

MID-EAST e-NEWS

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Welcome

If I had prepared early enough I could have written Moab alongside the date in the banner, but it would have been Moab, Utah. As it was, an interesting week in Colorado & Utah has delayed the issue of this issue of e-NEWS.

Anyway, it is not often that we have the opportunity to read the mail of an Iranian president, so the center-page spread is an abridged version of President Ahmadinejad's letter to President Bush. Perhaps some of you have suggestions of how you, as a Christian, would reply... The complete text can be found at: <http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/news/iran/2006/iran-060510-irna01.htm>

Email your responses to pkclark@pmbx.net & check the web for back issues.

Azerbaijan

Located on the Caspian Sea, between Russia and Iran, Azerbaijan is a Muslim country, with its neighbor, Armenia, being Christian Orthodox. These two countries have a shared history, though not exactly enjoying friendly relations.

After being part of various Muslim dynasties until the 19th Century, Azerbaijan was acquired by Russia between 1813 and 1828.

A brief independence during the Russian Revolution of 1917 was followed by

1849 - World's first oil well is drilled south of Baku.

incorporation into the Soviet Union, from which Azerbaijan only emerged in 1991.

Whereas Armenia and Azerbaijan are ethnically homogenous – Muslims and Christians living separately as a result of conflict in the waning years of Soviet control – the region known as Nagorno Karabakh is a portion of Azerbaijan that is ethnically Armenian.

It was an autonomous republic during the Soviet period. The enclave has claimed independence, a claim denied by both

The **Tats** are *Mountain Jews* who have lived for centuries in northern Azerbaijan and adjacent Dagestan (see e-NEWS 26).

Armenia and Azerbaijan. In 1994 a ceasefire was declared between Azerbaijan and Armenia, but the issue of Nagorno Karabakh has not yet been settled.

The make-up of the government of Azerbaijan is familiar to those who have observed other Middle East republics: the

1918-22 Azerbaijan was the world's first Muslim republic.

President is elected to a 5-year term, and it is he who appoints the cabinet. The legislative *National Assembly* is an elected assembly with 50 members. In the 2003 presidential election, after the death of president Heidar Aliiev, the electoral body acclaimed his son, then Prime Minister, Ilham Aliiev, as president, though observers claimed that vote rigging denied an opposition candidate – Isa Gambar – his due as winner of the election.

Azerbaijan is divided into 59 *rayons* ('counties'), with 11 administrative cities, and one autonomous republic, Nakhchivan. The 15 regions shown on the map are the taxing authorities, each based around the chief town.

Until recently, agriculture has accounted for nearly half of Azerbaijan's economy. However, the development of oil resources seems set to increase its proportion of the country's revenue.

Population: 7.9 million

Ethnic Groups: Azeris, 91%; Russians, 1.8%; and numerous smaller groups.

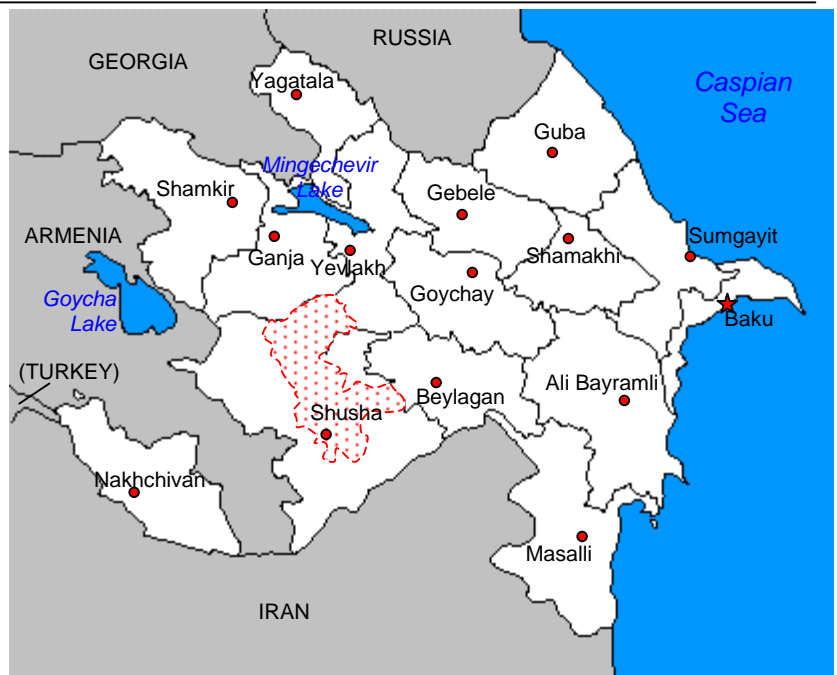
Religious Identity: Muslim (Twelver Shia) 65%, also Sunni, Armenian Apostolic, Russian Orthodox, Jewish.

Languages: Azerbaijani (95%) is a Turkic language, with Russian as a second language.

Per Capita GNP: \$950

International Dialing Code: 944

Life expectancy (M/F): 63/70 years



Ahmadinejad's Letter to President Bush

On May 8th it was announced that President Ahmadinejad of Iran had written a personal letter to President Bush. Rather than presenting an approach to settling their stand-off over Iran's nuclear development, the letter challenges President Bush from a religious point of view, to act "in line with the teachings of Jesus Christ". Extracts from the letter follow.

Paragraph titles have been added for clarity; to save space, some line breaks in the original text are indicated by ¶ .

Religious beliefs and conduct

"Mr. George Bush, president of the United States of America

For some time now, I have been thinking, how one can justify the undeniable contradictions that exist in the international arena -- which are being constantly debated, especially in political forums and amongst university students. Many questions remain unanswered. Those have prompted me to discuss some of the contradictions and questions, in the hopes that it might bring about an opportunity to redress them.

Can one be a follower of Jesus Christ (Peace Be Upon Him), the great Messenger of God, ¶ Feel obliged to respect human rights, ¶ Present liberalism as a civilization model, ¶ Announce one's opposition to the proliferation of nuclear weapons and WMDs, ¶ Make "War on Terror" his slogan,

And finally, ¶ work towards the establishment of an unified international community -- a community which Christ and the virtuous of the Earth will one day govern,

But at the same time, ¶ Have countries attacked. The lives, reputations and possessions of people destroyed and on the slight chance of the presence of a few criminals in a village, city, or convoy for example, the entire village, city or convoy set ablaze. ...

Of course, Saddam was a murderous dictator. But the war was not waged to topple him, the announced goal of the war was to find and destroy weapons of mass destruction. He was toppled along the way towards another goal; nevertheless the people of the region are happy about it. ...

Mr. President, ¶ You might know that I am a teacher. My students ask me how can these actions be reconciled with the values outlined at the beginning of this letter and duty to the tradition of Jesus Christ (Peace Be Upon Him), the Messenger of peace and forgiveness? ...

Israel – Establishment

Young people, university students, and ordinary people have many

questions about the phenomenon of Israel. I am sure you are familiar with some of them. ...

I tell them to study the history of WWI and II. One of my students told me that during WWII, which more than tens of millions of people perished in, news about the war, was quickly disseminated by the warring parties. ...

After the war they claimed that six million Jews had been killed. Six million people that were surely related to at least two million families. Again let us assume that these events are true. Does that logically translate into the establishment of the state of Israel in the Middle East or support for such a state? How can this phenomenon be rationalized or explained?

Mr. President,

I am sure you know how -- and at what cost -- Israel was established:

-- Many thousands were killed in the process.

-- Millions of indigenous people were made refugees.

-- Hundreds of thousands of hectares of farmland, olive plantations, towns and villages were destroyed.

This tragedy is not exclusive to the time of establishment; unfortunately it has been ongoing for 60 years now.

A regime has been established which does not show mercy even to kids, destroys houses while the occupants are still in them, announces beforehand its list and plans to assassinate Palestinian figures, and keeps thousands of Palestinians in prison. Such a phenomenon is unique -- or at the very least extremely rare -- in recent memory.

...

Is support for this regime in line with the teachings of Jesus Christ (Peace Be Upon Him) or Moses (Peace Be Upon Him) or liberal values? ...

Nuclear Development

... Why is it that any technological and scientific achievement reached in the

Middle East region is translated into and portrayed as a threat to the Zionist regime? Is not scientific R&D one of the basic rights of nations? ...

US Involvement in Other Countries (Africa, Iran 1953)

... The brave and faithful people of Iran

too have many questions and grievances, including: the coup d'etat of 1953 and the subsequent toppling of the legal government of the day, opposition to the Islamic revolution, transformation of an Embassy into a headquarters supporting the activities of those opposing the Islamic Republic (many thousands of pages of documents corroborate this claim), support for Saddam in the war waged against Iran, the shooting down of the Iranian passenger plane, freezing the assets of the Iranian nation, increasing threats, anger and displeasure vis-a-vis the scientific and nuclear progress of the Iranian nation (just when all Iranians are jubilant and celebrating their country's progress), and many other grievances that I will not refer to in this letter.

September 11th

Mr. President, September Eleven was a horrendous incident. The killing of

innocents is deplorable and appalling in any part of the world. ... All governments have a duty to provide security and peace of mind for their citizens. ... After 9.11, instead of healing and tending to the emotional wounds of the survivors and the American people -- who had been immensely traumatized by the attacks -- some Western media only intensified the climate of fear and insecurity ...

President Ahmadinejad sees a conflict between his view of Christian principles and the willingness to participate in a war which will bring suffering to citizens.

He admits that the people of the Middle East are glad that Saddam has been removed from power.

Without actually accepting the Western version of the holocaust, he asks how the six million dead validates the establishment of the state of Israel.

He quotes some of the complaints of the Palestinian population...

...and asks if this is in line with the teachings of Jesus.

The Iranian nuclear research is defended as being a valid use of technology for peaceful purposes.

In 1951, PM Mossadegh nationalized the UK oil monopoly (then AIOC, now BP). After the PM tried to have the Shah exiled, in 1953, the UK persuaded the US (through the CIA) to help them remove the Prime Minister from power. This was known as *Operation Ajax*, and it replaced the Shah Reza Pahlavi on the throne until the 1979 Islamic Revolution. (Ahmadinejad is said to have been one of the students involved in the 1979 takeover of the US embassy)

Some believe that the hype paved the way -- and was the justification -- for an attack on Afghanistan. ... Will the truth not be lost in a contrived and deceptive climate? Again, if the truth is allowed to be lost, how can that be reconciled with the earlier mentioned values? Is the truth known to the Almighty lost as well? ...

Responsibility of Rulers

Mr. President, ¶ ... What has been said, are some of the grievances of the people around the world, in our region and in your country. But my main contention -- which I am hoping you will agree to some of it -- is:

Those in power have a specific time in office and do not rule indefinitely, but their names will be recorded in history and will be consistently judged in the immediate and distant futures.

The people will scrutinize our presidencies. Did we manage to bring peace, security and prosperity for the people or insecurity and unemployment?

Did we intend to establish justice or just supported special interest groups, and by forcing many people to live in poverty and hardship made a few people rich and powerful -- thus trading the approval of the people and the Almighty with theirs?

Did we defend the rights of the underprivileged or ignore them?

Did we defend the rights of all people around the world or imposed wars on them, interfered illegally in their affairs, established hellish prisons and incarcerated some of them?

Did we bring the world peace and security or raised the specter of intimidation and threats?

Did we tell the truth to our nation and others around the world or presented an inverted version of it?

Were we on the side of people or the occupiers and oppressors?

Did our administrations set out to promote rational behavior, logic, ethics, peace, fulfilling obligations, justice, service to the people, prosperity, progress and respect for human dignity or the force of guns, intimidation, insecurity, disregard for the people, delaying the progress and excellence of other nations, and trample on people's rights?

And finally, they will judge us on whether we remained true to our oath of office -- to serve the people, which is our main task, and the traditions of the prophets -- or not? ...

Religious Responsibility (Koran quotes, shared beliefs)

Mr. President, it is not my intention to distress anyone. ¶ If Prophet Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Ishmael, Joseph, or Jesus Christ (Peace Be Upon Him) were with us today, how would they have judged such behavior? Will we be given a role to play in the promised world, where justice will become universal and Jesus Christ (Peace Be Upon Him) will be present? Will they even accept us? ...

Mr. President, ¶ According to divine verses, we have all been called upon to worship one God and follow the teachings of divine Prophets.

"To worship a God which is above all powers in the world and can do all He pleases." "the Lord which knows that which is hidden and visible, the past and the future, knows what goes on in the Hearts of His servants and records their deeds." ...

We believe a return to the teachings of the divine prophets is the only road leading to salvation and have been told that Your Excellency follows the teachings of Jesus (Peace Be Upon Him) and believes in the divine promise of the rule of the righteous on Earth. ...

Service to and obedience of the Almighty is the credo of all divine messengers.

The God of all people in Europe, Asia, Africa, America, the Pacific and the rest of the world is one. He is the Almighty who wants to guide and give dignity to all His servants. He has given greatness to Humans.

We again read in the Holy Book: "The Almighty God sent His prophets with miracles and clear signs to guide the people and show them divine signs and purify them from sins and pollutions. And He sent the Book and the balance so that the people display justice and avoid the rebellious."

All of the above verses can be seen, one way or the other, in the Good Book as well. ...

Do you not think that if all of us come to believe in and abide by these principles, that is, monotheism, worship of God, justice, respect for the dignity of man, belief in the Last Day, we can overcome the present problems of the world -- that are the result of disobedience to the Almighty and the teachings of prophets -- and improve our performance? ...

Will you not accept this invitation? That is, a genuine return to the teachings of prophets, to monotheism and justice, to preserve human dignity and obedience to the Almighty and His prophets?

The Failure of Liberalism & Democracy

Mr. President, ¶ History tells us that repressive and cruel governments do not survive. God has entrusted the fate of men to them. The Almighty has not left the universe and humanity to their own devices. Many things have happened contrary to the wishes and plans of governments. These tell us that there is a higher power at work and all events are determined by Him. ...

We increasingly see that people around the world are flocking towards a main focal point -- that is the Almighty God. Undoubtedly through faith in God and the teachings of the prophets, the people will conquer their problems. My question for you is: "Do you not want to join them?"

Mr. President, ¶ Whether we like it or not, the world is gravitating towards faith in the Almighty and justice and the will of God will prevail over all things. ...

Throughout his letter Ahmadinejad is focused on the religious aspect of presidential decisions. He emphasizes the importance of social justice.

Ahmadinejad quotes Koranic verses and calls for national leaders to judge themselves according to monotheist religion.

He sees the message of the Bible as teaching basically the same concern for humanity as the Koran.

He challenges President Bush to accept this Islamic concept of justice. (In Ahmadinejad's terms, this author wonders if he is offering Pres. Bush an opportunity to accept the Islamic view of life.)

He sees - from US actions & policies - that President Bush has left his religious principles, and he urges a return to this.

Translation obtained from Reuters, May 9th, 2006

This Month

April	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	May	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15						
	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M							
Africa	Chad rebels threaten gov., attack refugees			Jinjawid attack Sudan refugees in Chad				UN cuts Darfur refugee rations				Darfur rebels & gov. discuss peace treaty. Talks deadline extended 2 days, to May 2.				2002 Tunisia bombers sentenced in Spain																				
Pakistan	Senior Al-Qaeda leader killed				Convoy ambush, 7 soldiers die				Girl, 12, shot 5 times after refusing to marry cousin, survives				Convoy ambushed in Waziristan, soldier dies				Landmines kill 3 in Baluchistan				Man kills 2 sisters over their job hunting															
Afghan.	6 civilians hurt by US fire				6 police, 1 US, killed by Taleban				Convoy ambush-4 Canadian troops die				6 civilians injured by US action				US strike kills 4 near Pakistan border																			
Arabia	Yemen charges 17 for threats to US interests																Small bomb explodes in Manama																			
Iraq	Café bomb kills 6, 2 police				Rumsfeld, Rice visit Iraq				Iraqi army graduates demonstrate				Tikri suicide bomber kills 3 army				Baquba teacher killed				Mortar attack on British base															
US Deaths: 3/30: 2,317 4/28: 2,395 5/16: 2,433	Street battles in Adhamiya, Baghdad				Jaafari steps down as PM				Raid kills 12 insurgents				2 German hostages freed				Baghdad-2 car bombs-9 die				Roadside bombs kill 3 US				Baghdad bombs kill 19											
	Dr. killed in Tal Afar hospital				Maliki visits clerics, inc Sistani				Balad:10 insurgents killed				Karbala bomb, 21 die				Mosul insurgents clash with police				Bombs wreck 6 small Shia shrines															
	Car bomb kills 12 S of Baghdad				5 Iraqi soldiers killed in Baiji				Raid on Baquba posts kill 30				Anbar governor attacked, 10 die				Gen. held, involved in death squads				2 Baghdad airport bombs kills 14															
	Baquba bus attack, 8 killed				Al-Maliki asked to form gov.				Sistani: militias should be disbanded				Baghdad morgue receives 65 shot, beheaded				Baghdad-11 bodies found, Suwayra 12				Yusufiya clashes, 41 militants killed, US helicopter downed, 2 US die,															
	12 bodies found in Baghdad				3 Diyala Univ. professors killed				6 insurgents arrested				Bomb kills 4 European coalition troops				Bomber kills 16 Fallujah recruits				5 insurgents escape from prison				4 teachers killed in Balad Ruz											
	100,000 or more Iraqis have fled the violence. IRAN troops enter Kurdish region twice. Baghdad morgue: 35-50 deaths per day, inc. many sectarian killings				4 Fijians die in Kirkuk convoy attack				Al-Maliki:militas must join army				3 contractors killed				Parliament meets for 1 st time				Courthouse bomb kills 5, Baghdad				24 insurgents held in Baquba				Saddam charged with crimes against humanity, refuses to plea							
	Iran shells Kurd positions in Iraq				Baghdad:32 recruits found dead				Sadr City car bomb kills 2				Iran bombs PKK positions				Baghdad court bomb-9 die				Roadside bomb kills 2 US				Gunmen in uniform arrested after 10 kidnapped				Dawa office bombed, none hurt							
Civilian deaths->	29	16	10	12	13	8	15	16	44	15	5	10	6	5	7	1	90	43	35	1	11	39	29	32	28	12	12	2	48	31						
Iran	Iran shells Iraqi Kurds (& on 4/30)				Women allowed to watch soccer games				IAEA criticizes Iran nuclear development				Bad alcohol kills 15 in S.				Ahme'adinejad writes to Pres.				Jundollah (Sunni rebels) kill 12 in S.															
Turkey	Café bomb injures 30 in Istanbul				PKK rebels attack military post in E. killing 2				Clash with PKK in SE. 1 soldier, 2 rebels killed											Solider killed by Kurdish mine near Iraqi border																
Syria	Syria takes 181 Palestinian refugees stranded at Jordan/Iraq border											Hariri inquiry chief interviews Pres. Assad				244 Palestinians allowed into Syria				Writer Michael Kilo arrested for signing Lebanese petition																
Lebanon	Leaders discuss removal of pro-Syria president				Lebanon claims jurisdiction from Syria over Shebaa farms area											Lebanon calls for Israel to withdraw from Shebaa farms				Economic reform protests				PLO reopens office in Beirut												
Jordan	Govt. claims to have seized Hamas arms				Pal. Foreign minister visit cancelled				Hamas activists arrested				Mubarak meets Abdullah in Aqaba, they push for renewed peace talks				20 held in Hamas plot																			
Egypt	52 held after sectarian violence				Judges protest colleagues' prosecution				Judges tried for criticism of 2005 election				3 bombs at Dahab hotels kill 23				3 Dahab suspects killed in NE Sinai				Sinai rebel leader killed at El Arish															
Israel	Tel Aviv suicide bomb kills 9-by Islamic Jihad				Kadima agree deal with pensioners party				Kadima joined by Labour				Cabinet approves barrier around Ariel & Kadumim				Smuggled explosives seized from dinghy																			
	A new government is formed, isolation of Hamas is enforced.				Militant shot in Nablus																															
WB & Gaza	Crisis over Hamas refusal to accept Israel, funding for PNA ceases, workers unpaid				Hamas announces new security force of militants, led by Samhadna				Abbas vetos security force plan				Abbas calls for peace talks				Police seize carload of explosives				WB mother of 5 killed in IDF raid				3 die in Fateh/Hamas disputes				Deliveries resume as Abbas promises to pay fuel supplier							
									17 Palestinians arrested in WB				Air strike kills 1 in Gaza				Hamas attempts to pay workers directly from donor banks				Small fire in Parliament building				Fuel cut off in Gaza				Hammer leader calls for arms from Arab nations							
																					Hammer sympathizers attack Fateh funeral				Quartet accepts funding route for Pal. aid				Fateh/Hamas violence continues				Abbas urges Hamas to seek peace, Israel to cooperate			