

# THE DAILY STAR

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## Iran played pivotal role in prisoner swap

DIPLOMATS AND NEGOTIATORS ON ALL SIDES RECOGNIZE THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC'S INFLUENCE



Israeli Army personnel transport a coffin carrying a Lebanese militia member, set to be exchanged on Friday

**Henri Mamarbachi**  
Agence France Presse

Iran played a key role in the negotiations that are set to culminate this week in the biggest ever prisoner swap between Hizbullah and Israel, officials and diplomats said.

While considered a coup for the resistance movement, the deal probably would not have seen the light of day without the intervention of Iran which – in the words of German mediator Ernst Uhrlau – used all its “powers of persuasion.”

Hizbullah leader Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah paid tribute to the Islamic Republic’s “cooperation” in securing the deal, which will see Israel free almost 440 Arab prisoners and hand over the bodies of 59 Lebanese in return for Hizbullah turning over an Israeli businessman and another three soldiers who are presumed dead.

“The Iranians helped things along. They could have asked us not to pursue the negotiations but they told us to do what we thought necessary,” Nasrallah said Sunday.

The deal was brokered by Germany, which since 1996 has played the role of mediator in prisoner swaps between Israel and Hizbullah. “There is no doubt that Iran used its influence with Hizbullah and helped to unblock the negotiations by proposing a two-stage

compromise,” said one Western diplomat.

He was referring to a secondary deal under which Israel has agreed to turn over Samir Kantar, a veteran Lebanese prisoner jailed for life over the murder of an Israeli family in 1979, in return for concrete proof about the fate of missing Israeli airman Ron Arad.

Nasrallah said he expected information about Arad, who was shot down over Lebanon in 1986, and four Iranian diplomats who went missing here in 1982 and are presumed dead, to be available in two or three months.

He said a committee – which sources in Beirut said would include representatives from Germany, Hizbullah, Iran and Israel – would be set up in Germany to monitor the second swap.

“Iran not only provided moral support to Hizbullah but played a direct and essential role in reaching an accord,” said Lebanon’s An-Nahar newspaper.

The paper said the deal was linked to diplomatic developments in Iran in recent months, notably an accord with Britain, France and Germany on the Islamic Republic’s nuclear activities.

The deal led to Iran last year signing an additional protocol to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty allowing surprise visits of its nuclear facilities by inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

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INSIDE

Another Constitutional deadlock on trial provisions



On Monday, Parliament arrived at a deadlock for the second time over the explanation of articles 60 and 70 of the Constitution, which together govern trial procedures for presidents, ministers and prime ministers. → PAGE 2

South anticipates return of bodies of fallen fighters

The town of Zawtar Gharbieh – like other towns and villages in Nabatieh – is waiting impatiently for the return of the bodies of those killed years ago defending their land. → PAGE 2

Trade fair experience pays dividends for Lebanon

Between Jan. 19 and 23, Beirut-based International Fairs & Promotions (IFP) held Rebuild Iraq 2004, the first trade fair to attract international construction firms interested in doing business in war-shattered Iraq. → PAGE 5

Lebanese mobile networks to run for less?

A Cabinet committee may soon recommend a re-negotiation with Cellis and LibanCell to reduce the monthly fee charges for managing the mobile networks. → PAGE 5

The challenge of reconciling the histories of Lebanon

In ancient times, the Fertile Crescent, as it is popularly known, gave birth to great civilizations and empires that saw many invasions and migrations. → PAGE 8

LETTERS Page 6

CAMBIO

US dollar	1,514.00	Kuwaiti dinar	5,135.69
UK pd	2,767.29	UAE dirham	412.25
Euro	1,902.80	Saudi riyal	403.71
Syr pd	32.74	Bahr dinar	4,015.92
Jord dinar	2,135.40	Can dollar	1,155.02
Swiss fr	1,215.87	Qatari riyal	415.93
Aust dollar	1,171.99	Cyp pd	3,248.74
Egypt pd	246.13	Japanese yen	14.27

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## Appearances matter to which gender?

Debate persists at home and abroad

**Jessy Chahine**  
Daily Star staff

“Vierges et sexy pour trouver un mari.”

Virginal, sexy, and eager to find husbands, was how Lebanese women were described by a reporter at the French monthly women’s magazine Marie-Claire.

“Three imperatives,” Emmanuelle Eyles wrote in her article published in the magazine’s February edition, “are the Lebanese women’s daily credo for finding a husband: be beautiful, blonde and showy.”

Was Eyles right? If yes, then is that why Lebanese women seem to be overly preoccupied with their appearances?

“I think it is induced by Lebanese men’s interest with appearances,” said Joseph Assio, a 23-year-old Lebanese student currently living in the United States. “Girls like to look pretty and there is nothing wrong with that ... but when guys raise the bar by placing too much weight on appearances, then girls have to rise up to the challenge by increasing their interest in their appearance.”

Assio added that the Lebanese, or Arab culture in general, is behind the men’s excessive interest in looks. “I guess guys in Lebanon are less mature in general, but not a big difference when you compare them with those in Western cultures.”

Assio added that the appearance problem was everywhere in the world, yet he had only started to notice it when he traveled to the United States.

“Here (in America), you have two extremes that the girls in general fall into,” Assio said. “Here a girl would pay so much attention to her physical

appearance or not at all, I mean a girl would either spend 10 hours a week in the gym or zero hours. She would either watch everything she eats or nothing and thus the results are extreme; girls are either very slim or very obese, in general of course.”

Whereas in Lebanon, Assio said, the majority are more balanced, or in the middle.

Barnaby Skinner, a British journalist who visited Lebanon last summer, said that the Lebanese women’s interest with physical appearances was obvious.

“I got the impression that every second or third girl ... had an operation (here)”

“When it comes to surgery like nose-jobs or operations on their breasts, yes, I think they really exaggerate,” Skinner told The Daily Star, adding that “not so in the way they dress, though. Girls dress similarly in Europe.”

Skinner added that, as far as he noticed during his two-week visit, surgical aesthetic operations abound more in Lebanon than in Europe and the United States.

“I got the impression that about every second or third girl has had some kind of operation in Lebanon,” Skinner said. “It’s the way they talk about it as well. It seems so natural to say: ‘I’ve had an operation on my nose!’ Here, in Switzerland for example, you hardly ever see a girl with bandages (after the operation) and it’s something most girls would never talk about so openly.”

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MEDIA AND SOCIETY

## Do you expect the truth from news?

Reporters bear a responsibility to combat cynicism

**Ramsay Short**  
Daily Star staff

At night, some people turn on the light to keep from seeing.

Sometimes the reality many people live is so brutal that they like to hide from it however and wherever they can – through drugs, through denial, through apathy, through consumerism. For those who choose not to switch off from the world, there exist sources of information with which to understand it.

One of those sources is the print media, and more specifically newspapers. Yet, for many here in Lebanon and the rest of the world, trust in reporters and their objectivity or ability to get to the truth has eroded considerably in recent years – a reaction that can be seen in the fact that newspaper readership figures have been dropping dramatically year to year.

Although, in principle, freedom of speech is protected by Lebanon’s Constitution – both the original one of 1926 and the amended one at the Taif Conference of 1989 – and the laws governing publishing and broadcasting do not involve prior censorship for locally published media, being openly critical can get one in trouble.

With increasing control of newspapers by governments, political money and multina-

tional companies headed by media moguls, can we really believe what we read? Do we trust in the reporter’s objectivity and integrity?

How many readers in Lebanon answer “no” to that question would provide a valuable insight to those of us who are in the business of writing and reporting news. More importantly, how much Lebanese newspapers influence people or policy, and therefore an indicator of how seriously the press is taken, would be valuable to know.

Though the best way to convince a skeptical readership that we believe in what we do must be in the stories that we write, often here we are faced with constraints that can make it difficult to get particular information or expose it. And yet no journalists at The Daily Star and the other Lebanese newspapers would be in the profession if they did not absolutely believe in its necessity as an instrument to affect and benefit democratic society.

Of course, in Lebanon, as former Prime Minister Salim Hoss famously declared: “There is a lot of freedom but very little democracy.”

The problem for many read-



ers here is that even when investigations in the Arabic, French and English press are conducted into scandals or abuses of authority – the Arabic press is brilliant and efficient at reporting these – and everyone reads about it, rarely does anything happen as a result. Ideally, newspapers would ensure that justice is done, that it is seen to be done and that investigations are carried out when this is not the case. The print media covers the issues and stimulates a debate especially in editorials – the most prominent Lebanese papers like An-Nahar and As-Safir are highly influential in their commentaries – but there is little action taken as consequence.

This is the main complaint from readers. One financial advisor for a prominent Lebanese

bank and devourer of the printed press, who requested anonymity, said over the weekend, “We know everything that is going on, the reporters and commentators in general do a good job, but nothing changes and people in positions of power are not held responsible for their actions.”

“Some really critical subjects are avoided and reporters write between the lines in a kind of a code based on understatement and allusion.”

The advisor is one reader who trusts in the actions and standards of the reporter, but many people do not. Reporters throughout the world as a group have a more tarnished reputation than most. Enough

SNAPSHOTS



Last week’s storm left the Roman temples in Baalbeck covered in snow. The bad weather is expected to continue until the middle of the week

WEATHER



TODAY  
HIGH: 14  
LOW: 12



WEDNESDAY  
HIGH: 17  
LOW: 12



THURSDAY  
HIGH: 19  
LOW: 12



2.5m OF SNOW  
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