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UN Commends Iranian Progress

The Islamic Republic of Iran has made excellent progress and is well placed to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the United Nations Resident Coordinator said.

Knut Ostby made the remark at a press conference on Wednesday to mark the UN Day 2008 (October 24) at the United Nations Information Center in Tehran, Fars News Agency reported.

"Iran has acted successfully in the areas of poverty reduction, education and health," Ostby said.



Relevance

According to a report by IRNA, the UN official stressed that some disparities exist in Iran, particularly between some geographical areas, adding that it lags behind some countries in areas such as gender equality, women empowerment, HIV/AIDS and environment.

Ostby noted that the current year has coincided with the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and UN's peacekeeping operations as well as the Convention on Genocide.

"UDHR remains the first pillar of the 20th century human rights law," he said.

"Today, UDHR is relevant more than ever because we live in a world threatened by racial, economic and religious divide. In this situation, we must defend and proclaim the universal principles enshrined in UDHR such as universality, interdependence, indivisibility, equality and non-discrimination, which are crucial to achieving justice."

The UN coordinator stated that the MDGs were set by world leaders at the 2000 Millennium Summit.

Moderate Quake

A moderate earthquake measuring 4.3 on the Richter scale shook the suburbs of Bandar Gong in southeastern Hormuzgan province early Saturday.

News in Brief

Islamic Financing Best Option

Results of an Internet-based poll revealed that the Islamic financial system is viewed as the best option by



Muslims after the ongoing global economic crisis.

According to an Internet poll conducted by Aljazeera TV's Arabic-language website, more than 84 percent of people preferred an Islamic finance system to the methods now in practice.

When asked which financial system, capitalism, socialism or Islamic, they would prefer once the current world economic crisis ends, 84.3 percent of the respondents chose the Islamic system. The results of the online survey indicate that only 5.2 percent of the respondents chose capitalism, while 6.5 percent favored a socialist outlook as the most efficient way to manage an economic system, Presstv reported.

A prominent Egyptian cleric recently said Muslims should grab the opportunity provided by the global financial crisis to construct a system based on Islamic ideals.

"We have our own economic philosophy and system, which others do not have," Sheikh Yusuf Al-Qaradawi said on October 14.

The idea of implementing a financial system based on the principles of Sharia (Islamic law) has been rising in popularity among Muslims everywhere.

Malaysia Tourism Ties to Expand

A Malaysian official said Iran-Malaysia ties will expand in all fields, especially in the tourism sector.

Speaking to reporters, Suleiman Abdul Rahman Tayyeb, deputy minister of tourism who is currently in Iran to meet officials of Iran's Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization, added that the two countries enjoy special affinities for expansion of ties in tourism sector, because they are both Muslim

UN



Presence in Iran

Pointing out that the UN has been present in the country since 1950, he said currently 17 UN organizations are active in Iran, including FAO, UNAIDS, UNAMA, UNICEF, UNDP, UNESCO, UNHCR, UNIDO, UNIC, OCHA, UNODC, UNFPA, WFP, WHO, LOM, IOM, UNDSS and the World Bank.

Ostby termed control of drug and crime, assistance of refugees, strengthening capacities and capabilities for achieving the MDGs, strengthening good governance, improving economic performance, generating employment, sustainable development, disaster management and energy, and facilitating the transfer of science and technology for development in all areas of cooperation as the main objectives of programs pursued by the United Nations in Tehran.

Rich States Behind Much of Global Pollution

Rich countries are partly responsible for pollution from poor ones, including poisonous mining discharge, because they buy many of the raw materials and goods that produce the waste, environmental groups said.

"In our part of the world, these problems have been fixed for the most part," said Richard Fuller, founder of the New York-based Blacksmith Institute, which has compiled a database of 600 of the world's worst polluted places, Reuters reported.

"We have exported our industry overseas and yet there's no pollution controls in these places or the pollution controls are terribly inadequate."

Swiss Report

Blacksmith and Green Cross Switzerland, which works to clean up contamination from industrial and military disasters, released a report last week called "The World's Worst Polluted Places"--available at www.worstpolluted.org.

It found that artisanal gold mining, contaminated surface water, radioactive waste processing, uranium mining and the recycling of used lead acid batteries, most of which occur in poor countries from Africa to Asia, are some of the world's top 10 sources of pollution dangerous to human health.

Millions of people are poisoned or killed each year by industrial pollution and emissions, it said.

To be sure, the developing world is also rife with problems that are not caused by the processing or manufacture of goods used in rich countries.

Indoor air pollution from cooking fires, which occurs mostly in Africa, is one key example, the report said. And many of the products made or processed in rapidly developing countries, such as China and India, are used domestically.

Extensive Damage

countries, IRNA reported.

"Conditions for Muslim tourists are ripe in both the countries," he said.

Tayyeb noted that Iranians rank third in terms of visiting Malaysia, adding that the figure increased to 27,215 in 2007 from 18,725 in 2006.

"Iran is one of the main and strategic partners of Malaysia," he said.

"A joint committee has been set up to pursue agreements and programs in the field.

Stating that Malaysia is not pursuing political considerations in developing ties with Iran, Tayyeb said, "We view the issue from cultural and commercial aspects. We will always support Iran as a civilized and cultured country and are keen to expand ties with it in all arenas."

World Travel Awards Announced

The World Travel Awards

Organization has announced its 2008 Winners for Green, declaring the best environmental services in 10 categories.



The awards are presented with the aim of encouraging international competition, stimulating innovation and creativity as well as ensuring that travelers receive exceptional value, Presstv reported.

The organization seeks to identify companies that consistently excel beyond expectation and try to take customer expectations to a high, unparalleled level. The 2008 World Travel Award Winners for Green are as follows:

Leading Conservation Company: Shamwari Game Reserve, South Africa
Leading Eco-Friendly Airport: Singapore Changi Airport

Leading Eco-Lodge: Kumbuk River, Sri Lanka

Leading Green Cruise: Line Sea Cloud Cruises

Leading Green Destination: Costa Rica
Leading Green Hotel: Chateau Mcely, Czech Republic

Leading Green Resort: AquaCity Poprad, Slovakia

Leading Green Transport: Solution Company Europcar

Leading Responsible Tourism Scheme: Quest, England

Leading Sustainable Tourism Scheme: Green Airport Initiative.

Russians First Potters on Earth?

Russian archeologists claim that Russians were



Still, children in developing countries are hit by pollution from many of the industries that make or process things used mostly by rich countries, including metals smelting and processing, lead battery recycling and the industrial mining of both common and precious materials, it said.

Children are more vulnerable to disease from toxic pollution than adults.

Rich countries should help mop up pollution sources not only because they are the world's largest consumers but because some pollution can travel over oceans through the atmosphere, eventually reaching consumers throughout the world.

"Mercury from artisanal gold mining can end up in tuna that we end up eating, poisoning our own children," Fuller said.

Blacksmith and Green Cross Switzerland helped launch the Health and Pollution Fund last year with representatives from the United States, Germany, China, Russia and other countries.

Funeral Art in Vienna

If you want to make sure everything goes as planned on your "special day", then rehearse your own funeral in Vienna, with music, flowers and an audience.

Conceptual artists Gary



O'Dwyer and Pierre Coinde have been encouraging people in the Austrian capital to lie back on a white, elevated tomb-like platform in the city's central Karlsplatz while they play a chosen funeral song, Reuters reported.

Their art installation, which has passed through Frankfurt, Istanbul, Toronto and Venice, blends in well with Vienna, the home of elaborate funerals and with one of the world's few museums dedicated to death.

"Some people are curious, some are horrified, like you have asked them to do something terrible," O'Dwyer said.

"But for us, it is about remembering to live. It gives people the chance to make a statement through a song."

Classical music is a popular choice in the home of Beethoven, while some people choose more tongue-in-cheek tracks like Gloria Gaynor's 'I Will Survive' or Falco's 'Rock me Amadeus,' one of Austria's few international pop hits.

Florian Wagner, 24, opts for Phantom/Ghost's eerie song 'Relax It's Only a Ghost' as he lies back on a red pillow in the sunshine next to a plinth decked with flowers.

Passersby on their way to a nearby concert house stare quizzically at his inanimate body while others stand solemnly and watch the ceremony.

"It's a way of relaxing, it is not macabre at all and gives you a chance to confront ideas about death, which is a good thing," Wagner, dressed in black, said after hopping off the tomb platform with a smile.

Many Pesticides Damage Human Brain

Many pesticides used may damage brain growth in fetuses and young children, according to a study published on Friday.

the first people on the planet to cultivate land, breed cattle and make earthenware. Russian tribes inhabited Khabarovsk Region in the Stone Age, the archeologists said after finding a 15,000-year-old hunters' settlement on the bank of Amur River in Khabarovsk, Presstv reported. Stone axes, knives, scrapers, arrowheads and baked earthenware have so far been unearthed in the area.

"It was the first earthenware on the globe, and though it was primitive, with plain decoration, and poorly baked, yet it was a significant landmark in the history of mankind," said Andrei Malyavin, an employee of Khabarovsk Archeology Museum.

Firing shaped clay is among the possible first steps toward social organization or society. The production of earthenware shows that the group had moved beyond simple farming, and into some specialization.

Khabarovsk is the administrative center and the largest city of Khabarovsk Krai, Russia, located some 30 km from the Chinese border.

The study urged the European Union to tighten restrictions.

“Toxicity to the brain is not routinely included in testing pesticides,” Philippe Grandjean of the Harvard School of Public Health and the University of Southern Denmark said.

“Because many of them are by design toxic to the brain of insects, it is very likely that they are also toxic to human brains,” he said of a review of almost 200 scientific reports worldwide about the brain and pesticides, Sciam.com reported.

“Laboratory experimental studies using model compounds suggest that many pesticides currently used in Europe...can cause neuro-developmental toxicity,” Grandjean and two colleagues in Denmark wrote in the journal Environmental Health.

The developing brain of the fetus and young child is far more sensitive than the adult brain to disruptions from chemicals, they said.

The study focused on the use of pesticides in the 27-nation EU, which is currently reviewing pesticide laws. It urged greater testing and caution in approving chemicals because of uncertainties about their effects.

Manufacturers say their pesticides are safe for humans.

“Many other countries are watching what the EU is doing...It should take these matters much more seriously than in the past,” Grandjean said.

Many pesticides used in the EU are also used in other nations.

Pesticides used on food crops in the EU exceed 140,000 tons a year, corresponding to 280 grams (10 ounces) per EU citizen, the study said.

More than 25 percent of fruits, vegetables and cereals contain detectable residues of at least two pesticides.

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