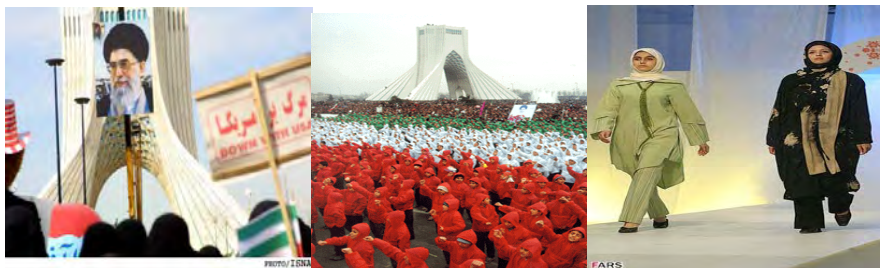




**Intelligence and  
Terrorism Information Center**

**Spotlight on Iran**

November 2009—Aban 1388  
Week of November 12 – November 19  
Editor: Raz Zimmt



**Highlights of the week**

- ✓ Strong reactions in Iran to Russia's announcement of yet another delay in the completion of the Bushehr nuclear reactor
- ✓ Formation of tenth government complete nearly four months after Ahmadinejad's swearing-in ceremony
- ✓ Tehran's subway network causes a severe political crisis between the president and his critics
- ✓ Despite the authorities' continuing efforts, the use of satellite dishes is on the rise
- ✓ How much time do Iranian women spend on the phone per day?

## **Strong reactions in Iran to Russia's announcement about yet another delay in the completion of the Bushehr nuclear reactor**

The announcement of Russia's Energy Minister Sergei Shmatko early last week about yet another delay in the completion of the Bushehr nuclear reactor, which was supposed to come online by year's end, caused strong reactions in Iran. In a conversation with journalists, Shmatko said that, due to technical difficulties, the Russian engineers would not be able to meet the deadline they had set for themselves.

Last week, Hashmatollah Falahat-Pisha, a member of the Majles National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, accused Russia of once again selling Iran to the Americans for a high profit. He noted that the Russians had always used Iran as a negotiation chip in their dealings with other world powers (Khabar Online, November 16).

Kazem Jalali, yet another member of the Majles National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, also criticized Russia's conduct towards Iran. In an interview to the "Iranian Diplomacy" website (Diplomasi-ye Irani, November 16), Jalali said that the continuing delays in the completion of the reactor in Bushehr cultivated mistrust towards Russia in Iranian public opinion. He added that Russia's reluctance to follow through on its commitments to Iran may compromise the strategic relations between the two countries. Jalali noted that Iran did not accept the Russian claim that the completion of the Bushehr reactor was postponed due to technical difficulties, and that Iran had made it clear to Russia on several occasions that Iran believed that the delays in the construction of the reactor were the result of Russia's political considerations.

Before the announcement of the Russian Energy Minister, the reformist daily Aftab-e Yazd published an editorial criticizing Russia, addressing the reports published during the last week about Russia's delaying the delivery of the S-300 anti-aircraft defense system. The Russians look for every possible opportunity to deny the Iranians' rights, the article says, serving the interests of the US and Europe while expecting further concessions from Iran. The article complained about the continuing silence of Iranian senior officials over Russia's repeated violations of the agreements it had signed with Iran, including the ongoing delays in the completion of the nuclear reactor in Bushehr. The daily demanded that Iranian politicians stop turning a blind eye to a behavior which jeopardized Iran's national interests (Aftab-e Yazd, November 16).

The conservative daily Jomhuri-ye Eslami strongly condemned last week the implied threat made by Russia's President Medvedev to step up sanctions against Iran if diplomacy should

fail. An editorial published by the daily states that it is now clearer than ever that there is no real difference between the worldviews of the US and Russia about Iran's nuclear program. Recent developments show that the Russians cannot be counted on to follow through on their commitments to Iran. Medvedev's recent conduct vis-à-vis Iran, as reflected in his talks with President Obama, indicates that Russia has turned from a friendly neighboring country to a country which threatens Iran and attempts to implement the demands put forward by the US and Israel. However, Iran will not be affected by the threats and pressure exerted by Russia, and continue to act in accordance with its national interests. The Kremlin leaders must realize that their cooperation with the US over the nuclear issue does not serve Moscow well (Jomhuri-ye Eslami, November 17).

Furthermore, Asr-e Iran, a website affiliated with the pragmatic conservative bloc, suggested that Iran improve its relations with the international community to keep Russia from taking advantage of its exclusive relations with Iran to continue treating it in a humiliating fashion.

The reason that the Russians allow themselves to employ such an offensive approach towards the Iranians, according to Asr-e Iran, is that Iran put all of its eggs in one basket. This is true not only for weapon systems and relying on Russia for assistance with its nuclear program, but also in other economic spheres. For example, many Iranians prefer to spend their vacations in Russia.

In order to get out of that predicament, Iran must improve its position on the international scene and its relations with other Western countries, including the US. Relations with Russia are no more justified than relations with the US, which throughout history has not damaged Iran as much as Russia, a country that betrayed Iran again and again. If Iran improves its relations with the international community, such countries as Russia will not allow themselves to behave inappropriately towards Iran, since their relations with it will no longer be exclusive. The Iranian people deserve respect on the international scene, rather than the humiliating way it is treated by Russia (Asr-e Iran, November 17).

Meanwhile, published last week were the results of a public opinion poll of Iranian web surfers, performed by Russia's Ria Novosti news agency, about Iranians' views of Russia. The web surfers were asked about Russia's image in Iran. Out of the 1506 web surfers who took part in the survey, 92 percent replied that Russia had a negative image in Iran, while only 6.5 percent said that Russia had a positive image (Asr-e Iran, November 15).

## **Formation of tenth government complete nearly four months after Ahmadinejad's swearing-in ceremony**

Some four months after Ahmadinejad's swearing-in ceremony and two and a half months after 18 out of his 21 cabinet nominees were approved, last week the Majles approved Ahmadinejad's three cabinet nominees for energy, welfare, and education ministers. Majid Namju was approved as Energy Minister by a majority of 210 to 26, 19 abstained; Sadeq Mahsouli was approved as Welfare and Social Services Minister by a majority of 149 to 95, 21 abstained; Hamid Reza Baba'i was approved as Education Minister by a majority of 217 to 33, 13 abstained (various news agencies, November 15).

Sadeq Mahsouli, an engineer by trade, served as interior minister in Ahmadinejad's first government. Previously, Mahsouli served in various management positions in a number of provinces, in the Defense Ministry, and in the Revolutionary Guards.

Majid Namju, also an engineer by trade, served in a variety of positions in the spheres of engineering and construction in the Revolutionary Guards, as a member of the Kerman municipality, and as deputy minister of energy.

Hamid Reza Baba'i, a teacher and holder of a PhD in Islamic theology, served in a number of positions in the Iranian education system and was also a Majles member.



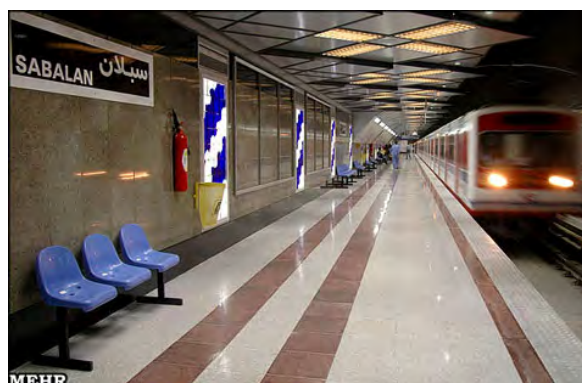
**Right to left: Namju, Baba'i, Mahsouli**

It should be noted that the cabinet nominations of Fatemeh Ajorloo for welfare minister, Sousan Kesharvaz for education minister, and Mohammad Ali Abadi for energy minister were not approved by the Majles in September, requiring the president to introduce alternative nominees. After his intention to appoint three other women to the cabinet was criticized, Ahmadinejad reconsidered and had to settle for just one woman minister: Marzieh Vahid Dastjerdi, who was appointed Health Minister.

## **Tehran's subway network causes a severe political crisis between the president and his critics**

A severe crisis broke out last week between Ahmadinejad's government and the Tehran municipality over the president's announcement during a televised interview given on November 11 about his intention to transfer the responsibility for Tehran's subway network to the government.

The president's announcement was given on the backdrop of strong disagreements and blame throwing between the government, the Tehran municipality, and the subway management over the question of responsibility for the problems plaguing the Tehran subway network. The main disagreement has to do with the budget, some of which comes from the Tehran municipality and some of which from the government. According to the Tehran municipality and the subway management, in recent years the government has not transferred its share of the budget for the operation and expansion of the subway network. The subway's manager, Mohsen Hashemi (the son of Ali-Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, Chairman of the Expediency Discernment Council and one of the president's most bitter enemies), blamed the government last week for the financial hardships of the subway. He said that the government did not live up to the agreements achieved between the subway management on one hand and government and Majles representatives on the other about government financial assistance to the subway, which would make it possible to add more wagons to the network. As a result, no new wagons have been added to the network in the past four years, while currently-operating wagons are over a decade old and require frequent repairs. This causes a severe shortage of wagons which does not allow the network to meet the passengers' demands. Hashemi further claimed that the government had transferred to the subway only a small portion of the budget approved by the Majles, and failed to transfer the necessary financial assistance for subsidizing ticket prices (Tabnak, November 2).



President Ahmadinejad claimed last week that in recent years, the government had transferred considerable financial assistance to the subway and that the severe economic

problems facing the network were the result of bad management. The president's critics, however, claim that his policy regarding the Tehran subway network was mostly driven by political considerations having to do with the strong political rivalry between him and Tehran's mayor, Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, and the subway director, Mohsen Hashemi.

The president's announcement on the intention to transfer responsibility for managing the subway to the government brought about fierce criticism from his critics; even the Expediency Discernment Council expressed its reservations. Council spokesman Abbas-Ali Kadkhoda'i said last weekend that, by law, managing the subway was the responsibility of the Tehran municipality, and that transferring it to the government required the approval of the Majles (various news agencies, November 14).

Mohammad Hassan Moghimi, chairman of the Majles Development Committee, blamed the government for the problems plaguing the Tehran subway network and for taking advantage of the difficulties in providing subway services to civilians for political needs. Moghimi further claimed that transferring the management of the subway to the government was illegal (Rooz Online, August 15). Majles member Ghodrati-Ali Alikhani also lashed out against the president's announcement, saying in an interview to Parleman News that the government must meet its budget obligations to the subway and help the Tehran municipality solve the subway's problems. The government has many problems of its own and should not meddle in municipal affairs, Alikhani said (Parleman News, August 14).

Tabnak, a website affiliated with the president's critics in the pragmatic conservative bloc, also severely criticized the president, claiming that the figures presented by Ahmadinejad about the assistance supposedly offered by the government to the subway in recent years were baseless and false. The website wondered how the government intended to solve the economic problems of Tehran's subway when, in the past four years, it failed to fulfill its promises to promote subway projects in other major cities, including Mashhad, Esfahan, Shiraz, Tabriz, and Ahvaz (Tabnak, August 14).

### **Despite the authorities' continuing efforts, the use of satellite dishes is on the rise**

Last week, Ali Darabi, deputy chief of the Iranian Broadcasting Authority, expressed his concern over the increasing use of satellite dishes by Iranians. Speaking at an international religious convention in Tehran, Darabi said that about 40 percent of Iranians currently use satellite dishes to watch TV broadcasts from foreign countries. He noted that Iran's enemies resorted to the media as a weapon instead of military means, and made use of television and

satellite networks to realize their goals: weakening Islam and spreading the Christian faith and “American Islam”.

Darabi indicated that the use of satellite dishes in Iran increased considerably, saying that their usage by Iranian families doubled compared to last year. Satellite and Internet television networks, Darabi said, were currently used to spread the ideas and philosophy of “world imperialism”. According to Darabi, 116 satellite TV stations could nowadays be viewed in Iran, and their main purpose—particularly the Persian-language TV stations—was to weaken the religion and Islamic values in Iranian society (ISNA, November 13).



Asr-e Iran, a website affiliated with the pragmatic conservative bloc, commented on Darabi's statement last week, saying that the Iranian Broadcasting Authority was responsible for the increasing use of satellite dishes in Iran. Those responsible for the Broadcasting Authority should be asked why Iranians continued to prefer foreign satellite television over Iranian television, in spite of the considerable budget enjoyed by the Iranian Broadcasting Authority, the numerous Iranian TV channels broadcasting nationally and in each province, and hundreds of broadcasting hours on Iran's television and radio. Those in charge must find the reason for the sharp decrease in viewing the Iranian Broadcasting Authority's programs in the past year. If the programs broadcasted by the authority struck a chord with the Iranians, Asr-e Iran said, we would not be witnessing the significant drop in the viewing of Iranian broadcasts. The website warned that if the official broadcasting authority's current policy continued, the decrease in watching its broadcasts would continue as well (Asr-e Iran, November 14).

It is not the first time that Iranian senior figures express their concern over the increasing use of satellite dishes by Iranians, despite the authorities' incessant struggle against the installation and use of satellite dishes in citizens' houses. In November 2007, Sa'id Abu-Taleb, a member of the Majles Culture Committee, said that Iran's official TV channels did not provide a response to the diverse needs of the population, and that the use of satellite dishes

could no longer be prevented by imposing restrictions and waging a struggle against the phenomenon.

Senior conservative clerics have also spoken out against the use of satellite dishes on several occasions. For example, Seyed Ahmad Alam al-Hoda, the Friday prayer leader in Mashhad, previously argued that satellite dishes were worse than using drugs, and that those who put satellite dishes on their rooftops were single-handedly poisoning their children. Satellite TV channels, the conservative cleric said, spread corruption, sex, and anti-Islamic and anti-revolutionary incitement, and the authorities must combat the smuggling of satellite dishes into Iran and their distribution.

In 1995, a law was passed in Iran prohibiting the use of satellite dishes and requiring Iranians to remove any installed dishes from their roofs. In recent years, Iran's internal security forces continued sporadic operations to remove satellite dishes from citizens' houses, in which thousands of satellite dishes were confiscated. However, those operations turned out to be a total failure, and most of the satellite dishes removed were shortly replaced.

### **How much time do Iranian women spend on the phone per day?**

According to a researcher from the University of Tehran, women in Tehran spend an average of two hours per day on the phone. Speaking at a convention dedicated to consumption habits in Iran, the researcher noted that studies among Iranian women also indicated that one of the first things they do when they wake up is to turn on the television set. She added that many women reported leaving the television on even when they worked in the kitchen (Farda, November 15).

In another convention held in May in the Islamic Azad University of Qazvin, also dedicated to consumption culture and time management among Iran's citizens, one of the researchers said that different studies indicated that on average Iranians spent four times more on the phone compared to other countries.

In the course of the past year, several conventions about consumption habits and ways to encourage Iranians to save have been held in Iran, as the current Iranian year has been declared by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei as "the year of change in the consumption culture".