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فرا رسیدن سال نو
 ۲۰۰۹ میلادی را به
 ایرانیان عزیز مسیحی
 تبریک می گوئیم.

It's Human Rights Day—Go To Jail!

by Grace Nasri

IranTimes: A female rights lawyer, who was recognized by Italy's Human Rights International for her work, was detained by Iran last month—ironically, on Human Rights Day—as she was about to board a Rome-bound plane to accept her prize. She said the men who stopped her showed identification from the Office of the President, not from the police. That indicates a far more direct involvement by President Ahmadi-nejad in repressive activities than has ever been noted before. Nasrin Sotoudeh said she was prevented from boarding her flight at Imam Khomeini International Airport last month. Sotoudeh said her husband and children had been allowed to leave the country and would be accepting the award on her behalf. “The fact that she could not leave Tehran is a proof of the importance of her activities,” Human Rights International president Adolf Pfitscher was quoted as saying by the Italian news agency ANSA. The same thing happened last year when Parvin Ardalan, an activist in the One Million Signatures Campaign for Women's Equality was boarding a flight for Sweden to accept the Olof Palme Prize for her work in support of women's rights. Sotoudeh, who works with Nobel laureate Shirin Ebadi's Defenders of Human Rights Center, has worked with women's rights activists, members of the One Million Signatures Campaign and has defended a youth who was sentenced to death when he was 16—one of several juvenile offender cases that have drawn international criticism. “They didn't give me a reason, but my passport was taken away. I passed passport control and suddenly my name was announced [on the public address system] and three plain-clothes men came to me with walkie-talkies. “Eventually one of them showed me his ID card. They were from the presidential office,” Sotoudeh said. She said she was allotted 72 hours to present herself at an address in Tehran. “There was no legal written order. What they did was illegal,” she said. “Like other activists who were banned from leaving the country, the government is scared of our voice reaching the outside world and building connections with them,” she said. A recent report by U.N. special rapporteurs Margaret Sekaggya—U.N. special rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders—and Yakin Erturk—special rapporteur on violence



against women—concluded: “Over the past two years, women's rights defenders have faced an increasingly difficult situation and harassment in the course of their non-violent activities.” According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), women's rights activists in Iran have been among the most successfully organized groups working toward improving the human rights situation in Iran. Over the past two years, their activities have largely taken the form of national campaigns including the One Million Signatures Campaign for Equality—a grassroots organization aimed at ending gender discrimination within Iranian law. But despite the peaceful nature of many of these campaigns, authorities in Iran have been treating the women activists largely as national security threats—arresting, detaining and harassing them largely on charges of harming national security. The Iran Times asked Sarah Leah Whitson, Middle East director at HRW, why she thought the regime was clamping down so hard on members of the One Million Signatures Campaign. “The issue is two fold. This is an issue that a wealth of Iranians are involved with as their sisters, mothers and wives are subjected to these discriminatory laws. The government feels very threatened by a campaign that the people themselves are directing that has broad popular support,” she said. “The second issue is that if these women are successful in their campaign to make their desires known to the government, the government will feel threatened that other groups may also make similar attempts, so they want to nip it in the bud.”

'Mother lode' of drugs on Iranian

Iran Times: The Iranian-American vice president of a real estate company in South Boston was arrested earlier last month after police raided his



apartment and found a “mother lode” of drugs and cash. Police in Boston raided the house of Taghi Tajgardoun, 28, on December 9 and found what Suffolk District Attorney Daniel F. Conley dubbed a “mother lode” of drugs and cash. Local, state and federal law enforcement seized 800 grams of cocaine—estimated to be worth

\$18,000—15 pounds of marijuana—estimated to have a street value of \$90,000—at least 200 prescription pills, more than \$25,000 in cash and three Iranian passports, all in Tajgardoun's name, Deputy Superintendent Paul Fitzgerald said. “We believe he's been here for a little while and probably running a drug operation,” Fitzgerald said of Tajgardoun, who is currently being held on \$1 million bail on drug trafficking charges. Tajgardoun is listed as the vice president of Kush Real Estate in South Boston. He was arrested when a postal worker informed police about a suspicious package from Los Angeles addressed to Tajgardoun's post office box. A drug-sniffing K-9, Maximus, confirmed the package contained drugs, police said. When Tajgardoun arrived to pick up his package, police questioned him and he confessed to having “weed” (marijuana) stashed in his apartment, a police report stated. Police then searched Tajgardoun's apartment and said the home served as a “sophisticated drug distribution point.”

Iran will hurl animal into space

Iran Times: Iran says it will begin sending live animals into space as part of its Kavoshgar rocket program. Mohammad Ebrahimi, deputy head of the Aerospace Research Institute, announced Monday that future versions of the Kavoshgar rocket will be designed to carry animals in order to pave the way for Iran to place men in orbit eventually. He did not make clear whether the very next Kavoshgar launch would carry an animal or a later one. The first living being launched into space was the Russian dog Laika,

who was fired into orbit in November 1957 aboard the second Soviet satellite. Laika was inside a pressurized cabin. Information on her heart rate and other reactions to the launch were radioed back to earth. But there was no way to return her to earth and she died after a few days. The Kavoshgar is a sounding rocket that would not put an animal into orbit but merely hurl it straight up into space, from which it would then fall back to earth in a capsule slowed by a parachute, meaning the animal should return alive.

Baghdad shoe man hates Iranians as well as Yanks

Iran Times: The family of Muntazar az-Zeidi—the Iraqi reporter who hurled his shoes at President Bush—said the 28-year-old Shiite hates the “Iranian moral occupation” as much as he does the “American material occupation.” “He hates the American material occupation as much as he hates the Iranian moral occupation,” his brother, Dhirgham, told The Associated Press (AP), referring to the influence of pro-Iranian Shiite clerics in Iraq's political and social life. “As for Iran, he considers the regime there to be the other side of the American coin.” That view is common among Iraqis—even among Shiites—who believe Washington and Tehran have been fighting a proxy war inside Iraq. But in Tehran, the Fars news agency said the AP interview with az-Zeidi's family was false. Fars said it had reached az-Zeidi's eldest brother, Uday, who was quoted as saying the AP interview was “absolutely wrong” and that his brother, a good Shiite, loves Iran. Sunday's shoe incident transformed a little known reporter from a minor TV station into an overnight national hero; many Iraqis, like az-Zeidi, are opposed to the nearly six-year U.S. presence while at the same time fearing their country will succumb to Iranian influence once the Americans pull out. Az-Zeidi was arrested Sunday and could face charges of insulting a foreign leader and the Iraqi prime minister, who was standing next to Bush when the two shoes were hurled. If convicted, az-Zeidi could face a maximum sentence of up to two years in prison. Thousands of people demonstrated in Baghdad and other cities around the Arab world calling for the overnight celebrity's release. On Monday, az-Zeidi's sister and three brothers—apparently including Uday—gathered with an AP reporter in their brother's one-bedroom west Baghdad apartment to voice their surprise over the incident. They insisted az-Zeidi's action was spontaneous. But they also expressed pride, along with many other Iraqis, that az-Zeidi stood up to an American president who many Iraqis hold responsible for years of death and destruction in their country. “I swear to Allah, he is a hero,” his sister, known as Umm Firas, told the AP. “May Allah protect him.” Az-Zeidi's siblings said he joined Al-Baghdadia television in September 2005 after graduating from Baghdad University with a degree in communications. Two years later, he was seized by unknown gunmen while on an assignment in a Sunni district of north Baghdad. He was freed



after three days, unharmed and without ransom, after Iraqi television stations broadcast appeals for his release. Az-Zeidi told reporters he did not know who kidnapped him or why, but his family blamed al-Qaeda. In January, he was arrested by American soldiers who searched his apartment building, his brother, Dhirgham, said. But he was reportedly released the next day with an apology. Az-Zeidi's siblings said those two experiences helped foster a deep resentment of both the U.S. military's presence in Iraq and Iran's influence over Iraq's cleric-dominated Shiite community, although the linkage of his experiences to Iran was not clear. One man az-Zeidi reportedly had respect for, was anti-American cleric Muqtada as-Sadr, who is currently believed studying in Iran. Zanko Ahmed, a Kurdish journalist who attended a journalism training course with az-Zeidi in Lebanon, recalled that az-Zeidi spoke fondly of as-Sadr, whose followers organized protests Monday to demand the young reporter's release. “Regrettably, he didn't learn anything from the course in Lebanon, where we were taught ethics of journalism and how to be detached and neutral,” said Ahmed, who described Az-Zeidi as boastful and arrogant. Az-Zeidi showed considerable accuracy in throwing his shoes and would have hit Bush square in the face if the president had not showed remarkable speed in ducking. The only injury in the fracas was a bruise to White House press secretary Dana Perino, who was hit in the face with a microphone as security men wrestled with az-Zeidi.

Dead youth bears big medical bills

Iran Times: A young Iranian-American teen who died in an accident last month was remembered at a fundraiser in Colorado held to help his family cover the boy's medical costs. Seventeen-year-old Mario Torabi suffered head injuries when he crashed into some trees while driving an All Terrain Vehicle (ATV) for the first time November 22 in central Colorado, during a weekend trip with classmates. He had not been wearing a helmet. Mario, who was named after racecar driver Mario Andretti, was airlifted to a hospital after a friend drove for help because the teens were not in cellphone range. But when surgery failed to save the young man, his family decided to take him off life support. Mario, who was born on Valentines Day, died on Thanksgiving. Mario's mother, Susan Torabi—who became a widow when her husband Misha died last year—is a classroom aide who works with disabled children at an elementary school in Littleton, south of Denver. Misha suffered from Crohn's disease, an incurable autoimmune disorder that attacks the digestive tract. Compounding the two tragedies the family has recently faced is the fact that Mario was uninsured at the time of his accident. As such, the widow now faces an enormous amount of debt from to Mario's final medical bills. To help raise money for the family, a teacher at Susan's elementary

school suggested organizing a commemorative run. Last Friday, Susan, her 20-year old son, Abbas, and her 29-year-old daughter, Alana Kohl, stood together near the track at Chatfield High School as Mario's classmates joined in the Jingle Bell Run fundraiser. The race raised nearly \$5,000 for the Torabi family. Anne Sterrett, the principal of the elementary school where Susan works, told the Rocky Mountain News, “To see someone so giving, so selfless, lose so much really broke the hearts of our community.” Mario struggled after the death of his Iranian-born father, whom he sought to emulate by planning to become a commercial pilot. The father and son were very close and the two hoped to one day start a commercial airline in Iran called Torabi & Sons. “They would stay up all night talking about stories, dreams and life,” Alana wrote in a Web posting. “He had a very happy-golucky way,” Susan told the Rocky Mountain News. “He made everyone smile and laugh. He had a very good heart, and he meant well all the time.” “He was born with a huge smile on his face,” his sister remembered. “I love you Mario. See you in another life.” Donations to the Mario Torabi Memorial Fund can be made at any Wells Fargo Bank or mailed to The Mario Torabi Memorial Fund, 9782 W. Ken Caryl Drive, Littleton, Colorado 80127.