



Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center

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Public reactions in Iran to the exposure of the nuclear plant: the exposure of the enrichment facility is an ace up Iran's sleeve on the eve of the commencement of talks with the West

Following the exposure of the second uranium enrichment facility in Iran and the strong criticism from the international community, Iran has stressed once again last week that it acted in accordance with its international commitments and on the basis of the agreements it signed with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

In an interview granted to Iranian TV channel IRINN, Iranian nuclear energy chief Ali Akbar Salehi criticized Western reactions to the exposure of the new uranium enrichment facility. Salehi stressed that the facility was intended for civilian purposes, and that the update given by Iran to the IAEA on the activity of the facility was in accordance with its international obligations and cooperation with the agency. He criticized Western reactions to the exposure of the facility, saying that the West condemned Iran both when it notified IAEA about its nuclear facilities on time, when it was late in notifying the agency, and when it did not notify the agency at all. Iran is an independent country and will never give up its nuclear program, Salehi said (IRINN, September 25).

Alaeddin Boroujerdi, chairman of the Majles National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, also addressed the new enrichment facility, saying that Western countries and the US must not make Iran regret its cooperation with the IAEA beyond its legal obligations. Boroujerdi defined Western countries' stance on the new facility as an unreasonable, unrealistic campaign to besmirch Iran. He said that Iran was entitled to continue its peaceful nuclear activities, and that it had notified the IAEA about the facility sooner than stipulated in the agreements it had signed, i.e., more than 180 days before the introduction of nuclear substances into the facility (ISNA, September 26).

Last week Iranian press has also extensively addressed the exposure of the enrichment facility near Qom. An editorial published in the conservative daily Jomhuri-ye Eslami says that following the exposure of the nuclear plant by Iran, the West was put on the defensive. Iran, says the article, is under no obligation to report its nuclear activity to Western countries, but rather to the IAEA. The belligerent accusations by Western leaders against Iran on the eve of the Iran-G5+1 talks gave way to a defensive position in light of the West's failure to stop the Iranian nuclear program. The US failed in its attempt to mobilize international support to increase economic pressure against Iran, and even the opinions of the G5+1 countries are split, with each attempting to realize their financial interests vis-à-vis Iran. Jomhuri-ye Eslami concluded that by its announcement on the activity on the new nuclear plant, Iran managed to surprise Western countries and make it clear that even the publication of the report on

their agreement with Russia cannot let them take the initiative in the coming negotiations with Iran (Jomhuri-ye Eslami, September 27).

Furthermore, the daily Keyhan defined the exposure of the new nuclear plant as an ace up Iran's sleeve on the eve of the talks with the West. The exposure of the plant, according to Keyhan, was a shock to the Western diplomatic system and media. The announcement on the exposure of the plant, said the daily, put Iran in a better bargaining position in its coming talks with Western countries due to two reasons. First, the multitude of nuclear plants allows Iran to neutralize the threats made by the West of launching a military offensive against Iran, and with the West unable to militarily threaten Iran, the position of the West in the coming talks grows considerably weaker. Second, by exposing the nuclear plant, Iran actually removed the issue of suspending uranium enrichment from the agenda. The West, too, has now reached the conclusion that the best it can do is to monitor the enrichment process, and that the demand to suspend the uranium enrichment is now meaningless (Keyhan, September 27).

Following a two-day convention: the Assembly of Experts swears allegiance to the Supreme Leader while Rafsanjani remains politically isolated

Following a two-day convention, the first since the presidential elections and the outbreak of the current political crisis in Iran, the Assembly of Experts published a declaration expressing unconditional support of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and his policy. In the closing comments of the assembly convention, which was read by the assembly deputy chairman, Ayatollah Ahmad Khatami, the assembly declared its unconditional support of the Supreme Leader and his policy with regard to the political crisis in Iran, which began following the presidential elections.

The assembly asserted that Khamenei was the only person fit to serve as the leader of Iran and declared the trust it had for his leadership. The closing comments further read that the riots which broke out in Iran following the publication of the election results reflected a scheme concocted by foreigners with the cooperation of "agents from the inside" in an attempt to destabilize the Iranian regime. The assembly also congratulated President Ahmadinejad for winning the elections (various news agencies, September 24).

Nevertheless, the assembly's support of Khamenei was obtained not without internal disagreements between most of its members and some other members, mainly the assembly chairman Ali-Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, over the strategy required to deal with Iran's ongoing political crisis.

Early during the convention of the assembly, Rafsanjani addressed the political situation in Iran, stressing the need for keeping the people united, acting within the confines of the law, and reinforcing the connections between the various groups of the Iranian people. He also demanded Iran's broadcasting service to avoid airing the "confessions" of those detained in the latest riots. Rafsanjani also addressed a recently formulated plan to end the current crisis (ILNA, September 22).

The closing comments of the assembly convention did not, however, reflect Rafsanjani's statements and was even read in his absence. Ahmad Khatami, who, as already mentioned, read the closing comments, noted that the closing comments were supported by Rafsanjani and that the latter's absence from the closing session was a routine matter. Rafsanjani's absence, however, was perceived as an expression of his reservations about the assembly's decisions.

The plan to end the political crisis, which was addressed by Rafsanjani, was also not mentioned in the assembly's closing comments. Fars news agency reported that the Assembly of Experts had not discussed that plan at all. The agency cited assembly members claiming that the plan had been independently formulated by Rafsanjani without consulting the assembly members or the Supreme Leader, and therefore could not be accepted by the assembly (Fars, September 23). Ayatollah Ahmad Khatami, considered one of President Ahmadinejad's most ardent supporters in the Iranian religious establishment, said in an interview to Fars that Rafsanjani's was a private plan and his own personal responsibility. He further noted that Rafsanjani's plan, called "Exit strategy from the current situation in the country", reflected his personal opinions only and had not even been brought up in the convention of the Assembly of Experts (Fars, September 25).

Reformist website Rooz reported last week that ahead of the assembly convention, which had been postponed on several occasions, several assembly members believed that the two reformist leaders Mir-Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karoubi should be called to appear in order to present their claims regarding the presidential elections and the political crisis; however, their proposal was overruled by the majority of the assembly members. Another proposal, to summon the Supreme Leader for consultations with the assembly on the current political crisis, was overruled by the majority of the assembly members as well (Rooz, September 24).



The Assembly of Experts meets with the Supreme Leader (September 24)

Unusual public criticism was voiced during the convention of the Assembly of Experts by Grand Ayatollah Ali-Mohammad Dastgheyb, who spoke against the assembly's silence over the political happenings in Iran and its failure to establish an inquiry commission to investigate those happenings. He claimed that the assembly could not remain silent faced with the conduct of the authorities during the elections and the riots which broke out in their wake, and with the ongoing incitement against Rafsanjani and reformist bloc leaders. He also called on the assembly to summon Mohammad Khatami, Mousavi, and Karoubi to the assembly in order to present their claims (Emrooz, September 24). Last week, Dastgheyb's statements were strongly criticized by conservative circles, with some Assembly of Experts members even calling for his impeachment from the assembly. It should be noted that last month Dastgheyb demanded that the Assembly of Experts convene urgently to discuss the latest happenings in Iran and the Iranian public's demands, as reflected, according to Dastgheyb, in the demonstrations which broke out following the presidential elections.

Consisting of 86 clerics, the Assembly of Experts, according to the constitution of the Islamic republic, is responsible for monitoring the Supreme Leader's activity, appointing his heir, and even impeaching him in case it finds him no longer fit to serve in his position. Most assembly members, recently elected in December 2006, are currently affiliated with the traditional-conservative bloc.

Revolutionary Guards penetrate deeper into Iran's economy: a corporation affiliated with the Revolutionary Guards won the major offering of shares of Iran Telecommunication Company; one of the Revolutionary Guards' economic companies becomes a bank

Earlier last week, Tose'e-ye E'temad-e Mobin, a corporation some of whose companies are affiliated with Iran's Revolutionary Guards, won the largest transaction ever to take place on the Iranian stock exchange, in which fifty percent plus one share of the shares of Iran

Telecommunication Company (TCI) were offered to the public. The company shares, with a total worth of about 7.8 billion dollars, were issued on Sunday within just half an hour (various news agencies, September 27).

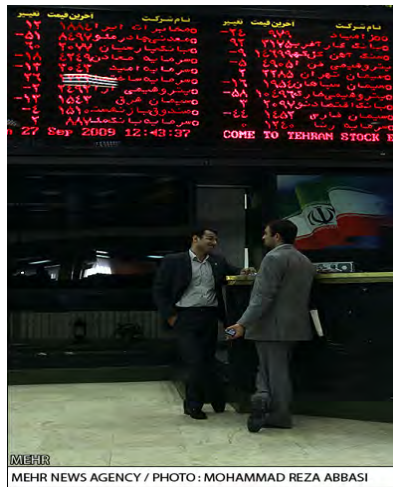
The Tose'e-ye E'temad-e Mobin corporation is made up of two investment companies: Tose'e-ye E'temad and Shaharyar Mahestan, as well as communications and electronics company Iran Mobin. According to reports which have appeared on Iranian media in the past several weeks, the two investment companies are affiliated with the Revolutionary Guards' Cooperation Fund, which includes dozens of economic and trade companies involved in the various spheres of Iran's economy.

The public offering of the shares, which was postponed several times in the course of the past weeks, was marred by doubts about its implementation. Several hours before the offering, Iran's privatization organization announced suddenly that Pishgaman-e Kavir Yazd, a corporation which was also supposed to compete for the transaction, dropped out as it had not received the security clearance necessary for purchasing the telecommunication company's shares. On September 28, reformist daily Mardom Salari reported that while the privatization organization claimed that the corporation had willingly given up its participation in the offering, parties from the corporation said that it was the privatization organization which informed it that it would not be able to participate in the offering owing to security reasons.

After Pishgaman-e Kavir Yazd dropped out, only two contenders remained in the major transaction: the Tose'e-ye E'temad-e Mobin corporation and Mehr Eqtesad Iranian, an economic group which, according to several reports, is also affiliated with the Revolutionary Guards and the Basij militia forces.

Iran Telecommunication Company's share offering to a corporation affiliated with the Revolutionary Guards triggered severe criticism and even a demand to cancel the transaction. Some of the Iranian media claimed that offering the shares of a government company to a "semi-government" company does nothing to achieve the objectives of the privatization policy (Alef, September 27; Asr-e Iran, September 28). According to an editorial published last week in the daily Jomhuri-ye Eslami, the increasing presence of "semi-government companies" in the Iranian economy restricts Iran's private sector, which may lead to the collapse of the privatization policy in the near future. The newspaper suggested that Clause 44 in Iran's constitution (which makes it possible to privatize government-held assets) be changed so as to limit the ability of semi-government bodies to purchase privatized government companies (Jomhuri-ye Eslami, September 29). Similar criticism was voiced by Majles member Elias

Naderan, who even addressed the Economy Minister asking for explanations regarding the transaction (Asr-e Iran, September 29).



Several days before the Tose'e-ye E'temad Mobin corporation won the giant transaction on Tehran's stock exchange, Iranian media reported that Iran's Monetary and Credit Council had approved the transformation of Ansar Monetary and Credit institution (also affiliated with the Revolutionary Guards) into a bank (Mehr, September 23).

Will the kings of Iran be removed from history textbooks?

Yaqub Tavakoli, the head of the history research team in the Iranian Ministry of Education, stirred a controversy last week when he said that due to coming changes in history textbooks, chapters pertaining to the political and military history of Iran's kings would be gradually removed. According to Tavakoli, they will be substituted by new chapters on important Muslim thinkers and philosophers in Iran. He noted that the Ministry of Education also intended to put more emphasis on the Islamic revolution in history textbooks (Mehr, September 22).

Tavakoli's statement was met with strong criticism from Iranian education professionals and historians. Historian Khosro Mo'tazed fiercely criticized the suggested history textbook reform, saying that the changes mentioned by Tavakoli were unfeasible. The kings of Iran, Mo'tazed said, were an inseparable part of Iran's historical heritage and deeply rooted among the Iranian people. He further added that Iran's ancient history could not be taken out of Iranian history, and that those who wanted to remove Iran's kings from textbooks intended to strike a blow against Iran's history and destroy its future (Tabnak, September 26).



From Shahnameh, "Book of Kings", Iran's national epos, written by the poet Ferdowsi in the 11th century

In the wake of the strong reactions to Yaqub Tavakoli's announcement, a senior Education Ministry official had to emphasize last week that Tavakoli's statement was only a suggestion. The Education Ministry official in charge of textbooks related that a plan to introduce changes in history textbooks was indeed being examined, but that no final decision had been made (Mehr, September 23).

It should be noted that Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei has recently addressed the need to introduce changes in the curricula of social sciences and humanities faculties in Iran's universities to adapt them to Iranian and Islamic values. Consequently, the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution in Iran issued an instruction to update the social sciences and humanities curricula in the universities.

On several occasions over the past several years, Iranian senior officials have also addressed the need to update school textbooks. For example, an Iranian Education Ministry official said during an education convention held in Tehran in January 2008 that Iran's textbooks must be based on the values and beliefs commonly held in Iran. At the same convention, the deputy minister of education criticized the textbooks in use in Iran, saying they were not based on the study and education philosophy of the Islamic republic (Fars, January 22, 2008). It should be noted that as part of the curricula reform enacted following the Islamic revolution (1979), history subjects pertaining to Iranian kings were significantly reduced.

Getting married in Iran is an expensive business

According to a research conducted by Shahid Beheshti University in Tehran, which was reported last week by Mehr news agency, an Iranian living in Tehran has to pay an average of 30 billion rials (about 30 thousand dollars) to get married. Sociologist Majid Abhari, the head of the research team, said that the high cost of an average wedding had to do (among other things) with the expenses of purchasing wedding rings, a wedding cake, wedding dress, and flowers, as well as renting a wedding venue, cars, and photographers. Abhari further

added that purchasing an apartment and a dowry were the main concerns on the minds of young Iranians wanting to get married.

According to Abhari, the cost of living in Tehran was the main reason for the increase in the age at marriage among young people in Tehran. He noted that in the second half of the past Iranian year (September 2008-March 2009) the marriage rate in Iranian young people dropped by 70 percent. In addition, last year saw a 11-percent increase in Iran's divorce rate, mainly in men aged 25 to 29 and women aged 20 to 24 (Mehr, September 26).

In recent years Iranian senior officials were asked to address Iran's marriage crisis, reflected both in the continuing increase in the average age at marriage and the increase in divorce rates. Last year, former interior minister Mostafa Pour-Mohammadi even suggested that the government encourage the institution of temporary marriage (Mut'a or Sigheh marriage, permitted in Shi'ite Islam) in order to help young Iranians who are faced with special problems as a result of the continuing increase in the age at marriage.

Picture of the week: Shahab-3 missile launched during a missile exercise conducted by the Revolutionary Guards during "Sacred Defense Week" (marking the beginning of the Iran-Iraq War)

