



**The Meir Amit Intelligence  
and Terrorism Information Center**



### **Highlights of the week**

- ✓ Rafsanjani faces a vote on his future: Assembly of Experts to decide next week whether to remove him from office
- ✓ Growing criticism as opposition leaders remain under arrest
- ✓ Iran shows disinterest in new IAEA report
- ✓ Will Iran impose a total ban on keeping pet dogs?
- ✓ Pictures of the week: students demonstrate to support Arab world uprisings, oppose the West (Tehran, February 27)

### **Rafsanjani faces a vote on his future: Assembly of Experts to decide next week whether to remove him from office**

With the approach of the internal elections for the Assembly of Experts leadership, slated for the assembly's meeting on March 8-9, this week has seen an escalation of political power struggles between supporters of Assembly of Experts chairman Ali-Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and his opponents from the radical-conservative camp.

Media affiliated with conservative right-wingers and government supporters strongly denied the claims made by Rafsanjani's supporters, according to which Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei allegedly supports Rafsanjani's candidacy for another term as chairman of the assembly. According to Fars News Agency reports, several Assembly of Experts members claimed that the reports saying that the Supreme Leader had instructed Rafsanjani to present his candidacy are a complete lie.



Assembly of Experts member Ayatollah Abdolnabi Namazi told Fars that the reports according to which the Supreme Leader supports Rafsanjani's candidacy are unfounded, and that Khamenei neither confirmed nor ruled out anyone's nomination in the coming elections for the assembly leadership. Namazi stressed that the Supreme Leader does not usually involve himself with the assembly affairs. He mentioned senior clerics Mohammad-Reza Mahdavi Kani, Mohammad-Taqi Mesbah-Yazdi, Mohammad Yazdi, and Ahmad Jannati as possible candidates for chairman of the Assembly of Experts (Fars, February 26). All four candidates belong to the radical right wing faction of the conservative bloc. Assembly of Experts member Ayatollah Akbar Qarabaghi also claimed in an interview granted to Fars that the reports according to which Khamenei instructed Rafsanjani to present his candidacy are false. He noted that Rafsanjani can expect to contend with a serious opponent in the coming internal elections (Fars, February 26).

Fars News Agency has recently accused some of Rafsanjani's close associates of attempts to defame Mahdavi Kani, chairman of the conservative Combatant Clergy Association, to prevent him from declaring his candidacy for chairman of the Assembly of Experts. The news agency reported this week that Mahdavi Kani agreed to run for the post next week after over 50 assembly members had approached him with a request to do so (Fars, February 28).

In recent days, the ultra-conservative website Raja News accused Rafsanjani's supporters of exerting pressure to allow him to retain his role as chairman of the assembly. The website criticized Majles member Ali Motahari, considered one of President Ahmadinejad's critics in the conservative camp, who recently said in a press interview that no one could remove

Rafsanjani from his post. The website argued that the political pressure exerted by Rafsanjani's men runs contrary to the Supreme Leader's instruction to avoid putting such pressure on Assembly of Experts members and leave it exclusively to them to decide on the next chairman. According to the website, the activity of Rafsanjani's supporters is a result of their assessment that most assembly members will likely object to his retaining the post (Raja News, February 24).

In addition, Raja News reported that, during one of his recent visits to the religious establishment center in the city of Qom, the Supreme Leader met with ultra-conservative cleric Ayatollah Mohammad-Taqi Mesbah-Yazdi and had an extended conversation with him at the latter's residence. During the conversation, held in the presence of Mesbah-Yazdi's family, the Supreme Leader reportedly praised the senior cleric and his personal and religious skills (Raja News, February 24). Mesbah-Yazdi is one of the key personalities of the radical right wing in the conservative camp and is considered one of Rafsanjani's fiercest political and ideological opponents in the Assembly of Experts.

Meanwhile, those media affiliated with the pragmatic conservative bloc and Rafsanjani's supporters stepped up their criticism of the alleged "wave of incitement" against Rafsanjani launched by his opponents in recent weeks. The daily Mardom Salari claimed that the elections for the Assembly of Experts leadership are being used by Rafsanjani's extremist enemies to land a crushing blow against his image and personality. The daily reported that, in response to the efforts to slam Rafsanjani, several political activists came to his defense. For example, Majles member Qodratollah Alikhani claimed that, in light of Rafsanjani's status as a veteran, experienced cleric and politician, no one could remove him from office (Mardom Salari, February 28).

This week, Rafsanjani himself addressed for the first time the reports on the coming internal elections for chairman of the Assembly of Experts. Speaking at a meeting of the Expediency Discernment Council, of which he is chairman as well, Rafsanjani said that he had never sought any office or position for himself. He said that it has been the Supreme Leader's choice or the people's will by which he has been assigned to the many positions he held since the Islamic revolution, and that he will continue being a soldier in service of the revolution. He even claimed that, in the previous elections for chairman of the Assembly of Experts, he offered the role of chairman to Ayatollah Mahdavi-Kani, who refused, and that he decided to take part in the elections on the Supreme Leader's orders, not because he had an interest in the role of chairman. Rafsanjani noted that he will remain true to his mission in the coming elections, and that the only thing that matters to him—regardless of the election results—is the will of the people and of God (ILNA, February 26).

In response to Rafsanjani's remarks, the government daily Iran published a commentary article saying that if his claim about always doing the Supreme Leader's bidding is correct, he should have implemented Khamenei's call to top regime officials and take a clear stand against the riots that broke out in Iran last year (Iran, February 27).

### **Growing criticism as opposition leaders remain under arrest**

In recent days, there has been growing criticism from the reformist camp over the continuing arrest of reformist opposition leaders Mir-Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karubi.

Kalemeh, a website affiliated with Mir-Hossein Mousavi's supporters, reported Monday that Mousavi and Karubi had been arrested and transferred to Heshmatiyeh Prison in Tehran (Kalemeh, February 28). The report was denied by the judiciary. Before that, pro-opposition media published reports claiming that in recent days, Mousavi and Karubi had been transferred with their families to a security installation where they are held in isolation. One of Karubi's sons confirmed that last Thursday (February 24) his parents had been taken by the security forces to an unknown location (Jaras, February 27).

This week, the children of Mousavi and Karubi published letters expressing concern over the continued arrest of their parents. In the letters, they said that they have been prevented contact with their parents by the security forces since February 14. In addition, the children sent a joint letter to the top clerics, calling them to make their voice heard to bring about their parents' release (Saham News, February 28).

Iran's prosecutor general Hojjat-ol-Eslam Gholam-Hossein Mohseni Eje'i admitted this week that Mousavi and Karubi are held in isolation and that they are not allowed to contact the outside world. He even threatened additional measures against the opposition leaders if they persist with their activities (Mehr, February 28).

Reformist opposition activists operating outside Iran called on supporters of the Green Movement in Iran to hold rallies on Tuesday (March 1) to protest the continuing arrest of Mousavi and Karubi. On that day, websites affiliated with the reformist opposition reported local clashes between demonstrators and security forces in Tehran and other major cities.



Three senior clerics affiliated with the reformist bloc issued this week strong condemnations of Mousavi and Karoubi's continuing arrest. Ayatollah Yousef Sane'i, Ayatollah Asadollah Bayat Zanjani, and Ayatollah Seyyed Ali-Mohammad Dastgheib protested the fact that Mousavi and Karoubi are held under arrest since the opposition demonstrations on February 14, demanding that they be released.

In a special memorandum of opinion released by Ayatollah Sane'i this week, he said that the authorities' conduct with regard to the two opposition leaders was an indication of political weakness. He even compared their conduct to that of the Shah's regime with regard to its political opponents on the eve of the Islamic revolution. It is puzzling, Sane'i said, that while the authorities claim that Mousavi and Karoubi enjoy no status in Iran's society, they refuse to give them a fair public trial so that they can defend themselves and let the society decide whether they are right or not (Jaras, February 27). Assembly of Experts member Ayatollah Dastgheib sent a letter to the assembly members this week calling them to act swiftly to secure the release of the opposition leaders, arguing that it contradicts the constitution and Islamic religious law (Kalemeh, February 27).

Former president Mohammad Khatami also broke his silence and expressed protest over the continuing arrest of Mousavi and Karoubi. At a meeting with clerics and academia lecturers, Khatami claimed that it is inappropriate to hold under arrest and impose restrictions on such personalities as Mousavi and Karoubi, who have loyally served the revolution and the Islamic republic for many years. Khatami expressed his hope that, as the Iranian new year approaches, the house arrests will cease, the restrictions will be lifted, and the political prisoners will be released from prison (Jaras, February 27).

### **Iran shows disinterest in new IAEA report**

The new report released last Friday by the IAEA about Iran's nuclear program has not stirred much interest on Iranian media. The report said nothing new about the nuclear program,

estimating once again that, based on new information the IAEA had received, the program may have military aspects as well.

Following the release of the report, Iran's Foreign Minister Ali-Akbar Salehi said that the information allegedly indicating the military aspects of Iran's nuclear program is completely unfounded. He noted that the IAEA must act in an independent fashion rather than in accordance with the positions of Western countries.

Iran's IAEA representative Ali-Asghar Soltaniyeh commented on the report saying it was yet another confirmation that Iran's nuclear program is for peaceful needs, and that the report reflects the IAEA monitoring of Iran's nuclear program, including uranium enrichment (ISNA, February 26).

Some members of the Majles National Security and Foreign Policy Committee expressed a more critical stance towards the IAEA following the report's release. Committee spokesman Kazem Jalali rejected the IAEA's claims about having information that indicates the military aspects of the nuclear program, arguing that their aim was to divert world public opinion from the developments in the Middle East and the long-standing support of Western powers for dictatorships in the Arab world. In an interview to the Fararu website, Jalali said that Iran has no need of an atomic bomb or non-peaceful nuclear technology. He claimed that in the past eight years, the IAEA has conducted many inspections in Iran and had its full cooperation, and that it still was unable to find any proof that the program was designed for military needs. He accused the IAEA leaders of being motivated by politics instead of professional considerations. He said that there are two approaches within the IAEA: the juridical approach, based on which the agency could not prove that Iran's nuclear activity is not peaceful, and the political approach, which prompts the agency to exert considerable efforts to question Iran's intentions (Fararu, February 26).

Esma'il Kowsari, also a member of the Majles National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, similarly claimed that the IAEA's claims about the supposedly military nature of the nuclear program are false. The IAEA reports are based on the demands of Western countries rather than on reality, Kowsari said. He noted that if the IAEA had documents to indicate any military aspects in the nuclear program, it would make them public by now (Fararu, February 27).

The new report released by the IAEA was not extensively commented on in Iran's press, which continued to focus on the political developments in the Arab world this week. The conservative daily Keyhan commented on the IAEA report in an editorial which showed a

disrespectful attitude towards the report and its significance. According to the daily, the release of the report indicates that the West has not understood the message Iran sought to deliver in the nuclear talks held last month in Istanbul. In the talks, Iran asked Western countries to recognize its rights, cooperate with it, and cease exerting pressure on it. Iran has proven that it is unwilling to yield to pressure and sanctions and change its nuclear policy, Keyhan claimed. The Americans assumed, however, that following the failure of the talks, they would be able to persuade other Western countries to step up sanctions against Iran. In practice, however, Western countries themselves have started questioning the effectiveness of the policy of sanctions and pressure against Iran. The only thing left for the Americans to do, therefore, is to adopt unilateral sanctions against Iran, and the Obama administration is well aware that such a move would be nothing more than a propaganda joke. According to Keyhan, the latest developments in the Middle East have only made Iran more significant for the West. In the future, Iran will be holding talks with the West from the position of a country that constitutes a single element able to influence regional developments. It is perfectly clear that, when it comes to dealing with Iran's nuclear program or regional developments, U.S. intelligence assessments or IAEA reports are worthless (Keyhan, February 28).

### **Will Iran impose a total ban on keeping pet dogs?**

Thirty-nine Majles members have submitted a bill that would prohibit Iranians from walking their dogs in public. The bill's introduction states that keeping dogs and walking them on the streets and in public places have become a major problem in Iran's major cities. It is a phenomenon that, according to the Majles members responsible for the bill, is cause for health problems and also a cultural-social problem, being a "blind imitation" of Western culture. The Majles members therefore seek to curb the increasing trend of Iranians walking their dogs in public places or keeping them in houses and apartments.

The bill's approval would make it illegal to walk "dangerous dogs" or "harmful animals" that are a threat to public safety and a cause of uncleanness in public places and on public transportation. A dog owner caught walking their dog would have to pay a substantial fine of up to 5 million rials (100-500 dollars) and their animal would be confiscated. The bill also suggests that keeping pets in apartments and houses is banned as well if a resident has expressed his objection. The bill authorizes the Ministry of Health to draw up a list of animals considered dangerous or unclean (in addition to dogs) (Fararu, February 26).

Keeping pet dogs, considered to be unclean (*Najes*) in Shi'ite law, is viewed as an expression of the corrupting influence of the West. The Iranian authorities have been attempting to limit the extent of the phenomenon since the Islamic revolution. In 1999, the then chief of

judiciary Ayatollah Mohammad Yazdi ruled that dogs must not be taken to public places. Yazdi did allow pets to be kept in people's homes, saying, however, that taking them to the street is an offense to the Muslim sentiments of the public and calls for police intervention. In 2002, the Friday prayer leader in the city of Orumiyeh (northwestern Iran) also ruled that keeping pet dogs was tantamount to moral corruption, and issued a call to detain pet dogs and their owners. In June 2010, senior conservative cleric Ayatollah Nasser Makarem Shirazi issued a religious ruling decreeing that dogs should not be kept as pets. When asked to clarify the position of Islamic religious law on the growing number of dogs kept as pets in Iran's big cities, the senior cleric ruled that keeping pet dogs was a blind imitation of the West, where many people love their dogs more than their wives and children. In his ruling, Makarem Shirazi claimed that there are many references to dogs being unclean in Islam, even though the Quran itself does not explicitly address that matter.

Despite such rulings, the number of dog owners in Iran has been on the rise, mostly in the big cities. Consequently, the authorities have stepped up efforts to curb the phenomenon as part of the campaign to enforce Islamic religious code. Among other things, internal security forces have been rounding up dogs (even those being walked by their owners) in public places.



**Dogs being rounded up by internal security forces  
(from the blog <http://dastanma.blogspot.com>, September 11, 2007)**



**Pictures of the week: students demonstrate to support Arab world uprisings, oppose the West (Tehran, February 27)**



Photo:Hamed Haghdoust

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