



# PROPHETIC TIMES

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## IRANIAN VICE PRESIDENTS, OTHERS RESIGN

*January 21, 2004* The ASSOCIATED PRESS reported: 'A number of Iranian Cabinet ministers and vice presidents have submitted their resignations to protest the barring of thousands of would-be candidates from upcoming elections, a senior official said Wednesday. The resignations are the latest twist in an ongoing political crisis, sparked when hard-liners disqualified the candidates in what reformists said was an attempt to assure conservative victory in the February legislative election.

"A number of Cabinet ministers and a number of vice presidents have resigned. Naturally, they are waiting to see how things go," Vice President Mohammad Ali Abtahi said after a Wednesday Cabinet meeting. Abtahi did not say how many officials resigned nor did he identify them. When asked if he had also resigned, Abtahi smiled but did not respond.

President Mohammad Khatami must approve the resignations for them to take effect. Khatami, a leading reformer, has threatened to resign if the disqualifications are not reversed. Wednesday, however, he refused to take that step.

The crisis was triggered when supervisory bodies affiliated with Iran's Guardian Council, an unelected body controlled by hard-liners, disqualified more than a third of the 8,200 people who applied as candidates in the Feb. 20 elections. Among those disqualified were 80 liberal members of parliament.

State media controlled by hard-liners say those disqualified failed to meet the legal criteria for candidacy, but reformists maintain the move was intended to skew the elections in favor of conservatives.

"The 1979 Islamic revolution was based on democracy, and such methods damage our Islamic democracy and turn elections into sham elections," Abtahi said...'

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## EU DOWNBEAT ON ITS GOAL OF TRYING TO CATCH U.S.A.

*January 21, 2004* The EUOBSERVER reported: 'The European Commission today published a very downbeat assessment on its highly ambitious goal to become "the most competitive, knowledge-based economy in the World by 2010" - the so-called Lisbon strategy. The report concedes, "the Union cannot catch up on the United States as our per capita GDP is 72 percent of our American partner's".

Presenting the report, Commission President Romano Prodi confirmed that the EU would miss its targets for the half-way stage of the process (which runs from 2000 to 2010) and said, "This should be a strong enough message to serve as a wake-up call to governments".

The report outlines the main problems facing the EU in its effort to catch up with the US, saying "in certain domains there are significant problems which hold back the entire strategy and which hinder the return of strong growth". The main areas where the EU lags behind the US are jobs, productivity and investment.

And Alasdair Murray, economics expert at the Centre for European Reform, told the EUobserver, warned, "EU leaders must use the spring summit in March to push through some meaningful reform measures. Otherwise the economic gulf between the EU and the US risks becoming ever larger"...

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## EU SAYS EUROPE FALLING BEHIND ON ECONOMY

*January 21, 2004* The SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER reported: 'European Union nations are dragging their heels in their ambitious drive to become the world's most competitive economy by the end of the decade, the European Commission said Wednesday. The EU's executive agency said Europe is falling further behind the United States after a standstill year in which European job growth evaporated, public finances deteriorated and the average unemployment rate rose to 8.1 percent.

In an annual survey of how the 15 EU nations fare in trying to become economically more dynamic, European Commission President Romano Prodi said governments lack political will to overhaul the continent's economies. His report lamented a "substantial gap" between Europe and the United States in the ability to rally risk capital and money for research and development, quickly process patent applications and spend generously on information technologies.

At a 2000 summit in Lisbon, Portugal, the EU leaders pledged to overtake the United States as the world's leading economy by 2010. The plan was to boost investments in information technology, accelerating integration of European energy, transportation, telecommunications and other markets, aiming for an employment rate of 67 percent and making labor markets more flexible.

Four years on, "the overall picture ... is mixed," Prodi told the European Parliament where he formally unveiled the survey's findings. The EU "member states do not seem to realize that 2010 is around the corner. Four years after Lisbon it is clear that we are going to miss our midterm targets," he said.

According to the EU head office, employment was stagnating at 64 percent and that for the 55-64 age group the rate was only 40.1 percent. Among other things it blamed inadequate use of information and communication technologies, insufficient investments in research, innovation, education and training and a still fragmented EU home market that grows to 25 nations in May.

France, Germany and Italy top the list of nations failing to make the required economic and labor law reforms, said Prodi, while Austria, Luxembourg, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Sweden have done best.

The Commission criticized resistance to a single EU patent - crucial to quickly bringing new products and services on the market - or EU-wide criteria for professional standards.

"The worst of all is the lack of leadership the report highlights in EU member states," said Paul Hofheinz, president of the Lisbon Council, a Brussels-based research institute. "Everyone knows what needs to be done. But unless Europe acts now, there won't be much of an economy left to reform."

The Commission report said the EU's productivity growth rate- now between 0.5 and 1 percent - was far below the U.S. rate of 2 percent. "Lower labor productivity per hour worked now represents 40 percent of the difference in GDP per capita between the EU and the USA," the report said. It put Europe's per capita economic output at 72 percent of that of the United States, a gap "illustrates the need to stimulate market integration, business dynamism, and investment, particularly in knowledge."

The report did not mention the fall of the dollar against the euro in recent months. The rising value of the euro is hurting European exports and slowing the continent's economic recovery...'

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## **SYRIA COMPLETES CW WARHEADS**

*January 21, 2004* Middle East Newline reported: 'Syria has completed chemical warheads for its arsenal of Scud-based missiles.

U.S. officials said Syria, with help from North Korea, has succeeded in designing and installing CW warheads for the Scud B, Scud C and Scud D missiles. This provides Syria with warheads that can reach distances from 250 to nearly 700 kilometers.

The chemical agent deployed in the CW warheads is sarin, regarded as the most toxic of material. Syria has also been developing more toxic agents such as VX.

"Since the 1970s, Syria has pursued what is now one of the most advanced Arab state chemical weapons capabilities," Undersecretary of State John Bolton said. "It has a stockpile of the nerve agent sarin that can be delivered by aircraft or ballistic missiles, and has engaged in the research and development of more toxic and persistent nerve agents such as VX."

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## **EGYPT, SUDAN DISCUSS SECURITY COOPERATION**

*January 19, 2004* Middle East Newline reported: 'Egypt and Sudan have launched talks to bolster security cooperation. The talks were held in Cairo over the weekend between the presidents of Egypt and Sudan. Egyptian officials said security cooperation led the agenda of the meeting between Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and his Sudanese counterpart, Omar Bashir.

Security cooperation has become an essential part in the relations between Cairo and Khartoum amid an agreement to establish a free trade zone, officials said. Under this proposal, citizens of Egypt and Sudan can work, invest or visit each other's country without restrictions.

Earlier, Egyptian Interior Minister Habib Adly and his Sudanese counterpart Abdul Rahim Mohammed Hussein discussed details of the new security effort. Officials said the talks focused on cooperation between security agencies, training, intelligence exchange and joint patrols.

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