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Iraq ...

Larijani noted that Iraq needs lasting security to attain its development goals.

But Iran is sincere in its relations with Iraq and will support the democratic process in the country, he added.

The people of the two nations have always been friends and even during the war imposed by Saddam Hussein on the people of Iran from 1980 to 1988, the Iranian nation stood in solidarity with the Iraqis fighting against Saddam, the speaker of the Iranian parliament added.

Larijani stated that the Iranian parliament is elected by the peoples' vote and is interested in having close ties with the Iraqi parliament.

He went on to say that the two countries have had constructive economic cooperation in recent years, and Iran hopes to enhance this collaboration in the near future.

Iran exports about 700 megawatts of electricity and over 2.5 million liters of gasoline to Iraq every day.

Larijani emphasized that the Iraqi parliament can play an important role in efforts to improve ties between the two countries.

He also asked Iraqi officials to make efforts to solve the problems of Iranians who visit the holy sites of Iraq.

In addition, Larijani described the presence of members of an Iranian terrorist group in Iraq as harmful to Iran-Iraq relations.

According to international law, since these people are terrorists, they should be expelled from Iraq, he added.

"We thank the Iraqi government for its efforts so far, but ask the Iraqi government not to allow terrorists to stay permanently in our friendly neighboring country."

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Earthquake ...

Last year, a strong earthquake measuring 6.1 in magnitude hit Hormozgan, demolishing nearly 200 villages and killing at least six people.

Iran lies on a series of seismic fault lines and has experienced devastating earthquakes -- most notably in December 2003 when a 6.6 magnitude quake devastated the ancient city of Bam in southeast Iran, killing at least 30,000 people.

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Climate ...

It certainly doesn't reflect the state of the science, which has hardened dramatically over the past two years. If you don't believe me, open any recent edition of *Science* or *Nature* or any peer-reviewed journal specializing in atmospheric or environmental science. Go on, try it. The debate about global warming that's raging on the internet and in the rightwing press does not reflect any such debate in the scientific journals.

An American scientist I know suggests that these books and websites cater to a new literary market: people with room-temperature IQs. He didn't say whether he meant Fahrenheit or Centigrade. But this can't be the whole story. Plenty of intelligent people have also declared themselves skeptics.

One such is the critic Clive James. You could accuse him of purveying trite received wisdom, but not of being dumb. On Radio 4 a few days ago he delivered an essay about the importance of skepticism, during which he maintained that "the number of scientists who voice skepticism (about climate change) has lately been increasing". He presented no evidence to support this statement and, as far as I can tell, none exists. But he used this contention to argue that "either side might well be right, but I think that if you have a division on that scale,

you can't call it a consensus. No body can meaningfully say that the science is in."

Had he bothered to take a look at the quality of the evidence on either side of this media debate, and the nature of the opposing armies -- climate scientists on one side, rightwing bloggers on the other -- he too might have realized that the science is in. In, at any rate, to the extent that science can ever be, which is to say that the evidence for man-made global warming is as strong as the evidence for Darwinian evolution, or for the link between smoking and lung cancer. I am constantly struck by the way in which people like James, who proclaim themselves skeptics, will believe any old claptrap that suits their views. Their position was perfectly summarized by a supporter of Ian Plimer (author of a marvelous concatenation of gibberish called *Heaven and Earth*), commenting on a recent article in the *Spectator*: "Whether Plimer is a charlatan or not, he speaks for many of us." These people aren't skeptics; they're suckers.

Such beliefs seem to be strongly influenced by age. The Pew report found that people over 65 are much more likely than the rest of the population to deny that there is solid evidence that the earth is warming, that it's caused by humans, or that it's a serious problem. This chimes with my own experience. Almost all my fiercest arguments over climate change, both in print and in person, have been with people in their 60s or 70s. Why might this be?

There are some obvious answers: they won't be around to see the results; they were brought up in a period of technological optimism; they feel entitled, having worked all their lives, to fly or cruise to wherever they wish. But there might also be a less intuitive reason, which shines a light into a fascinating corner of human psychology.

In 1973 the cultural anthropologist Ernest Becker proposed that the fear of death drives us to protect ourselves with "vital lies" or "the armor of character". We defend ourselves from the ultimate terror by engaging in immortality projects, which boost our self-esteem and grant us meaning that extends beyond death. More than 300 studies conducted in 15 countries appear to confirm Becker's thesis. When people are confronted with images or words or questions that remind them of death they respond by shoring up their worldview, rejecting people and ideas that threaten it, and increasing their striving for self-esteem.

One of the most arresting findings is that immortality projects can bring death closer. In seeking to defend the symbolic, heroic self that we create to suppress thoughts of death, we might expose the physical self to greater danger. For example, researchers at Bar-Ilan University in Israel found that people who reported that driving boosted their self-esteem drove faster and took greater risks after they had been exposed to reminders of death.

A recent paper by the biologist Janis L. Dickinson, published in the journal *Ecology and Society*, proposes that constant news and discussion about global warming makes it difficult to repress thoughts of death, and that people might respond to the terrifying prospect of climate breakdown in ways that strengthen their character armor but diminish our chances of survival. There is already experimental evidence that some people respond to reminders of death by increasing consumption. Dickinson proposes that growing evidence of climate change might boost this tendency, as well as raising antagonism towards scientists and environmentalists. Our message, after all, presents a lethal threat to the central immortality project of western society: perpetual economic growth, supported by an ideology of entitlement and exceptionalism.

If Dickinson is correct, is it fanciful to suppose that those who are closer to the end of their lives might

react more strongly against reminders of death? I haven't been able to find any experiments testing this proposition, but it is surely worth investigating. And could it be that the rapid growth of climate change denial over the last two years is actually a response to the hardening of scientific evidence? If so, how the hell do we confront it?

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(Source: *The Guardian*)

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Afghan ...

The British fatalities were among the largest in a single incident in Afghanistan. They brought the total number of British forces who have died in Afghanistan to 229. Britain has 9,000 troops in the country, the second largest force after the United States. Last month, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown announced plans to increase troop numbers by 500.

Former Foreign Minister Abdullah Abdullah, who was the main challenger to President Hamid Karzai in Afghanistan's recent fraud-marred election, said the continuing violence showed the Karzai administration had failed to bring peace to the country despite assistance from international forces.

"As far as the presence of international forces in Afghanistan is concerned, eight years of golden opportunity we have missed. You were here. Your soldiers were here, and they have made sacrifices for bringing peace and stability to Afghanistan," Abdullah said during a news conference in Kabul.

"But eight years down the road we still need more troops. In the absence of a credible and reliable and legitimate partner, more soldiers, more resources" are needed, he said.

Presidential spokesman Humayun Hamidzada said it was an isolated attack.

"These are incidents that can happen anywhere. The crazy man who has done this has also attacked the Afghan police," he told the AP. "You can't use this isolated incident to say that there is a problem with the police force of Afghanistan. In the U.S., people shoot up people in a shopping mall. There are crazy people everywhere."

Karzai issued a statement condemning the killings and offering condolences to the people of Britain and the relatives of the soldiers.

The commander of international forces in Afghanistan, Gen. Stanley McChrystal, said he discussed the shooting with Interior Minister Mohammad Hanif Atmar, who "gave me his assurance that this incident will be fully and transparently investigated."

"We will not let this event deter our resolve to building a partnership with the Afghan National Security Forces to provide for Afghanistan's future," he said in a joint statement issued by NATO forces and the ministry.

Atmar said the attack "appears to be an isolated incident."

Last year, Afghan policemen twice attacked American soldiers in the space of about month. In October 2008, a policeman threw a grenade and opened fire on a U.S. foot patrol, killing one soldier, while in September, an officer opened fire at a Paktia police station, killing a soldier and wounding three before he was fatally shot.

Peter Galbraith, the former top American official at the U.N. mission in Afghanistan who had called attention to fraud charges in the country's presidential election, told British radio that police training and recruiting had been "rushed" in Afghanistan.

"It is a terrible tragedy but it is, I

won't quite say inevitable, but it is not surprising," he told BBC Radio 4.

"The process of police training and recruiting has been very rushed. Normally the police get an eight-week training course. That is actually very short and there isn't a lot of vetting of police before they are hired."

Such attacks have also occurred in Iraq, where U.S. and coalition forces are engaged in a similar process of mentoring and training the Iraqi army and police.

In February, two Iraqi policemen opened fire at a police outpost in northern Iraq, killing an American soldier and an interpreter and wounding three U.S. soldiers -- the fourth attack since late 2007 with suspected links to Iraqi security units.

In London, Brown extended his condolences to the soldiers' families.

"They fought to make Afghanistan more secure, but above all to make Britain safer from the terrorism and extremism which continues to threaten us from the border areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan," he said.

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Abdullah ...

Abdullah said the government-appointed Independent Election Commission's (IEC) decision to cancel the November 7 run-off was illegal and said Karzai would not be able to deliver reform.

"A government which is derived from such an illegal decision will not be able to deliver," Abdullah said in his first public comments since the IEC's decision.

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Italian ...

Magi said he was acquitting five Italian defendants because Italy withheld evidence, contending it was classified information.

The Italian judge on Wednesday began deliberating the fate of 26 Americans and seven Italians charged with kidnapping an Egyptian terror suspect in 2003, as the first trial in the world involving the CIA's extraordinary rendition program drew to a close.

After nearly three years of hearings, Judge Oscar Magi heard the last rebuttals before beginning deliberations. A verdict -- expected later Wednesday -- will be the first legal appraisal of the CIA's program to abduct suspected terror suspects and transfer them to third countries for interrogation.

The American suspects -- all but one identified by prosecutors as CIA agents -- are being tried in absentia and are considered fugitives. Their lawyers, most of whom have had no contact with their clients, have entered innocent pleas on their behalf and argued for their acquittals...

The Americans are accused of kidnapping Osama Moustafa Hassan Nasr, also known as Abu Omar, on Feb. 17, 2003, from a street in Milan, then transferring him by van to the Aviano Air Base in northern Italy, where he was put on a plane and taken to Ramstein Air Base in southern Germany. He was then moved to Egypt, where he says he was tortured. He has since been released, but has not been permitted to leave Egypt to attend the trial.

The trial is the first by any government to scrutinize the CIA's extraordinary rendition program, which human rights advocates charge was the CIA's way to outsource the torture of prisoners to countries where it is practiced.

The Milan proceedings have been a sore spot in relations between the United States and Italy. The CIA has declined to comment on the case, and Italy's government has denied involvement.

The trial has continued despite obstacles that have threatened to derail it. Subsequent Italian governments, including the current govern-

ment of Premier Silvio Berlusconi, have refused or ignored prosecutors' requests to seek extradition of the American defendants -- a fact that raises doubts about the enforceability of any guilty verdicts against the absent Americans.

But even that test may be delayed, as sentences in Italy aren't served until all appeals are exhausted, a process that can take years.

In addition, Italy's highest court ruled some key evidence inadmissible because it is considered classified -- including dossiers seized from the Rome apartment of an Italian intelligence agent and the testimony of a carabinieri officer allegedly at the scene of the kidnapping.

Magi ruled that the trial could go forward despite the ruling. Closing arguments focused on which evidence could and could not be considered, in particular for the Italian defendants, and the verdicts will reflect Magi's thinking.

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Turkey ...

The government sees atomic power meeting 20 percent of Turkey's power needs in 20 years.

"In 2010 ... we have plans for both Akkuyu and Sinop, and I can easily say that we have plans for other places after those," Yildiz said. "Even if we play with the model or the structure, we will most definitely break more ground on this in 2010."

Activists and some opposition parties warn that a nuclear-power industry in Turkey, which is criss-crossed by geological faultlines, poses a threat to the environment.

Turkey has cancelled four previous attempts to build a nuclear plant, with plans stretching back to the late 1960s, due to the high cost and environmental concerns.

Natural gas, of which Turkey has few reserves of its own, fires half of its power plants. It imports most of that fuel from Russia, and opponents to last year's nuclear tender have said awarding the contract to a Russian firm does not diversify its energy sources enough.

Yildiz also said his ministry was still drawing up legislation to develop more renewable energy sources and that parliament may vote on it in four months.

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Private ...

So what are the ways back to fiscal health, particularly in the countries with the biggest deficits? The answers stare at U.S. from the charts: there must be some combination of a recovery in domestic private sector spending with a surge in net exports (and so a fall in the net capital inflow). If the recovery came overwhelmingly from the former, we would see a return to earlier private deficits. But that would almost certainly mean another surge in leverage. This then would be a case of adjustment postponed and, worse, of new bubbles. Alternatively, there could be a surge in net exports. But this also implies increased spending, relative to income, elsewhere. Many fear that this, too, might mean new bubbles.

The fundamental point, however, is that it is idiotic to discuss the reduction of the huge fiscal deficits, without considering the nature of the offsetting adjustments in the private and external sectors. Some adjustments would be desirable, but others would be extremely perilous.

Remember the aim: it is to reach a healthy fiscal position, at high levels of output and with sustainable levels of private spending and external balances. It is a combination many countries signally failed to achieve in the run up to this huge crisis. I see little evidence, hitherto, that we will do very much better on the way out.

(Source: *Financial Times*)

Iran delivers official protest over murder of citizen in Belgium

Tehran Times Political Desk
TEHRAN — Iran has strongly protested the murder of one of its nationals in a prison in Belgium.

The director of the Iranian Foreign Ministry's department for expatriates delivered the Islamic Republic's official protest to the Belgian ambassador to Tehran at a meeting on Tuesday.

Iranian citizen Mamiani Asl was murdered last week in Leuven prison.

The Belgian ambassador expressed regret over the murder and said the issue would be investigated and the results of the probe would be announced.

According to Radio Netherlands, an Iranian inmate was killed by a special police unit after midnight on Friday.

UN chief tells Israel to stop provocative actions

UN chief Ban Ki-moon has urged Israel to end its "provocative actions" in East Jerusalem Al-Quds and to freeze all its settlement activity in the occupied West Bank.

"The Secretary General is dismayed at continued Israeli actions in occupied East Jerusalem, including the demolition of Palestinian homes, the eviction of Palestinian families, and the insertion of settlers into Palestinian neighborhoods," a UN statement said on Tuesday.

"The eviction today of a Palestinian family in East Jerusalem is just the most recent incident," AFP quoted the statement as saying.

Ban warned that such actions "stoke tensions, cause suffering and further undermine trust" and urged Israel "to cease such provocative actions."

The UN chief also called on Israel "to implement its commitments" under the roadmap for Middle East peace "by freezing all settlement activity, including natural growth; dismantling outposts; and reopening Palestinian institutions in East Jerusalem."

(Source: *Press TV*)

UN implicated in war crimes in Congo: HRW

A top human rights group says the UN mission in Congo (MONUC) has done nothing to stop Congolese troops from killing civilians in the east of the country.

Human Rights Watch said in a report that the UN peacekeeping force in the area did nothing to stop the soldiers from decapitating men and raping young girls.

"MONUC's continued willingness to provide support for such abusive military operations implicates them in violations of the laws of war," the report stated.

The group has accused the Congolese military of killing more than 500 civilians over the past few months in the region.

"Some Congolese army soldiers are committing war crimes by viciously targeting the very people they should be protecting."

In the eastern Congo, the Ugandan Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and Hutu extremists of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) have caused untold suffering for thousands of civilians. Congo launched an offensive in January against the militias, which have been destabilizing the Great Lakes region for years. Some of the guerillas even participated in the 1994 Rwanda genocide. The eastern Congo has experienced interminable cycles of violence since the war began in 1998. The conflict has dragged on for over a decade and left over 5.4 million people dead.

(Source: *Press TV*)