

# NEWS ON IRAN

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## DOMESTIC

### Protests

*Iran Zamin*, Jan. 29 - Taxi drivers in Makkou staged a strike and announced that if their demands are not met they will continue the action. Reports say that most residents of Makkou support the strikers.

### Political prisoner executed

Voice of Mojahed, Jan. 22 - This week, the Iranian regime secretly executed Reza Yahya'i, 37, a Mojahedin sympathizer. A former political prisoner, he was detained seven months ago. He is survived by his wife and child.

### Rising divorce rate

*Ressalat*, Jan. 28 - The director of the central province's identification registration organization said that divorce rate in the first six months of this year rose three-fold relative to last year. He quoted Judicial officials as blaming economic problems and the resultant psychological pressures, cultural and age differences as the primary reasons for the increase in the divorce rate.

### Cinemas segregated

AFP, Jan. 23 - Tehran's media reported that officials in Isfahan have decided to segregate cinemas to uphold Islamic regulations. These reports say that ticket counters, entrances, seats and exists for men and women will be separated.

### High prices

Voice of Mojahed, Jan. 25 - Prices of basic commodities continue to rise. In Tehran, the price of potatoes rose 10%, beets 20%, white bread 100% and baked bread 75%. In the port city of Anzali, one small white fish sells for \$10. In Zanjan, the price of potatoes rose by 25%.

### Inflation reaches 120%

Radio France, Jan. 24 - An economics professor at Paris University said while the Iranian regime has put the inflation rate at 70%, the real figure based on various economic indices is between 100 to 120%. He added: The Iranian regime has tried to increase the share of taxes in the budget. Of course low income people carry the major burden of the taxes. Four percent of the Iranian population hold more than 40% of the country's revenues.

### Corruption

BBC, Jan. 21 - The former head of the Tobacco company had provided the Islamic Propaganda Organization and the Martyrs and the Encyclopedia

foundations with the funds embezzled from the company. Amounting to tens of millions of dollars, the funds are said to have been deposited abroad, including in Swiss banks.

### More money for military

Tehran radio, Jan. 21 - Another 2,200 bn. rials (\$1.257 bn.) were allotted to the ministry of defense for weapons purchases. This was approved in addition to the already approved 5,600 bn. rials (\$3.2 bn.) for defense spending by the Majlis.

### Iran magazine banned

Reuters, Jan. 27 - A Tehran court has sentenced a leading author and magazine editor to 35 lashes and six months imprisonment for "publishing lies" and insulting Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

The court also banned Abbas Maroufi from working as a journalist and closed his literary monthly *Gardoon*. The ruling said *Gardoon* had insulted Khamenei in an article allegedly comparing the Iranian leader to the late Shah of Iran Muhammed Reza Pahlavi, the paper said.

Maroufi was also convicted of "publishing lies" in a social psychology survey in *Gardoon* which concluded that depression was the dominant mood among Iranians, the daily *Kayhan* said.

### Sanctions hurting mullahs

AFP, Jan. 24 - The budget approved by the Iranian regime's Majlis indicates that the U.S. embargo is gradually having an effect. While the sixty trillion rial budget in 40% more than last year, the inflation rate may exceed 80% in the coming year.

## FOREIGN

### Tougher EU stance urged

*Fedre lands venn*, Jan. 28 - Kjell Magne Bondevik, former Norwegian foreign minister and the Christian Party's Parliamentary Group Leader, said that there's a consensus in the Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Commission about the need to initiate greater and tougher economic punishments against Iran. Norway's stance vis-a-vis the Iran regime is clearly defined, he said. The human rights abuses are condemned and deplored. I do not rule out the possibility of international sanctions against the Tehran regime.

*Vart Land*, Jan. 24 - Norwegian foreign minister Bjorn Tore Godal will ask the European Union to adopt a tougher stance against Iran vis-a-vis the Salman Rushdie affair. He said he will raise the matter with the

EU president, the Italian foreign minister. The Rushdie affair was taken up in the meeting of Nordic countries during which Godal called on Nordic countries to take the initiative in exerting more pressure on Iran.

### **Iran Intelligence Chief investigated**

Reuters, Jan. 26 - German prosecutors are investigating possible links between Iran's intelligence minister and the killing of four exiled Kurds in an inquiry that could lead to a warrant for his arrest.

Rolf Hannich, spokesman for the Federal Prosecutors' Office, said that the investigation of Ali Fallahiyan was prompted by allegations that Tehran had ordered five suspected Iranian agents to kill the Kurdish activists in Berlin in 1992.

"The (trial's) evidence indicates that it was a deed steered by an intelligence agency." The five defendants in the Berlin trial are charged with murdering three leaders of the Iranian Democratic Party of Kurdistan (DPK-I) and their translator in a Berlin restaurant in September 1992.

AFP, Jan. 25 - The director general of German intelligence services announced that Iranian intelligence services were directly involved in the murder of Iranian Kurds in Berlin in 1992. Testifying before the court dealing with Mykonos murders, Klaus Gruenewald said: "An Iranian regime's intelligence team had gone to Berlin to prepare for the assassination attempt."

### **Arms confiscated**

Reuters, Jan. 26 - Turkey seized several weeks ago an Iranian arms shipment intended for Moslem Hizbollah guerrillas in Lebanon.

On Wednesday Turkish Interior Minister Teoman Unusan said the seized cache included six anti-aircraft guns and more than 1,600 mortar bombs. He said it came from Iran on a risky overland route through the southeast corner of Turkey to the Syrian border.

### **Mullahs inciting Bahrain unrest**

*Al-Nodva*, Jan. 22 - The Saudi daily wrote: "So long as Tehran's policy rests upon terrorism, tension in the region will remain... Terrorism and continued instability are Iran's only political weapons, reflected in meddling in Bahrain's internal affairs... How much longer will Tehran pursue such conduct vis-a-vis her neighbors."

*Al-Yoam*, Jan. 21 - The Kuwaiti daily commented that unrest in Bahrain could not be the work of a few agitators. These actions are directed and organized from abroad by individuals who receive their training and instructions from Qom.

### **Penal code condemned**

ANSA, Jan. 25 - Italian MPs called for a revision in the Iranian regime's penal code which they described as violating recognized international human rights standards. Mrs. Giovanna Melandri, the Parliamentary Human Rights Committee chair announced the initiative at a press conference at the parliament.

### **Counterfeit dollars**

Reuters, Jan. 22 - Iran is using its official government mint to counterfeit U.S. \$100 bills, ABC News reported on Tuesday night, citing U.S. officials.

It quoted intelligence sources as saying Washington made "covert contacts" with Iran late last year to demand a stop to the alleged trade in phony bills "and may be prepared to do more."

One unidentified White House source said the alleged Iranian counterfeiting was "tantamount to an act of war."

## **FEATURE**

### **Parliamentary elections aggravate schism at the top**

*By the editor*

On Jan. 27, Rafsanjani and his cabinet met Khamenei to find a solution to what Rafsanjani had described as "a schism" in the ruling clique. The rift became public on January 18 when 16 members of Rafsanjani's cabinet signed a statement in support of Rafsanjani. The statement in question, signed by 10 of the 24 government ministers, called on the regime's operatives to vote for candidates in the parliamentary elections who would support Rafsanjani and his economic policies.

However, the most important ministers, including the foreign, the intelligence, the interior and the oil ministers, did not endorse the statement, indicating that the cleavage caused by Rafsanjani in the so-called Militant Clergy has backfired. *Ressalat* wrote in this regard: "The most cohesive government after the revolution suffered a split in ranks." A parliament deputy echoed the same theme: "Within and without Iran they say Rafsanjani's government has lost its cohesiveness."

The reason for issuing the statement in the first place was that Rafsanjani had failed to include five candidates of his choice in the 30-member slate fielded by the militant clergy.

The action enraged the rival faction. Two days later, 150 parliament deputies published a letter lashing out at Rafsanjani. Movahedi Savoji, an MP closely linked with Khamenei, publicly warned Rafsanjani that they may put "his incompetence" to vote and that they may bring up an interpellation against the cabinet ministers. That less than half the ministers signed the statement displays Rafsanjani's fragile standing. Since the statement was made public and after warnings by

Khamenei, 10 signatories indicated that they were going to withdraw their signatures.

The recent rift however must be seen beyond a split between Rafsanjani and his opponents. After Khomeini's death, the warring factions have gradually devoured each other. During the fourth Majlis elections in 1991, a coalition consisting of pro-Rafsanjani and pro-Khamenei currents purged the rival faction, the so-called Imam's line, from the reigns of power. Not even one member of that group was elected to the parliament. This time, it appears that Khamenei's supporters are trying to pull the rug from under Rafsanjani's feet. To ensure the election of their faction's candidates, the interior minister Besharati, a staunch pro-Khamenei figure, has already replaced some 160 local and state governors as well as other pro-Rafsanjani politicians prompting a loud protest by the lame-duck president.

But, Rafsanjani is not the only senior official having problems. The regime's supreme leader Khamenei lacks any religious authority among the traditional clergy. During his much publicized visit to Qom, the seat of the mullahs' power, he was shunned by all senior clergy who teach in various Qom seminaries. A few weeks ago, his most fervent promoter, mullah Ahmad Azari Qomi, issued a 28-page letter, rejecting Khamenei's claims to be the Marja' (the source of emulation). He also lambasted Rafsanjani and blamed the Majlis for the multitudes of acute problems confronting the regime.

Whatever the outcome of the parliamentary election farce, nothing will change as far as the mullahs' suppressive domestic and the aggressive foreign policies are concerned. One thing is certain, however. The election sham in March, as illegitimate as it is, will not reverse the clerics' demise; it will only aggravate it.