possibly more important than those efforts are actions on the second front — the role of the private sector, Levey added.

"We have also taken public action and made an unprecedented effort to share the information that forms the basis of our actions with firms all over the world," Levey said. "We have made that evidence public."

"That information demonstrates that Iran engages in illicit nuclear and ballistic missile transactions, supports terrorist groups and that, in order to conduct those activities, it engages in financial deception to evade the controls of responsible businesses that have no desire to participate in illicit activity," he added.

U.S. Independence Day a Civic and Social Event

Americans celebrate July 4, 1776, adoption of Declaration of Independence

By Michael Jay Friedman
Staff Writer

Washington -- The United States celebrates its Independence Day on July 4, a day of patriotic celebration and family events throughout the country. In the words of Founding Father John Adams, the holiday would be "the great anniversary festival. It ought to be commemorated as the day of deliverance. ... It ought to be solemnized with pomp and parade, with shows, games, sports, guns, bells, bonfires, and illuminations, from one end of this continent to the other, from this time forward forever more."

The Fourth of July holiday is a major civic occasion, with roots deep in the Anglo-American tradition of political freedom.

A SUMMER HOLIDAY

Each year crowds of visitors flock to the National Mall -- the grassy expanse between the U.S. Capitol and the Washington Monument -- for the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, which always takes place on two weekends overlapping the Fourth of July holiday. This year's festival celebrates Mexico, Asian-Pacific-American culture, and the work of Smithsonian researchers, curators and other specialists. In 2009, the festival's international exhibits focused on the music of Latin America and the culture of Wales.

Throughout the United States, Fourth of July fireworks displays are popular, from the spectacular exhibition on the National Mall to more modest fireworks shows in city parks across the land. In New York City, Macy's department store sponsors what it bills as the nation's largest July 4 fireworks display. In 2010, the 30-minute show will feature 40,000 shells launched from six barges afloat in the Hudson River. Macy's estimates that more than 3 million will watch in person and that millions more will see it on television.

"The Fourth" is a family celebration. Picnics and barbecues are common. July is summer in the United States, and millions of Americans escape the heat at beaches and other vacation spots. Independence Day is not among the legal holidays fixed on a Monday or Friday, but many employees use vacation time to create an extended weekend.

Construction of important public works sometimes begins on July 4. The Erie Canal, Washington Monument and Baltimore and Ohio Railroad (the nation's first) all broke ground on Independence Day. The date reflects a desire symbolically to stamp these projects as true civic improvements.

A CIVIC OCCASION

The Fourth of July is a time when elected officials and other public figures often give speeches extolling American traditions and values.

Independence Day has provided some of this nation's most stirring words of freedom. In 1788, Founding Father James Wilson addressed a Philadelphia gathering that was possibly the largest July 4 celebration in the young nation's history. He exhorted his fellow citizens to ratify the proposed Constitution. "A people, free and enlightened," he said, "establishing and ratifying a system of government ... A WHOLE PEOPLE exercising its first and greatest power -- performing an act of SOVEREIGNTY, ORIGINAL and UNLIMITED."

On July 4, 1852, the black journalist and abolitionist Frederick Douglass decried the evils of slavery, still prevalent in the American South at that time, but identified forces "drawing encouragement from the Declaration of Independence, the great principles it contains, and the genius of American Institutions in operation" that "must inevitably work The downfall of slavery."

Ninety years later, near the darkest moments of World War II, President Franklin D. Roosevelt reminded the nation that for the "weary, hungry, unequipped Army of the American Revolution ... the Fourth of July was a tonic of hope and inspiration. So is it now.... The tough, grim men who fight for freedom in this dark hour take heart in its message -- the assurance of the right to liberty under God -- for all peoples and races and groups and nations, everywhere in the world."

President Obama in his 2009 Fourth of July message celebrated "the indomitable spirit of the first American citizens." He called on people to "remember how unlikely it was that our American experiment would succeed at all; that a small band of patriots would declare independence from a powerful empire; and that they

would form, in the new world, what the old world had never known – a government of, by, and for the people.”

Across the nation, civic leaders of even the most humble station echo these words, and their audiences give thanks for the freedom and liberties that the founding generation won for all Americans.

Pakistan’s Efforts on Trafficking Cited by United States

U.S. joins South, Central Asia nations ranked in trafficking report

By Gabriella Krohmal
Staff Writer

Washington – Among the countries of the South and Central Asia region, Pakistan stands out in the 2010 Trafficking in Persons Report – for positive reasons.

Pakistan’s ranking as a Tier 2 country in the 2010 Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report is an improvement over its 2009 rating, when it was listed as a Tier 2 watch list country. The annual report, required by the U.S. Congress, ranks 177 nations by tiers to measure the extent to which each government adheres to the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, a U.S. law enacted in 2000 to combat human trafficking and protect victims. A Tier 2 ranking means a government is “making significant efforts” to comply with the anti-trafficking law’s minimum standards but does not yet meet those standards. Tier 2 watch list countries do not meet the minimum standards but are making significant efforts, yet trafficking is either increasing or more concrete steps are needed by the governments.

For the first time, the 2010 report includes the United States in its rankings, with the U.S. listed as a Tier 1 country, where the government complies fully with the law’s minimum standards.

The U.S. Embassy in Islamabad acknowledged Pakistan’s 2010 ranking in a statement, saying, “The U.S. Government is committed to supporting Pakistan in its efforts to combat human trafficking.” The embassy’s statement added that the 2010 TIP report reflected “the Government of Pakistan’s efforts to prosecute trafficking offenders, prevent and combat bonded labor, and protect trafficking victims.”

Of the 12 South and Central Asia nations ranked in the 2010 report, Pakistan was the only one to improve on its ranking. In 2010, Nepal and Kyrgyzstan are ranked as Tier 2 nations, as they were in 2009. Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are ranked as Tier 2 watch list, the same as in 2009. Afghanistan, Kazakhstan and the Maldives all ranked on

the Tier 2 watch list in 2010, down from their Tier 2 rankings in 2009.

During 2009, Pakistan endeavored to prosecute individuals charged with human trafficking, the TIP report said. According to the report, 385 people were convicted in 2009 under the Prevention and Control of Human Trafficking Ordinance, compared to just 28 in 2008. Another 166 were convicted under various other laws associated with human trafficking, the report said. At least three of those convicted were guilty of child trafficking, with the rest guilty of either labor or sex trafficking. In addition, the report said more than 150 Pakistani officials were penalized for facilitating or “participating in illegal migration and human smuggling.”

“The Government of Pakistan made some progress in its efforts to protect victims of human trafficking,” the report said. During 2009, local police successfully freed more than 2,000 bonded laborers in Sindh province, and Pakistan’s federal government succeeded in providing legal aid and development assistance, including land, housing, money and agricultural assistance, to bonded laborers from the provinces of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, Balochistan and Sindh. More than 1,000 children who had been trafficked to the United Arab Emirates were also successfully repatriated, the report said.

Pakistan also received mention for its efforts at preventing human trafficking, including projects such as eliminating bonded labor in brick kilns and the country’s Child Protection Management Information System, which collectively spent millions of dollars to issue Computerized National Identification Cards, provide loans so laborers could get out of debt, and fund community organizations to prevent child trafficking. Pakistan has also invested in training its police and military officials in the most effective ways to combat human trafficking, the report said.

The State Department also honored nine Heroes in the Fight Against Modern Slavery in 2010, including activists from Uzbekistan, India, Brazil, Burundi, Hungary, Jordan, Mauritania, Mongolia and the United States.

Natalia Abdullayeva of Uzbekistan was honored for forging unprecedented partnerships between the private sector and the government to fight trafficking. India’s Sattaru Umaphathi, the anti-human trafficking officer of the Crime Investigation Department for the state of Andhra Pradesh, was honored for leading numerous interstate and intrastate rescue operations, rescuing victims and arresting traffickers.

Lower Mekong Initiative Conference Targets Disease Threats

Meeting tackled International Health Regulations, transnational cooperation

By Cheryl Pellerin
Science Writer

Washington — High-level delegates from the United States and four countries that are part of the year-old Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI) came together in Hanoi, Vietnam, June 17-18, reaching agreement on a range of issues critical to the region's response to infectious disease threats.

The governments of the United States and Vietnam hosted the meeting. Delegation heads included Timothy Ziemer, U.S. global malaria coordinator at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID); Sea Huong, undersecretary of state of the Ministry of Health in Cambodia; Dr. Eksavang Vongvichit, vice minister of health of Laos; Dr. Punsiri Kullanartsiri, deputy minister of public health of Thailand; and Dr. Trinh Quan Huan, vice minister of health of Vietnam.

The U.S. delegation included field representatives from the Department of State, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

Conference objectives, Ziemer said during a June 17 keynote address, "are to gain an understanding of the revised International Health Regulations [IHR] as they apply to the Lower Mekong Initiative countries, and to look at case presentations, discuss the successes and challenges of implementing the [IHR] in the Lower Mekong Initiative countries, and identify gaps and lessons learned that could be addressed through regional health collaboration."

INTERNATIONAL HEALTH REGULATIONS

The IHR, revised in 2005 and in force starting June 15, 2007, are legally binding rules adopted country by country to contain disease threats that could spread quickly around the world.

Such diseases include emerging infections like the H1N1 pandemic virus, which the World Health Organization says has infected people in more than 214 countries and killed at least 18,172. Such lethal threats also could come from nuclear accidents or chemical spills, leaks and illegal dumping.

The IHR offers a legal framework that defines rights, obligations and procedures to ensure international health security without unnecessary interference in international traffic and trade. The revised regulations require all

member states to strengthen their capacity for disease surveillance and response. Some of the Lower Mekong countries have adopted the new regulations.

At the meeting, Lawrence Gumbiner, deputy assistant secretary in the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Oceans, Environment and Science, told *America.gov* that participants said greater communication is needed in the region.

"With globalization, with rapid transboundary transport that's available with goods and services and people moving across borders, we need rapid and efficient communication on health issues," he added. "Work is needed on language [barriers] and on computer systems that will allow health and other authorities to share information quickly."

Better sectoral coordination within governments was also discussed.

"This can't just involve ministries of health," Gumbiner said. "Customs officials, immigration officials, law enforcement and representatives from the ministries of finance and foreign affairs must be involved. There has to be more of a whole-of-government approach."

A coordinated approach is also needed to fight the sale of counterfeit medications. According to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the most counterfeited drugs in developing countries are high-volume medications such as anti-malarial drugs, vaccines and paracetamol, a mild painkiller called acetaminophen in the United States.

"Everybody recognized that counterfeit pharmaceuticals are a huge public health hazard and that a coordinated approach is required to confront it," Gumbiner said. "That involves health, law enforcement and trade. No organization can do it on its own."

Meeting participants also discussed adopting the health regulations and communicating the requirements from the national level to authorities at the local and regional levels, and holding more regular meetings of the Lower Mekong health authorities.

"Our people in the field — from the State Department, CDC and USAID," Gumbiner said, "stand ready to help them get together with greater frequency."

REGIONAL HEALTH ASSISTANCE

The conference was a component of Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton's Lower Mekong Initiative. On July 23, 2009, Clinton and the foreign ministers of Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam met in Phuket, Thailand, to explore ways to expand cooperation between

the United States and the Lower Mekong countries in the areas of environment, health, education and infrastructure.

“Total 2009 U.S. health assistance in the region was over \$135 million,” Ziemer told conference attendees, “with the focus on HIV/AIDS, pandemic influenza preparedness, malaria, tuberculosis, maternal and child health, and family planning and reproductive health.”

The U.S. government and bilateral partners pool their resources to accomplish health goals and achieve sustainable public health activities in all LMI countries, he added.

“We are prepared to work with you and other partners such as the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria,” Ziemer said, “the World Bank; nonprofit organizations; and bilateral partners to address our targets and achieve sustainability in the region.”

Teaching Students “Carbon Consequences”

U.S. schools pushing to implement green curriculums and buildings

By Karin Rives
Staff Writer

Washington — Three years have passed since students at Redmond High School near Seattle set out to measure their school’s carbon footprint. They looked at the school’s electricity and water consumption, how much waste it produces and where it goes, how students and teachers travel to school — and at every other school activity that generates greenhouse gas emissions.

Today, the school in the northwestern United States is saving some \$30,000 in annual electricity costs, compared with power costs three years earlier. Waste costs have dropped by \$10,000. Carbon dioxide emissions, meanwhile, are down by 200,000 pounds annually. That means Redmond High has beaten the goals set by the Kyoto Protocol, the international climate treaty.

Not bad for a school with 1,400 students. So how did they do it?

“We’re educating the kids that climate change has some pretty simple solutions,” explained Mike Town, Redmond High’s environmental science teacher, who pioneered the now-national Cool School Challenge initiative, a call for students and schools to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions.

“If they turn off the lights in a classroom for one hour they save the school district 4 cents in electricity costs,” Town said. “But when you show them that they also save

half a pound of carbon dioxide, then it means a lot more to them. The actions that the students perform have a carbon consequence and that’s what we’re trying to teach them.”

Redmond High is part of a rapidly growing green school movement that is marshalling hundreds of schools and thousands of teachers across the United States to press for better environmental practices and instruction during school hours. Earth Day Network, a Washington, D.C.-based environmental group, is playing an important role in this effort through its Green Schools initiative. Green Schools offers grants and education curriculums to schools that want to go green, along with practical assistance for projects such as garden design and construction and implementing recycling programs.

Earth Day Network, with the Clinton Foundation and the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC), launched Green Schools in 2007. Since then, 300 schools have been certified as “green” in accordance with USGBC’s stringent LEED standards for energy-efficiency (LEED stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design). More than 1,700 schools are in line to be certified.

One school that recently met the mark is the newly constructed T.C. Williams High School, just south of Washington, D.C. A 450,000-gallon (1.7 million-liter) cistern collects rainwater for flushing, cooling and irrigation at the school — rather than using potable drinking water for such purposes. Parking outside the school is designed to limit concrete and asphalt areas that create so-called urban heat islands. A vegetated roof filters storm water and reduces runoff while providing a nature laboratory for students, while ceilings angled to harvest daylight provide warmth and natural light.

T.C. Williams is also using the building to teach students about the impact they’re having on the environment. All water and energy consumption at the school, for example, is tracked and displayed for the students to see. The local school district is now restructuring its entire high school curriculum to incorporate sustainability practices and environmental knowledge.

OBAMA SEEKS FUNDING FOR ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY

Building what Earth Day Network calls a “green generation” of children who grow up to be environmentally conscious citizens “takes a long time, and we’re still in the early stages,” said Sean Miller, the group’s director of education. “That’s why we’ve defined this generational change to take 25 to 40 years. Within that time frame, we’re looking to see a complete transformation of school building standards as well as our school curriculum.”

Many students in the United States get no environmental education until they reach high school at age 13 or 14, if any at all. But that could change soon. President Obama's proposed budget for 2011 asks for \$100 million a year to increase environmental literacy in American schools and strengthen such education from elementary school and up.

The momentum is already there. Many schools that cannot meet LEED criteria because their buildings are too old or out-of-date are taking whatever steps they can to lessen their impact on the environment and to teach kids a lesson in the process. At Bloom High School in Chicago Heights, Illinois, for example, science students implemented a schoolwide recycling program run by the kids. They also collect cooking oil from the school kitchen and turn it into biodiesel in chemistry class to fuel a school bus.

With the help of Earth Day Network, students recently opened a new, professional greenhouse where they grow vegetables. "I thought of having a vegetable [vendor] stand," said Jill Krynski, director of the Bloom High School Science Club. "We'll see what happens."

Many students at Redmond High, meanwhile, are now carpooling or biking to school. Once they've used alternative transportation 50 times to or from the school, they get a cash prize of \$25 that can be donated to a school club or used to buy carbon dioxide offsets. This and the other green initiatives at Redmond High this year earned Town, the school's environmental science teacher, the NEA Foundation's Green Prize in Public Education.

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