



Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center

Spotlight on Iran

September 2009—Shahrivar 1388
Editor: Raz Zimmt



Highlights of the week:

1. The Majles approves 18 out of the president's 21 ministerial candidates for his new government. The nominations of two women (the education minister and the welfare minister) as well as the nomination of the energy minister have not been approved.
2. Mixed reactions in Iran to the IAEA report on Iran's nuclear program: official sources emphasize the positive aspects of the report; some of the conservative media criticize the report and its author.
3. Uproar in Iran following a journalistic investigation questioning the validity of the PhD degree of the intended science and higher education minister.
4. Some 40 Iranian ambassadors abroad to be replaced, perhaps owing to their reservations regarding the government during the riots which broke out following the presidential elections.
5. Severe crisis threatens the future of Iran's tea industry.

The Majles approves 18 out of the president's 21 ministerial candidates

After four days of discussions, the Majles approved Thursday morning eighteen presidential candidates named by Ahmadinejad. The nominations of Fatemeh Ajorloo for welfare and social affairs minister, Sousan Keshavarz for education minister, and Mohammad Ali Abadi for energy minister were not approved. The rest of the president's candidates, including the nominations of Marzieh Vahid Dastjerdi for health minister, Ahmad Vahidi for defense minister, Manouchehr Mottaki for foreign minister, Haydar Moslehi for intelligence minister, Mostafa Najjar for interior minister, Kamran Daneshjou for science and higher education minister, and Masoud Mir Kazemi for oil minister were approved.

At the beginning of the discussion, which started on Sunday, the president introduced his suggested ministers and the fundamental guidelines of his government, asking the Majles members to approve his government ministers. The president noted that his victory in the elections was a sign that the Iranian people were interested in seeing his government continue down the path it began during its first tenure.

The president declared that his government would be committed to spreading justice, maintaining national dignity, achieving progress, and continuing the struggle against the "global arrogance". He further added that his government would cooperate with all the countries in the world with the exception of the "Zionist regime", and that it would continue supporting the oppressed peoples across the globe. Concerning the economic sphere, the president announced that his government would act towards increasing employment, reducing dependency on oil revenues, introducing reforms in the consumption model, supporting local production, solving the housing problems, strengthening the agricultural sector, and pushing reforms in the banking, tax, and insurance systems.

Later in his speech, Ahmadinejad praised his ministerial candidates, saying they were worthy, educated, and capable professionals who could do their job properly and tackle tough issues. Among other things, the president defended his intention to name three women to his government's cabinet, saying that the presence of women in the government would boost the self-confidence of Iran's women. He noted that his three women candidates were talented, capable in their respective fields, devoted, and revolutionary (various news agencies, August 30).

Later this week, the president's 21 ministerial candidates introduced themselves to the Majles, detailing their goals and plans for the coming years, while the Majles members held a discussion on the qualifications and suitability of each candidate.



It was no surprise when, during the discussion, the president's political rivals (including those belonging to the conservative bloc) expressed their objections to the nominations of several ministers. Ahmad Tavakkoli, the head of the Majles Research Center, expressed his reservations about the intention to appoint Kamran Daneshjou to science minister, seeing as he served as the president's election campaign chief during the latest presidential elections. He said that this could spur opposition to Daneshjou from extensive portions of society, including students, for which the minister of science and higher education is responsible. Tavakkoli also expressed his objection to the appointment of former defense minister Mostafa Najjar to interior minister because of his military background, and also to the appointment of inexperienced women, as he put it, to government ministers. Tavakkoli noted that the nominees had no sufficient economic experience and that 11 out of the president's ministerial candidates lacked any experience in their respective offices or had little experience at most. Tavakkoli also criticized the conduct of the outgoing government and accused the president that his previous government had acted against the law when it ignored state budget, illegally imported gas, and reduced work hours in the month of Ramadan (Alef, August 30).

Ali Motahhari, a Majles member on behalf of Tehran, also criticized the suggested government, saying it was weak. According to Motahhari, the government's main weakness stemmed from the fact that the president preferred to appoint obedient ministers who would not express their opinions and be loyal to him, rather than efficient and ethical ministers. He added that some of the ministerial candidates, including the oil, energy, and interior ministers, lacked any experience (Aftab, August 30).

During the discussion on Ahmad Vahidi's nomination for defense minister, several Majles members shouted "death to Israel". Vahidi, one of the suspects in the 1994 bombing of the Buenos Aires Jewish community center (AMIA), won wall-to-wall support from the Majles members (ISNA, September 1).

Mixed reactions in Iran to the IAEA report on Iran's nuclear program

Mixed reactions were heard in Iran this week to the report issued last week by Mohamed ElBaradei, the outgoing director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, about Iran's nuclear program.

Official Iranian sources preferred to emphasize the positive aspects of the report, saying it proved once again that Iran's nuclear program was meant for peace. Iran's permanent representative to the IAEA, Ambassador Ali Asghar Soltanieh, said in an interview to Fars News Agency that the report showed that Iran continued to cooperate with the agency according to its obligations, even though it would not yield to political pressure designed to force it to take measures which go beyond its legal obligations. Soltanieh noted that ElBaradei had thanked Iran for allowing IAEA inspectors to visit the heavy water reactor in Arak and expressed his appreciation of Iran's willingness to cooperate with the inspectors regarding the nuclear facility in Natanz. He added that Iran would never terminate the activity in the reactor of Arak because it was meant for civilian and medical needs. He said that allowing the inspectors to visit the reactor was a sign of Iran's transparency with regard to its peaceful nuclear activity, and its willingness to continue its nuclear activity while cooperating with IAEA. Soltanieh said that Iran would like to express its gratitude and appreciation to the outgoing director general of IAEA who, despite all the political pressure put on him, asserted time and again in all the reports he published that there was no evidence that Iran's nuclear program was intended for military uses. Iran expects the new director general to put an end to the claims brought up by the US regarding its nuclear program, which poison the atmosphere in which IAEA operates as a technical, professional organization (Fars, August 28).

Iran's Atomic Energy Organization chief Ali Akbar Salehi also noted that the report reflected a relatively reasonable response by IAEA to the demands of several hostile countries, and that it rejected their unfounded claims regarding Iran's nuclear program (Iran Daily, August 31).

In contrast, the conservative daily Jomhuri-ye Eslami criticized both the report and the outgoing director general of IAEA, claiming that ElBaradei's position in recent years has been ambivalent and that he was leaving a disgraceful legacy to his successor. According to an editorial published early this week, ElBaradei turned IAEA from a professional organization to a political one, pressured by Western countries. Even though the last published report recognizes that Iran's nuclear activity is meant for peace and points out positive measures taken by Iran, its wording enables the West to continue exerting pressure on Iran. The report argues once again that the accuracy of Iran's claims regarding its nuclear program cannot be

established, stresses its lack of cooperation with the Security Council's demands, and asserts that it is unwilling to implement the "additional protocol" of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Jomhuri-ye Eslami claims that that double standard, reflected in the dozens of reports published by ElBaradei about Iran's nuclear program, turned him from a professional element into a legal source overstepping his authority. His report allows political pressure on Iran to continue and provides his successor with the necessary fuel to continue such pressure according to American dictates (Jomhuri-ye Eslami, August 30).

The Tabnak website also claims that there is no reason to portray the report in a positive light. An article published on the website this week claims that despite the positive aspects of the report, upon careful investigation the report is detrimental to Iran. Among other things, it argues that Iran acted contrary to the demands of the IAEA Board of Governors and the Security Council, did not implement the supplementary protocol, and did not cooperate with the agency on alleviating the concerns about the military aspects of its nuclear program.

Furthermore, the report also touches upon Iran's missile program, asking it to discuss with the agency the engineering design of the Shahab-3 missile to clarify that there is no connection between Iran's missile program and its nuclear program. The report also demands a discussion with Iran about the visit of a foreign expert on weapon systems. According to Tabnak, those issues constitute a serious violation of Iran's national sovereignty. Accordingly, the Iranian authorities should avoid expressing their satisfaction following the publication of the report and strongly condemn IAEA's persistence on groundless issues, which will continue its preoccupation with Iran's nuclear program for years to come (Tabnak, August 30).

The daily Keyhan has also dedicated this week's editorial to an analysis of the report's implications. According to Keyhan, the report confirms that Iran was able to solve all its technical problems towards expanding its uranium enrichment capabilities, and now has the technical capabilities required for any political decision it may make. The increase in the number of centrifuges in Natanz also indicates that the internal political crisis in Iran had no effect on the nuclear program's speed of growth.

According to Keyhan, in recent months Western countries have been exerting heavy pressure on IAEA to submit a negative report that would allow the implementation of Western strategy with regard to Iran. The West is currently determined to engage in negotiations with Iran, even though it understands that Iran feels no urgent need to negotiate and that the new Iranian government enjoys a better position that allows it to resist Western demands. The West is therefore interested to force Iran to agree to negotiations by threatening to step up sanctions against it. Western countries are nonetheless aware that in light of China and

Russia's opposition and also owing to other reasons, there is no chance for another round of sanctions against Iran. The West therefore decided to force IAEA to include in the latest report a reference to the "fake documents" pertaining to the so-called military aspects of Iran's nuclear program. Those efforts, meant to strengthen Europe's bargaining position vis-à-vis those who oppose the sanctions on Iran, failed and the latest report published by the agency indicates that it does not place any significance on Western claims regarding Iran's nuclear program (Keyhan, September 1).

Did the candidate for higher education minister lie about his PhD?

Reformist website Mowj-e Sabz-e Azadi has caused an uproar this week when it claimed that the candidate for science and higher education minister, Kamran Daneshjou, lied about his PhD degree and does not actually have one. The website referred to Daneshjou's claim of having a PhD in space engineering from a British university. Upon investigation, the website discovered that Daneshjou had never been issued a PhD by a British university or any university in Iran.

Among other things, the website reported that when it checked several articles published by Daneshjou in various magazines and websites, it became apparent that none of them had been written in a British university. His name also does not appear on the publication authors list in London's royal college library or the list of the Royal Institute of Science and Technology in Manchester, two higher education institutions mentioned on the website of the Tehran Science and Technology University, in which Daneshjou used to teach, as two places in which the ministerial candidate ostensibly studied. His name also does not appear in the thesis papers archive of any British university or on the list of PhD graduates in Britain. According to the website, Daneshjou was also not awarded a PhD degree by the Science and Technology University or by Sharif University of Technology in Tehran.

The website discovered that Daneshjou was expelled from Britain in 1989 due to his participation in protest activities against Salman Rushdie, the author of *Satanic Verses*, after Iranian leader Ayatollah Khomeini issued a religious ruling against him. As a result, Daneshjou was denied return to Britain and could not therefore be awarded a PhD by any British university (Mowj-e Sabz-e Azadi, August 28).

Following the publication of the affair, the chairman of the Majles Education Committee, Ali Abbaspour Tehrani, noted that while Daneshjou did not have an official university PhD degree, Iran's Science and Higher Education Ministry recognized him as a PhD based on his academic record. According to Tehrani, the Majles Education Committee investigated the affair and discovered that Daneshjou had completed his PhD studies in London's Royal

College, but was not awarded a PhD diploma due to his expulsion from Britain. However, he was given a chance to defend his thesis in Amir Kabir University in Tehran and therefore the Science Ministry approved his PhD degree, even though he does not possess a formal PhD diploma (Farda, August 28).



Daneshjoo on the University of Science and Technology website, <http://www.iust.ac.ir>

A similar uproar was sparked in Iran last August, when it became apparent that Ali Kordan, who was appointed interior minister by President Ahmadinejad, lied about his doctorate in law supposedly awarded by Oxford University, and that his diploma was fake. After the affair was exposed on Iranian media, Oxford University denied awarding such a degree to Kordan. As public and political criticism grew, a parliamentary investigation commission was established to look into the affair. In September 2008 Kordan had to admit that his diploma was indeed fake. In his defense, however, he claimed that he had gotten the diploma from a person who introduced himself as a representative of Oxford University in Tehran, and that he did not know that it was fake. Kordan was consequently forced to resign following a Majles no-confidence vote in November 2008.

Coming round of appointments in Iran's embassies abroad

Iranian sources have reported in recent days that President Ahmadinejad intends to relieve of duty 40 Iranian ambassadors currently serving in various diplomatic missions abroad. According to the report, the president intends to terminate the service of Iranian ambassadors who in the past several months have been sympathetic to the riots which broke out in Iran following the last presidential elections, and appoint in their stead "experts who are loyal to the principles of the revolution". An Iranian diplomat serving in the US told reformist website Rooz that after the last presidential elections, several Iranian diplomats expressed their reservations about the instruction issued by Iran's Foreign Ministry to photograph demonstrations of Iranians held outside of Iran's diplomatic missions abroad, as well as the Foreign Ministry's demand to express support of Ahmadinejad's government by writing articles in foreign press and giving interviews to foreign media.

Fars News Agency reported that the round of appointments was intended to bring Iranian diplomats who had been serving abroad for particularly long periods of time back to Iran. While he presented foreign minister candidate Manouchehr Mottaki for the approval of the Majles this week, President Ahmadinejad addressed the need to carry out reforms in the Foreign Ministry (Fars, September 1; Rooz Online, September 2). Referring to the report, Foreign Ministry Spokesman Hassan Qashqavi said that replacing ambassadors and mission heads after a three year period was a common practice (Fars, September 2).

What is more, it has been reported in recent days that the president intends to appoint several of his close associates, who served as ministers in his previous government, as ambassadors abroad. According to those reports, Ahmadinejad intends to appoint outgoing health minister Kamran Bagheri Lankarani as Iran's ambassador to China; outgoing science minister Mohammad Mehdi Zahedi as the ambassador to the United Arab Emirates; and outgoing interior minister Sadegh Mahsouli as Iran's ambassador to the UN.

After Ahmadinejad was elected for president four years ago, several dozen Iranian ambassadors serving abroad were relieved of duty, including the ambassadors in London, Paris, and Berlin.

Is Iran's tea industry on the brink of collapse?

Tea is still considered one of Iran's most popular drinks; however, ILNA News Agency has reported this week that Iran's tea industry is probably on the brink of collapse.

Tea is mostly grown in the provinces of Gilan and Mazandaran in northern Iran. In the beginning of the current decade, about 75 thousand Iranian families made their living by growing tea, mostly in small plots of land of less than 40 acres. Now, the estimated number of tea growing families is about 55 thousand.

Iran's tea industry has been in a severe crisis for the past several years. According to local tea growers, the government policy has left the industry on the brink of bankruptcy. Among other things, the government encouraged cheap tea imports from abroad, did not combat tea smuggling into Iran, and did little to protect local tea growing and support tea growing families. In 2004 it was even decided to close down the Iranian tea association. In recent years the government has also shut down a considerable number of tea factories and left many tea growers out of work. Smuggling tea into Iran (mostly from Sri Lanka and India) was a deadly blow to the local tea industry. ILNA agency reports that smuggled tea accounts for about 90 percent of all tea imported to Iran.



This week, a source related to the tea industry has warned that the tea crisis could lead to the bankruptcy of 50 out of the 156 tea factories operating in Iran. In an interview granted to ILNA, the chairman of the management committee of tea growers in northern Iran said that despite repeated appeals from the tea growers to the government, nothing has been done in recent years to solve the crisis. He noted that President Ahmadinejad had instructed to solve the crisis in his visit to Gilan province last year; however, the numerous meetings held in the course of the past year with regard to that matter had absolutely no effect. He claims that, given all the meetings held about the tea industry crisis with Agriculture Ministry officials, it appears that the ministry is set on destroying the local tea industry. He further added that in the past year, many tea factories have suffered severe money shortages and continuous losses. He also noted that no countries were buying Iranian tea anymore and that in light of the embargo on Iranian tea exports abroad, even Iraq, Iran's neighbor, avoids purchasing Iranian tea (ILNA, August 31).

Picture of the week: after 20 years, cleaning works on Tehran's Azadi Tower¹



¹ A symbol of Tehran, Azadi Tower marks the city entrance. It was built by the Shah in 1971 in commemoration of the 2,500th anniversary of the Persian Empire.