



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

Spotlight on Iran

August 2011—Mordad 1390
Week of August 11-18, 2011
Editor: Raz Zimmt



Highlights of the week:

- ✓ Another battle in conservatives' power struggle: the fight for the veil
- ✓ President's decision to appoint an ally as advisor on international affairs strongly criticized
- ✓ "Uprising of the oppressed": Iranian media on British riots

- ✓ Poor work culture and laziness despite Supreme Leader's "year of economic jihad" announcement
- ✓ Pictures of the week: police operation to confiscate satellite dishes

Another battle in conservatives' power struggle: the fight for the veil

A supplement on women's veils published by the government daily Iran sparked this week another battle in the power struggle within the conservative camp. Published last Saturday (August 13) and titled "Khatun" ("Lady"), the supplement had news items, articles, and interviews that expressed controversial views on the issue of veils. Mehdi Kalhor, former top advisor to President Ahmadinejad, said in an interview published in the supplement that the chador (the long veil used in Iran) is inappropriate for Iranian women, and that it was actually brought to Iran by the Qajari ruler Nasser al-Din Shah after his trips to France and Britain in the

second half of the 19th century. From a philosophical viewpoint, Kalhor said, the chador is the worst type of veil.

An article authored by Ali-Akbar Javanfekr, the president's media advisor and director of the daily Iran, criticized the operations conducted by the internal security forces to enforce the Islamic dress code on women.

The publication of the supplement by the government daily was strongly criticized by the conservatives, who claimed that the views expressed there reflect the anti-religious outlook of the "deviant faction" (the political faction affiliated with Rahim Masha'i, the president's office chief). Conservative news websites launched an attack on the daily Iran, accusing it of committing an unprecedented offense against the veil and spreading the anti-religious ideas of the "deviant faction" as part of its efforts to gain more influence ahead of the March 2012 Majles elections.

President's decision to appoint an ally as advisor on international affairs strongly criticized

A decision made by President Ahmadinejad last week to appoint his ally Ali Sa'idlou as vice-president on international affairs drew strong criticism from the media and Majles members, who argued that the appointment creates unnecessary redundancy in the conduct of Iran's foreign policy and undermines the status of the Foreign Ministry.

The president's critics further claimed that Sa'idlou is not qualified for the job, and warned that the appointment of a person like that can jeopardize Iran's national interests.

The reformist daily Mardom Salari said that the president's decision to appoint Sa'idlou is a follow-up to the decision he made last year to appoint some of his allies as special advisors on international affairs. Mardom Salari also warned about the appointment's possible repercussions for the national interests of Iran. Sa'idlou's lack of experience in conducting foreign policy, the daily said, may have severe repercussions for the foreign policy of Iran, similar to those caused by Hamid Baqa'i's appointment as the president's advisor on international affairs.

"Uprising of the oppressed": Iranian media on British riots

This week the Iranian media continued its extensive coverage of the violent riots that broke out in Britain last week. Conservative media said that the British authorities employed considerable force and violence to suppress the

demonstrations of “the oppressed”, criticized Western countries’ two-faced approach to human rights violations in the world, and accused Western media (particularly the BBC) of having a double standard in its coverage of the riots in Britain versus the riots that broke out in Iran in 2009.

The daily Siyasat-e Rooz condemned the suppression of the demonstrators in Britain, saying those who believe they have the right to meddle in the affairs of other countries under the pretext of supporting human rights are now suppressing their own citizens. The daily Keyhan compared the riots in Britain with the riots that broke out in Iran in the summer of 2009, arguing that, unlike the riots in Iran, which were based on a “lie” about the presidential election results having been forged, the protests in Britain are the result of genuine distress experienced by British citizens. Keyhan also called on Britain to recall its forces from Iraq and Afghanistan and send them to “Londonstan” and “Manchesterstan”.

The riots in Britain were also widely reported by the reformist media. In recent days, however, some reformist media have criticized the stance taken by a number of government supporters on the riots. Reformist intellectual Sadeq Zibakalam referred to the reactions of some Iranian top officials and media to the riots in Britain as “tragicomic”. He said that those watching the reactions of top Iranian officials cannot believe that they are being serious. Zibakalam compared the way the Iranian leadership conducted itself after the 2009 riots with the way British politicians are addressing the riots in their country, pointing out that British officials are willing to admit that the riots broke out as a result of internal problems in British society and do not attempt to put the blame on Britain’s external enemies.

Meanwhile, Iran once again issued a call to send “peacekeeping forces” to Britain. After Basij commander Mohammad Reza Naqdi offered last week to send the Basij forces to Britain to restore calm, this week Majles National Security and Foreign Policy Committee member Fatemeh Alia issued a call to send international peacekeeping forces to put an end to the violence and suppression of demonstrators by the British authorities.

Poor work culture and laziness despite Supreme Leader’s “year of economic jihad” announcement

Mehr News Agency reported this week that the number of effective work hours in Iran’s government offices and private sector is among the lowest in the world.

According to data published by the news agency, state employees spend most of their work time eating, drinking tea, and having telephone conversations.

These data join recent media reports indicating weak work ethics and laziness among Iranian workers. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's announcement of the current Iranian year (1390) as the "year of economic jihad" has drawn the Iranian media's attention to the poor work culture prevailing in the country and the laziness of the Iranian people. Last month media published figures indicating that Iranians rank third in the world for laziness (after Arabs and Africans).

The public and media debate on Iran's work culture and productivity has also been prompted by two proposals recently made by the government: shortening the work week to five days (by turning Thursday into a holiday in addition to Friday) and adding another non-working day to Eid ul-Fitr, which concludes the month of Ramadan. In recent weeks these two proposals have been criticized by politicians and media claiming that adding holidays will not help improve the productivity of the Iranian economy, and that there are already too many vacations in Iran causing considerable economic damage every year.

Another battle in conservatives' power struggle: the fight for the veil

This week Iran's prosecutor general Abbas Ja'fari Dowlatabadi filed a lawsuit against the government daily Iran for compromising public morality after the daily published a supplement on women's affairs dedicated to the issue of women's veils.

Published last Saturday (August 13) and titled "Khatun" ("Lady"), the supplement had news items, articles, and interviews that expressed controversial views on the subject of veils. Mehdi Kalhor, former top advisor to President Ahmadinejad, said in an interview published in the supplement that the chador (the long veil used in Iran) is inappropriate for Iranian women, and that it was actually brought to Iran by the Qajari ruler Nasser al-Din Shah after his trips to France and Britain in the second half of the 19th century. From a philosophical viewpoint, Kalhor said, the chador is the worst type of veil.

An article authored by Ali-Akbar Javanfekr, the president's media advisor and director of the daily Iran, criticized the operations conducted by the Iranian internal security forces to enforce the Islamic dress code on women. In addition to these unusual views on veils, the supplement also included photographs of dozens of famous Iranian women who, according to the editors, are looked up to as role models by the women of Iran, including President

Ahmadinejad's wife and other female celebrities who have been targets of criticism from the country's religious and conservative circles (Iran, August 13).



The front page of "Khatun", the women's supplement published by the daily Iran, August 13

The publication of the supplement by the government daily was strongly criticized by the conservatives, who claimed that the views expressed there reflect the anti-religious outlook of the "deviant faction" (the political faction affiliated with Rahim Masha'i, the president's office chief).

Mohammad-Taqi Rahbar, the head of the clerical faction and member of the Majles Culture Committee, said in an interview to Tehran Emrouz (a daily close to Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, the mayor of Tehran and President Ahmadinejad's political opponent) that the publication of the supplement reflects the increasing influence of the "deviant faction". Rahbar strongly criticized Kalhor's remarks in the interview the latter granted to the supplement, and expressed support for the activity conducted by the internal security forces to enforce the Islamic dress code, saying such activity has the support of the entire Iranian public (Tehran Emrouz, August 14).

Conservative Majles member Hamid Rasa'i also criticized the supplement, saying that the "deviant faction" is trying to divert public opinion from the economic corruption scandals in which it is involved. He noted that the Majles intends to discuss the daily Iran's serious and disturbing publication (Fars, August 13).

The criticism was also joined by top clerics. One of them, Ayatollah Nasser Makarem Shirazi, said that the purpose of the supplement was to undermine the public's faith concerning the veil (Fars, August 16).

Strong criticism of the supplement was also voiced by media affiliated with the conservative camp. The Jahan News website accused the daily Iran of committing an unprecedented offense against the veil and against Islam, arguing that the newspaper is aligned with the

“deviant faction” and follows in the footsteps of the radical reformists (Jahan News, August 13).

The daily Tehran Emrouz argued that the opinions published in the supplement humiliate veil-wearing women and cross the “red lines” of Islam and the revolution. According to the daily, the anti-religious “deviant faction” seeks to distance the public from the clerics, ideologically and philosophically take control of public opinion and divert it into secularity, compromise the concept of “rule of the religious jurispudent”, and change the government structure by means of a “soft war” (Tehran Emrouz, August 14).

Keyhan’s editor-in-chief Hossein Shariatmadari also strongly condemned the “Khatun” supplement and the “deviant faction” supposedly responsible for its publication. According to Shariatmadari, this faction employs three main tactics to achieve its goals: fostering division among those belonging to the conservative camp; attempting to undermine the international and domestic power of the regime by increasing its influence in various government offices, among other things; and stirring tensions in society. Shariatmadari warned about the increasing influence of the “deviant faction” on the president and the way it exploits this influence to achieve its goals. The editor-in-chief of Keyhan called on the judiciary to put an end to the government daily’s use of state resources to combat the religious beliefs of Iranian citizens, which serves the interests of the country’s enemies. It is inconceivable, Shariatmadari noted, that those close to the president should be granted immunity (Keyhan, August 15).

Particularly strong criticism of the supplement was voiced by Raja News, a website affiliated with the radical faction of the conservative camp. The website strongly condemned the daily Iran for the themes dealt with in the supplement, accusing it of offending Islamic morality and the veil and demanding that the judiciary take legal action against the daily (Raja News, August 13).

In light of the criticism it received, the daily Iran issued a strong-worded reaction attacking the media that had spoken against the “Khatun” supplement (particularly the Raja News website). The daily claimed that the remarks made by Kalhor and Javanfekr had been distorted to stir the religious sentiments of the public and damage the newspaper’s reputation. The editors of the daily clarified that they had no intention of offending the veil, and that the statements published in the supplement, including the interview with the president’s former advisor, had been taken out of context. For instance, Kalhor’s statement about the chador having been brought to Iran from Europe by Nasser al-Din Shah referred to the chador’s black color, not to the garment itself (Fars, August 14).

After the clarification was published, the Raja News website expressed regret over the daily's choice to attack its critics instead of apologizing. According to Raja News, the daily has become a mouthpiece for the "deviant faction", which adopts the reformists' views ahead of the Majles elections. The editors of the website insisted that Raja News correctly cited the remarks made by the president's allies as they had been published in the "Khatun" supplement (Raja News, August 14).

President's decision to appoint an ally as advisor on international affairs strongly criticized

A decision made by President Ahmadinejad last week to appoint his ally Ali Sa'idlou as vice-president on international affairs drew strong criticism from the media and Majles members, who argued that the appointment creates unnecessary redundancy in the conduct of Iran's foreign policy. The president's critics further claimed that Sa'idlou is not qualified for the job, and warned that the appointment of a person like that can jeopardize Iran's national interests.



Ali Sa'idlou, the president's new advisor on international affairs

Mohammad Karami-Rad, a member of the Majles National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, told the Farda news website that Sa'idlou, who formerly served as the head of the Physical Education Organization, has no background in foreign policy, and that no good can come from his appointment. Majles member Mostafa Kavakabian also criticized Sa'idlou's appointment as the president's advisor on international affairs, claiming that the appointment undermines the status of the foreign ministry and its ability to engage in diplomatic contacts (Farda, August 11).

Majles member Mohammad Taqi-Rahbar also said that there is no justification for appointing Sa'idlou to a position that never existed in the president's office, and that it creates a problematic redundancy in the conduct of foreign policy (www.icana.ir, August 10).

Criticism of Sa'idlou's appointment as the president's advisor was also voiced by media close to the president's critics. An editorial published last week by the reformist daily Mardom Salari warned about the repercussions of the appointment for the national interests of Iran. The daily argued that the decision to appoint Sa'idlou is a follow-up to the decision made by the president last year to appoint some of his allies (including his controversial office chief Esfandiar Rahim Masha'i and Hamid Baqa'i) as special advisors on international affairs. The decision provoked strong opposition and was even implicitly criticized by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, who ruled that the government should avoid redundancy in its areas of responsibility, including foreign policy. The decision was one of the causes for the resignation of former foreign minister Manouchehr Mottaki. The daily warned that Sa'idlou's lack of foreign policy experience may have severe repercussions for the foreign policy of Iran, similar to those caused by Hamid Baqa'i's appointment as the president's advisor on international affairs. According to Mardom Salari, Baqa'i's remarks on the Armenian massacre during World War I led to a crisis in Iran-Turkey relations; in addition, he undermined Iran's status by holding official visits to Egypt and Yemen on the eve of the popular uprisings that broke out in those countries (Mardom Salari, August 11).

The Fararu website also noted Sa'idlou's inexperience in foreign policy, arguing that the appointment shows that the president does not believe in official channels and keeps creating new offices to expand his control over the conduct of foreign affairs (Fararu, August 10).

Uprising of the oppressed": Iranian media on British riots

This week the Iranian media continued its extensive coverage of the violent riots that broke out in Britain last week. Conservative media said that the British authorities employed considerable force and violence to suppress the demonstrations of "the oppressed", criticized Western countries' two-faced approach to human rights violations in the world, and accused Western media (particularly the BBC) of having a double standard in its coverage of the riots in Britain versus the riots that broke out in Iran in 2009.

An editorial published by the conservative daily Qods said that Europe was also influenced by the revolutions in the Middle East. The BBC, which until recently referred to the demonstrators in Iran, Bahrain, and Egypt as "freedom fighters", is now calling the demonstrators in Britain hooligans and thugs. Liberal democracy, based on the principles of humanism and capitalism, has created a divide between the rich and the poor, the daily said, which is why Western society is undergoing a breakdown of morality. The daily called on British politicians to listen to the voices of the protest, address the citizens' problems, and reduce class differences instead of resorting to violence and suppression (Qods, August 13).

Fars News Agency also accused the BBC of having a double standard. While the network sympathized with the demonstrators in its extensive coverage of the 2009 riots in Iran, it is now taking a negative stance towards the riots in Britain and is even calling on the police to suppress the demonstrators (Fars, August 12).

The daily Siyasat-e Rooz condemned the suppression of the demonstrators in Britain, saying those who believe they have the right to meddle in the affairs of other countries under the pretext of supporting human rights are now suppressing their own citizens. Britain's PM David Cameron called the demonstrators "a bunch of thugs and looters", and even issued a call to block the internet and social networks. The British media is supporting the government and the police, referring to the protesters as looters, and attempting to frame the protest in racial terms to encourage Islamophobia and an anti-immigration policy. According to the daily, the media in Britain has proven once again that it is not concerned with the people's rights but instead works towards the realization of politicians' objectives (Siyasat-e Rooz, August 15).

The daily Keyhan also extensively covered the riots in Britain. In an editorial titled "From the streets of Tehran to the streets of London", Keyhan compared the riots in Britain with the riots that broke out in Iran in the summer of 2009. The riots of 2009 broke out because of a "lie" about the presidential election results having been forged. The protests in Britain, however, are the result of a genuine reality based on poverty, discrimination, and hopelessness. For decades the Europeans have been protecting the rich and neglected the masses of the people, who grow poorer by the day.

Many events that allegedly occurred in Iran in the summer of 2009 were the result of a "psychological and media campaign" waged by the governments of Britain, the U.S., and Israel. People were killed in cyberspace when in reality they stayed in their homes; people were tortured when in fact they were not even detained. What is happening in Britain, however, has nothing to do with a psychological campaign waged by the Iranians.

Another difference is that the riots in Iran broke out as a result of foreign involvement by the Americans, who supported the demonstrators. In Britain, however, foreign involvement can't be seen as the cause, unless one is willing to claim that the riots were orchestrated by Muammar Gaddafi, the ruler of Libya.

Keyhan also criticized the hypocrisy of the Western world, saying that the Western press uses the title "human rights" only when it comes to countries like Iran. The purpose of courts in Britain is not to bring the corrupt rulers to justice, but to prosecute young demonstrators. No

British leader says that Britain's political system is in need of reform, no one wonders about the queen's expenses, and no British politician calls for negotiations with the protesters. The West has to be concerned over the possibility of the economic breakdown turning into a social and political breakdown, Keyhan said, and the U.S. is undoubtedly next in line (Keyhan, August 14). In another article Keyhan called on the UN to provide humanitarian assistance to "blue-eyed, hunger-stricken" Londoners instead of conducting operations in North Africa. It also called on Britain to recall its forces from Iraq and Afghanistan and send them to "Londonstan" and "Manchesterstan" (Keyhan, August 13).



Students demonstrate in front of the British embassy to protest the suppression of the riots in the kingdom

The riots in Britain were also widely reported by the reformist media. In recent days, however, a number of reformist media have criticized the stance taken by some media and government supporters on the riots.

The daily Mardom Salari claimed this week that Keyhan and Fars News Agency had published photographs from clashes that occurred at British soccer stadiums last year and attributed them to the recent riots (Mardom Salari, August 15).

Reformist intellectual Sadeq Zibakalam referred to the reactions of some Iranian top officials and media to the riots in Britain as "tragicomic". In an article published in the daily Roozgar (August 13), Zibakalam said it is baffling how, in today's world of free, diverse media, the leaders of Iran distort reality, unable to see it for what it is. Those watching the reactions of top Iranian officials cannot believe that they are being serious, he added.

According to Zibakalam, top Iranian officials are evidently trying to get back at Britain for its involvement in the riots of 2009. In his discussion of the differences between the way the Iranian leadership conducted itself after the 2009 riots and the way British politicians are addressing the riots in their country, Zibakalam pointed out how the British parliament summoned government and police representatives to provide explanations on the events, and

how British officials are willing to admit that the riots broke out as a result of internal problems in British society without attempting to put the blame on Britain's external enemies.

Meanwhile, Iran once again issued a call to send "peacekeeping forces" to Britain. After Basij commander Mohammad Reza Naqdi offered last week to send the Basij forces to Britain to restore calm, this week Majles National Security and Foreign Policy Committee member Fatemeh Alia issued a call to send international peacekeeping forces to put an end to the violence and suppression of demonstrators by the British authorities. She also called on the UN Human Rights Council and the UN secretary-general to condemn the violence in the kingdom (Fars, August 13).

The riots in Britain were also addressed by Ayatollah Kazem Sediqi, Tehran's Friday prayer leader. In his weekly sermon the high-ranking cleric said that the riots in Britain reflect the collapse of the Western world. The fire that broke out in the kingdom is a sign that the fulfillment of the divine promise has begun, and that the vision of Islamic revolution founder Ayatollah Khomeini, who said that this will be the century when the oppressed triumph over the West, is on its way to becoming reality. The riots are the results of problems that the British created for other nations, Sediqi said, adding that if you dig a grave for someone else, you need to be careful or you might end up falling in it yourself (Fars, August 12).

Poor work culture and laziness despite Supreme Leader's "year of economic jihad" announcement

Mehr News Agency reported this week that the number of effective work hours in Iran's government offices and private sector is among the lowest in the world.

According to data published by the news agency, state employees spend most of their work time eating, drinking tea, and having telephone conversations. In total, the effective work time for an Iranian worker is 6 to 8 hours a week. An Iranian government ministry employee works for an average of one hour four minutes a day, which increases to two hours six minutes in the private sector. The average number of effective work hours in a year for an Iranian worker is 800, compared to 2420 hours in Japan, 1900 in South Korea, 1700 in Germany, 1420 in China, 1360 in the U.S., 1330 in Turkey, and 950 in Afghanistan. According to these figures, only workers in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait have less effective work hours than those in Iran (Mehr, August 11).

These data join recent media reports indicating weak work ethics and laziness among Iranian workers. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's announcement of the current Iranian year

(1390) as the “year of economic jihad” has drawn the Iranian media’s attention to the poor work culture prevailing in the country.

Last month (July) media published figures indicating that Iranians rank third in the world for laziness (after Arabs and Africans). Iranian sociologist Abbas Mohammadi, who discussed these figures in an interview to Mehr News Agency, said that the laziness of Iranian workers is the result of various social, economic, and environmental factors, including the reliance of Iranian economy on natural resources (particularly oil); feelings of despair experienced by young Iranian men and women as a result of not knowing whether they will have a job, when they can get married, and will they be able to move forward in life, which makes them lazy and unmotivated; the influence of television and computers, due to which many Iranians don’t go out to parks or engage in physical activities as before; the lack of bicycle lanes and high-quality sidewalks in cities, which prevents many Iranians from engaging in physical activities; and the large number of non-working days in Iran, particularly in the education system (Mehr, July 10).



The public and media debate on Iran’s work culture and productivity has also been prompted by two proposals recently made by the government: shortening the work week to five days (by turning Thursday into a holiday in addition to Friday) and adding another vacation day to Eid ul-Fitr, which concludes the month of Ramadan.

In recent weeks these two proposals have been criticized by politicians and media. The Tabnak website said that adding holidays will not help improve work productivity. An editorial published by the website said that the defining characteristics of Iranian workers are laziness, poor work ethics, and work-related despair. Such feelings of despair are also evident among educated, qualified workers, who feel that their promotion is not based on professionalism but rather on outside considerations.

The website criticized the president’s proposal to shorten the work week and his statement about Iran being the country with the lowest number of vacation days in the world. According

to Tabnak, the president did not address Iran's low work productivity compared to other countries, and completely ignored the quality of the work. The website claimed that the laziness of Iranian workers stems from the fact that their creativity is suppressed by their superiors, and from a promotion policy based on how close the worker is to his manager rather than on productivity and professionalism. What is needed, Tabnak said, is a cultural change and a work environment that will increase productivity and efficiency, rather than an increase in the number of vacation days (Tabnak, July 29).

The government's proposal to add one day as a work holiday to the Eid ul-Fitr vacation, discussed by the Majles this week, was also met with reservations. Mohammad Dehqan, a member of the Majles' presiding board, announced this week that adding new holidays without canceling old ones contributes nothing to Iran. Those who support the proposal, the Majles member said, argue that Arab countries enjoy a longer Eid ul-Fitr vacation, ignoring Iran's 13-day New Year (Nowrooz) vacation, and the holidays on Prophet Muhammad's birthday and death anniversary and on Revolution Victory Day (Afkar News, August 11).

The daily Jomhuri-ye Eslami also criticized the government's decision to extend the Eid ul-Fitr vacation. An editorial published by the daily said that there is no justification for the proposal, and that it will further reduce the already low productivity of government ministries. The daily argued that the proposal is also unjustified on religious grounds since the religion of Islam discourages idleness and encourages work, and that it contradicts the instructions of the Supreme Leader, who issued a call to encourage work and increase efforts as part of the "year of economic jihad" (Jomhuri-ye Eslami, August 13).

In recent years politicians and media in Iran have grown increasingly critical of the country's holiday policy. Iranians enjoy nearly 80 days off work (Fridays and about 25 non-working days due to national and religious holidays). In addition, an Iranian worker is entitled by law to 30 days of paid vacation (in addition to the official vacation days). Economic experts say this vacation policy causes billions of dollars' worth of economic damage per year. The number of hours Iran can engage in effective economic relations with European countries is even smaller due to the fact that the weekend holiday in Iran is Friday (compared to Saturday and Sunday in most European countries) and due to the time difference between Iran and Europe and the difference in work hours between Iran and countries in the Western world—the regular work hours in Iran are 8 AM to 4 PM.

Pictures of the week: police operation to confiscate satellite dishes

