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Highlights of the week

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Struggles for power in Iran's upper echelons: chief of judiciary also strongly criticizes President Ahmadinejad

Judiciary chief Ayatollah Sadeq Amoli Larijani has strongly criticized the president this week, saying that his style of speech is inappropriate. Larijani's criticism came after a statement made by the president at a meeting with journalists on Journalist Day, marked in Iran last Saturday. The president voiced criticism over the judiciary's behavior towards journalists who supposedly violated the journalism law, saying it delayed the release of arrested journalists. The president further claimed that the judiciary did not do enough to address cases of insults targeting the president.



Photo :Hamed Malekpoor

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Left to right: Sadeq Larijani, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Ali Larijani

Speaking at a meeting of top judiciary officials on Sunday, the judiciary chief responded to the president's claims by saying that he could have been expected to use more moderate, appropriate language. Larijani said that the president's statements were unjust and untrue, and that the judiciary acted independently and was governed by the law, not by the personal opinions of the judges. According to Larijani, the president's criticism against the judiciary reflects a misunderstanding of the law and its application.

He also rejected the president's claim about the judiciary ignoring incidents in which insults were leveled at the president, saying that the judiciary had taken care of several complaints submitted by the president on that issue (ILNA, August 8).

Sadeq Larijani is the brother of Majles speaker Ali Larijani, who has also been engaged in a political power struggle with the president for the past several months. This week, the Majles speaker has instructed to introduce a new law into Iran's Official Journal. The law has been recently passed by the Majles and approved by the Guardian Council after the expiration of the period of time during which the president is legally required to sign the law in order to put it into effect. It is not the first time in recent months that Larijani has issued an instruction to put into effect laws passed by the Majles but not signed by the president (Mehr, August 7). Larijani's instruction once again reveals his strong differences of opinion with Ahmadinejad over the division of authority between the executive and the judiciary.

In view of the escalating power struggles in Iran's upper echelons, the conservative daily Keyhan has issued a warning this week about the continuation of the public bickering between top officials, claiming that it serves the interests of Iran's enemies, is exploited by the reformist opposition, and has a negative impact on domestic public opinion. An editorial published by the daily says that differences of opinion between top officials are to be expected; the problem is that, in Iran, those officials use public arenas to resolve their differences. That phenomenon compromises the interests of the regime and provides Iran's

enemies with an opportunity to take advantage of the internal disagreements to promote their own interests (Keyhan, August 10).

Meanwhile, top political commentator and reformist intellectual Prof. Sadeq Zibakalam has assessed this week that, in view of the crisis faced by the reformist opposition, many of whose members are either in jail or have fled Iran, the major political struggle in Iran's near future will be waged between the two factions of the conservative camp: the pragmatic and the radical. Zibakalam's opinion is that, in view of the government's failures in economy and foreign policy, the pragmatic conservative faction will ultimately prevail over the radical faction, affiliated with the president and his government (Aftab-e Yazd, August 9).

Seventeen political prisoners end hunger strike after more than two weeks

This week, seventeen political prisoners held in ward 350 at Tehran's Evin Prison ended a hunger strike which lasted more than two weeks. The prisoners began the hunger strike on July 26 in protest of their prison conditions and the decision of the prison authorities to transfer them to isolation for protesting the wardens' behavior towards them.

The hunger striking prisoners include student activists, journalists, and activists belonging to political movements, who were arrested during the riots which broke out after last summer's presidential election. The prisoners demanded that the prison authorities apologize for the humiliation they suffered and to be brought back to the prison's general ward as a condition for ending the hunger strike. A memorandum of opinion published this week on the prisoners' behalf says that they complied with the reformist opposition leaders' request to end the strike. They noted that they would continue fighting for their rights, expressed gratitude for the support they got in Iran and elsewhere, and said they hoped that the authorities would follow through on their promises to take measures against wardens who hurt the political prisoners (Kalemeh, August 9).

Last week, the families of the hunger striking prisoners held a demonstration in front of the Attorney General's offices in Tehran. The demonstrators demanded to meet with the Attorney General, to put an end to the inhuman treatment their family members endured in the prison, and let them meet their loved ones. A confrontation between the families and the internal security forces arose during the demonstration. The father of one of the prisoners was arrested this week when he came to the judiciary offices to deliver a letter on behalf of the families.



Demonstration held by the families of the hunger striking prisoners

Earlier this week, reformist opposition leaders Mir-Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karoubi issued a call to the political prisoners to end the hunger strike. In a letter published by Mousavi, the opposition leader expressed support of the prisoners' demands and called them to end the hunger strike out of concern for their health. Mousavi said that the prisoners' message was heard in Iran and all across the world, and that their hunger strike proved that while the body can be arrested, the soul cannot be conquered. He also called on the prison authorities to respect the prisoners' rights (Kalemeh, August 6). A similar call was issued by Karoubi at a meeting with families of arrested journalists. Karoubi expressed concern for the prisoners' well-being and called them to end the hunger strike (Saham News, August 7).

The call of the two opposition leaders was taken up by other top reformist officials, including top cleric Ayatollah Bayat Zanjani and Abdollah Nouri, the former interior minister in Mohammad Khatami's government. The Islamic Participation Front, one of the two main reformist parties, published a special memorandum of opinion expressing support of the political prisoners and calling them to end the hunger strike and continue their struggle in other ways. In the memorandum, the Front called on those who took part in the protest rallies following the presidential election to join the hunger strike for one day to express sympathy with the hunger striking prisoners and their families (Jaras, August 7).

This week, the conservative daily Keyhan has strongly criticized the reformist opposition leaders for their sympathy with the hunger striking prisoners, claiming that, during last year's Oods Day processions on the last Friday of the month of Ramadan, reformist opposition activists publicly broke the Ramadan fast, drank water, and even smoked cigarettes, violating Islamic religious law (Keyhan, August 8).

Iran presents: illustrated online book about Holocaust

Iran has recently launched a new website examining the story of the Holocaust of European Jewry through Iranian eyes. The website is operated by the Khakriz Cultural Center, belonging to the students' Basij in Tehran's University of Science and Technology. The

website (www.holocartoons.com) is entirely dedicated to an illustrated book containing several dozen pages about the Holocaust. It is available in three languages: Farsi, English, and Arabic.



The book is dedicated to “all those who were killed under the pretext of the Holocaust”. It presents the claims on the “fabrication of the Holocaust” that are prevalent in the Iranian political discourse, and argues that the Zionists have been using it to take over Palestine.

The illustrated book portrays claims about the Holocaust in a mocking light. It says, for example: “One day, when Hitler woke up, he decided to choke six million Jews. Unfortunately, there were only 5.4 million Jews living in Europe, so he invited another 600 thousand Jews to come to Europe, and they immigrated there within several days.” Elsewhere it says: “There wasn’t enough gas during the war to burn the Jews, so the Nazis forced the Jews who had not yet choked to death to blow on the corpses so they would burn properly.” It further states: “Did the Holocaust take place only during World War II? No, six million Jews had died from hunger and poverty during World War I, but since nobody paid any attention, they let themselves die again by having the Nazis choke them during World War II.” The book goes on to portray the manner in which the Zionists invented the Holocaust (“Jewish artists rebuilt gas chambers using their mental abilities and their imaginations”) and the cynical use made by Zionists of the “Holocaust lie” to gain financial profit and suppress the Palestinians (“the German government asked the Jews to accept everything it had, but the Jews only agreed to receive 100 billion dollars and donated the rest to God”; “Researchers proved that the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem looked at Hitler’s photograph three times during the war, and that Palestine therefore belongs to the Jews... Palestine was empty save for a small number of Muslim natives who wished to sacrifice their lives to welcome the Zionist Jews... The Zionists first rejected the proposition of the Muslims, but as they insisted, they agreed to take Palestine”).

The new website is yet another expression of the Holocaust denial policy which plays a major part in the Iranian regime’s attempt to undermine the legitimacy of Israel and to eliminate

the moral and historical foundation on which Zionism stands. Expressions of Holocaust denial have appeared many times since the Islamic revolution; however, they have become significantly stronger since Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's election for president in 2005. In August 2006, Iran held an exhibition of cartoons aimed to portray the Holocaust as a historical lie; in December of that year Iran officially sponsored a Holocaust denial convention organized by a research institute affiliated with the Iranian Foreign Ministry.

Iranian study: "temporary marriage" is now income source for women

A new Iranian study indicates that "temporary pleasure marriage" (*mut'a* or *sigheh*), which is permitted in Shi'ite Islam, has become a source of income for many Iranian women in recent years.

In an interview granted to Mehr News Agency this week, sociologist Ma'sumeh Porishi provided details about the study, showing that economic problems are the main factor motivating many women to choose that kind of marriage. Those women are mostly housewives without a permanent income who receive welfare from the government. That money, however, is only enough to buy their basic needs, meaning that they need an extra income for housing and other expenses. Since most of them do not have sufficient education, and in view of the gender discrimination prevailing in Iranian society, they find it hard to enter the employment market and are forced to find other ways to cover their expenses.

In many cases, such women are divorcees or widows who find themselves in a financial crisis and are interested in remarrying. Those women, particularly mothers with children, find it very difficult to find a husband and choose the option of temporary marriage, even if their temporary husbands are not men of means. According to the study, most of the temporary marriages last between one hour and five months.

The researcher claims that, for those women, temporary marriage has become a real source of income, with many women entering temporary marriage time after time. Many women told researchers that they had been dependent on their husbands in their first marriages, and that experience taught them that it was better to avoid such dependency, leading them to prefer to marry for a limited period of time. Other than the financial need, indicated by most of the women as the main reason for their decision to opt for temporary marriage, women also indicated psychological and sexual needs, as well as the need for social protection.

The study also examined women's attitudes towards the phenomenon, and found that many of them view it in a positive light. Those women claimed that, due to the fact that the Iranian

legal system discriminates against women, does not protect their rights, and makes divorce proceedings difficult for them, women are better served by temporary marriage. Other women, however, claimed that it was a negative phenomenon, both for women and for the lives of married couples where a husband may decide to temporarily marry another woman.

The study further indicates that the phenomenon is not related to the level of religious observance of those choosing temporary marriage. According to the researcher, religion is not an influencing factor, and women may decide on a temporary marriage regardless of how strictly they observe Islam.

The researcher warned about the health impacts associated with the phenomenon of temporary marriage. She said that temporarily married women do not receive the sexual education provided by the authorities to regularly married couples. As a result, those women are frequently unaware of the health risks of having sexual relations with their husbands and the danger of sexually transmitted diseases.



- "How do you feel about temporary marriage?" – "I like it a lot, but it should be made longer" (cartoon published on www.pix2pix.org, May 6, 2008)

In recent years, there has been a sharp increase in temporary marriage in Iran. Iranian researchers suggest a correlation between temporary marriage and economic problems, which cause a continuing increase in the average age of marriage and force young couples to find temporary solutions to formalize their relationship. Many top Iranian officials, however, have expressed support of the phenomenon, and in the summer of 2007 former interior minister Mostafa Pour-Mohammadi even proposed that the government encourage that institution to help young Iranians who have no means to afford a permanent marriage. His proposal sparked fierce criticism, mostly from reformist circles, who warned that this would be a blow to the institution of family and to women's status in Iran.

Pictures of the week: seasonal workers in Iran

