

105 years old woman takes oath as newest U.S. citizen

IranTimes: Sona Babai, from Gharahbagh, West Azerbaijan, was bent over by her 105 years last month, but she still had a smile and a sparkle in her eyes as she took the oath to become a United States citizen.

She placed her hand over her heart, pledged allegiance to the flag and became simultaneously one of the newest and oldest Americans.

Asked by the Los Angeles Times, what she planned to do now that she was a U.S. citizen, Babai did not have to think long: "I am an American," she said. "I'm going to vote." Babai was one of 7,000 people from 132 countries who became U.S. citizens together at naturalization ceremonies last month in Pomona, California.

As she walked forward and an announcer gave her age, the audience broke into applause. Babai said she wanted to be naturalized out of gratitude to America for embracing her children and allowing them and their children to thrive as engineers, dentists, restaurateurs, architects and in other chosen fields. Babai gave birth to 10 children in Iran. Six of them are still alive and four of them are American citizens.

"American is a big umbrella that lets a lot of people under it be safe," she told reporters in Azeri that was translated by her son, Antoine. "Because of the good hearts of

the American people, I want to be part of them."

According to the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services, Babai is the fourth oldest person ever to be naturalized. The oldest was a 117 years old American in 1997. As a child, Babai remembers the disorder that surrounded the Constitutional Revolution 100 years ago and recalls hiding in a well to escape murderous bands that ravaged her village.

At the age of 12, she was kidnapped by a distant relative who wanted her for his bride, according to her son. Despite the difficult beginning, the marriage last 84 years and Babai said she grew to love her mother in law so much that she still kisses the woman's photo every night before going to bed. Neither Sona nor her husband, Mokhtar, ever became literate, but they respected education and heard about the benefits of American schooling. They sent two sons to Louisiana State University. They eventually moved to California and opened a French restaurant in Palm Desert. Two sisters followed their brothers and settled in Irvine, California.

After Mokhtar died at the age of 103 in 1991, the four American children arranged to bring their mother to America. She arrived six years ago.

Regime orders Internet slowed

Iran Times: The regime has ordered Iran's Internet service providers (ISPs) to reduce the speed of service to homes and Internet cafes in what appears to be a continuing efforts to reduce Internet access.

The state news agency quoted an unnamed Communications Ministry official as saying ISPs were now "forbidden" to provide service to homes and safe and faster than 128 kilobytes per second (kps), while the standard is 256 kps or 512 kps with even higher speeds becoming more common internationally. That means it will take much more

times for Iranians to download anything from the Internet or to upload. Only homes and cafes are impacted. Businesses and government offices are exempt.

With the drive around the world toward faster Internet access, the only logical reason for the move to slow access is to make it harder for Iranians to work with the Internet.

The reform daily Etamad, reporting on the showdown order, said, "Once more, one of the tools for providing information is faced with new government red lines and restrictions."

Iran-Maldives-Football

Iran's National Youth Football Team beat Maldives 3 to 1 in 2006 Doha Asian Games here on Wednesday night. Arash Borhani scored at 15th minute of the first half, Maziar Zare on 22nd minute of the same half, and Adel Kaj-Kolah two minute before the end of the game.

Defending champions Iran thus got the defence of their title off to a winning start with a 3-1 win over the Maldives. But at least the Indian Ocean side didn't suffer as they did the last time these two sides met when Iran racked up a 17-0 scoreline in a World Cup qualifier in 1997.

Iran went into the match in a state of turmoil having been banned then reinstated by FIFA at the weekend in a row with the Tehran government over interference in footballing affairs.

Iran, coached by veteran Brazilian Rene Simoes, were always on top in the Group D clash but will regret not adding to their total.

"I am upset that we only won 3-1," said Simoes.

"It's worth three points. We are the defending champions, but this is a new team, it's not the same as the one four years ago."

Mehdi Mahdavia is on his way out

Hamburger SV defender Mehdi Mahdavia is on his way out and won't receive a new contract this summer when his current deal expires, the bi-weekly kicker sports magazine reported Thursday.

Assessing Mahdavia's potential to help his club to avoid relegation for the first time in team history, the football journal wrote, "His time in Hamburg has run out and that's the way he is presenting himself (on the pitch) for several months."

The magazine added in its analysis that Mahdavia as well as several other HSV players, had only "limited capabilities" to really help their club in the relegation struggle.

Hamburg's local press reported earlier that HSV's management won't extend Mahdavia's contract, given his high salary - estimated at 2.3 million euros a year - and his recent woeful performances in the Bundesliga and the Euro-



pean Champions League.

The 29-year-old former Pirouzi striker who joined Hamburg in 2001 from VfL Bochum, has repeatedly expressed interest in staying at the club.

A self-pronounced Bundesliga title contender, HSV are ranked 17th in the 18-team

Iranian pitcher wins Series-in Japan

IranTimes: The St. Louis Cardinals may have won the World (really the North American) Series of baseball last month, but across the Pacific the Nippon Ham Fighters won the Japan Series behind the skilled pitching of Yu Darvish, their half-Iranian star.

The 20 year old has an Iranian father and a Japanese mother. He has been one of the biggest names in Japanese baseball since high school. He passed up college to go straight into Japanese major league baseball. Darvish has been looked upon as something of a novelty due to his mixed parentage. A few years ago, he said, "Right now, I'm drawing a lot of attention because of my ethnicity and my name, but those things don't matter. I want to compete based on my ability."

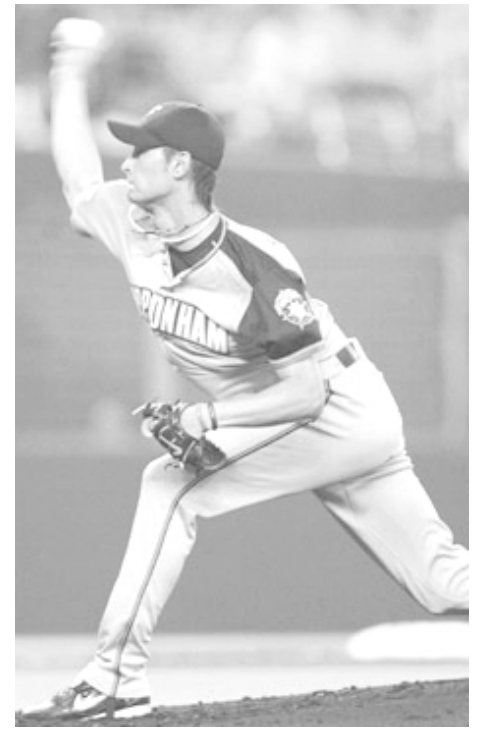
Yu's father is an Iranian businessman and former Iranian soccer player who played for the Florida State football team when he was in college.

The right-handed signed with the Nippon Ham Fighters in December 2004. The team name, which produces much head-scratching among Americans, comes from the team's owner, the Nippon Ham Corporation. Last month, in only Darvish's second season in the majors, Darvish pitched eight innings to lead his team to a 4-1 victory over the Chunichi Dragons to clinch the Japan Series' best-of-seven championship for the team that is based on Japan's northern island of Hokkaido.

Hokkaido had never even hosted a Japan Series game before last month. The Nippon Ham Fighters had only moved to the island three years ago from Tokyo. The franchise last won the Japan Series in 1962. This season saw a remarkable turnaround for the team, which finished last year an excrable 16 1/2 games out of first place.

Darvish was picked to pitch the first game in the series, which the Fighters lost. They then won three straight games, and Darvish was picked to pitch the next game.

Darvish started that game in a rocky way. He let Chunichi load the bases early on and then score a run on an infield single. But



that was all Darvish gave Chunichi. He faced Chunichi for eight innings and struck out six while walking three and giving up eight hits.

In the third inning, the radar gun clocked one of his pitches at 153 kph (95mph), a new career high for the young pitcher.

Early in 2005, he was been grounded after being caught smoking underage. Under Japanese law, men have no right to smoke until they are 20.

A picture of Darvish smoking in a pachinko parlor appeared in a weekly gossip magazine. Yu was promptly confined to his team dormitory and ordered to perform community service as punishment.

As a proper Japanese, Yu was publicly contrite. "I am very sorry for breaking the hearts of my fans," he said. "I will focus on playing baseball and make sure nothing like this ever happens again."

In December 2004, he signed for the maximum rookie salary, Y15 million (\$145,000). He also got a signing bonus of Y100 million (almost \$1million). American scouts are said to be eyeing him.

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Woprld Stop Investing ...

foreign investment (i.e., stock purchases) in the oil industry. FDI counts actual ownership of a significant share of a business; UNCTAD uses 10 percent as its threshold. But foreign funding in oil and gas development was also poor last year. Central Bank Governor Ebrahim Sheybani announced that Iran's economy grew only 4.7 percent (on an annual basis) in the first quarter of the Persian year, down from 7.1 percent for the same period last year. He blamed that on slow development in the oil sector resulting from lack of investment and a decrease in exploration. The bank said the oil sector's growth was the lowest among all economic sectors in the first quarter.

Iran has always had problems attracting foreign investment. Massive bureaucracy and a judicial system that is not trusted are among the factors that discourage investment. In the past year, the confrontation over the nuclear issue and President Ahmadi-nejad's anti-western diatribes have added discouragement.

But last year, months before Ahmadi-nejad won election, a survey of the world's 60 largest countries by the Economist Intelligence Unit, the research arm of The Economist

magazine, ranked Iran dead last as a desirable locale in which to invest.

The EIU looked at such things as economic stability, policies toward private investment, financing, infrastructure and the political environment in judging whether a country looked like a good place to invest over the next five years.

Iran came in at the very bottom with Nigeria in 59th. The 60 countries surveyed, while less than one-third of the UN's membership, account for more than 95 percent of the world's economic activity.

Iran's attraction of a mere \$30 million in foreign investment last year is put into some perspective when it is realized that the country of Saint Lucia, a sand spit of an island in the Caribbean with a population of less than 200,000, attracted \$112 million, or almost four times as much as Iran, last year.

Within the Middle East, Iran and Yemen were the only countries to attract less foreign investment in 2005 than in 2004. The UAE ranked first in the Middle East, attracting \$12 billion in foreign investment last year, followed by Egypt with \$5.4 billion and Saudi Arabia with \$4.6 billion. Egypt has a population almost the same as Iran's but attracted 179 times as much foreign direct investment. And Egypt is not generally considered a favourable locale in which to invest.

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U.S. harasses ...

a total retraction.

A former congressional staffer said the scholarly editing issue and the basketball issue indicate that the officials at the Treasury Department who handle Iran sanctions "are not under adult supervision." He told the Iran Times, "This shows that a bunch of lawyer-bureaucrats are running the system. Normally in government, there is a political appointee who oversees such bureaucrats and subjects their ideas to a laugh test

before they go public. That obviously hasn't been done here."

He said the surprising thing was that after its embarrassment over the editing issue, Treasury would "step in it again."

The BBC said treasury has been contacting players, asking them for details about their contracts for the names of the Americans who helped arrange those contracts.

Treasury spokeswoman Molly Millerwise said it was standard procedure to enter into talks with any party suspected of violating the embargo, but she said she could not confirm or deny any individual investigations.