



**The Meir Amit Intelligence
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Spotlight on Iran

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Majles vs. the government: initiative to summon President Ahmadinejad to a questioning re-launched; proposal to remove minister of economy rejected

This week saw the re-launch of the initiative to summon President Ahmadinejad to a questioning before Majles members, an exceptional move that may even end with the president's removal from office. The initiative was first brought up several months ago, only to be removed from the agenda of the Majles after several of its members who had initially signed the proposal to summon the president to a questioning revoked their signatures.

Earlier this week, the proposal, bearing the signatures of 74 Majles members, was submitted to the Majles deputy speaker for the second time. It is now expected to be brought up at a Majles committee where a representative on behalf of the president will be asked to provide explanations to the Majles members. If they are not satisfied with the explanations, the president will be required to appear at a questioning within one month.

Meanwhile, this week the Majles rejected a proposal to dismiss Shamseddin Hosseini, the minister of economy, for his involvement in the large embezzlement exposed about two months ago in Iran's banking system. Following a discussion attended by the president, 141 Majles members (including Majles speaker Ali Larijani) voted against the proposal, 93 voted for it, and 10 abstained.

Majles committee accuses top Ministry of Economy and Central Bank officials of being responsible for massive embezzlement scandal

This week the Majles Article 90 Committee, responsible for monitoring the various state authorities, submitted to the Majles plenary session a report of its findings with regard to the massive banking embezzlement uncovered about two months ago. The embezzlement, considered the biggest in the history of Iranian banking, involved the theft of nearly 3 billion dollars subsequently used to purchase government assets.

The Majles committee report details severe flaws in how the Ministry of Economy and the Central Bank conducted themselves in the embezzlement. Among other things, the report asserts that the Central Bank and the Ministry of Economy did not take the necessary measures to control those banks affiliated with the Arya Group, the main target in the embezzlement allegations. The committee suggested taking disciplinary measures against the minister of economy and the deputy governor of the Central Bank.

Following the release of the report, government critics once again demanded that strong measures be taken against senior government officials involved in the embezzlement. In its editorial, the daily Jomhuri-ye Eslami claimed that the release of the committee's report is not enough, calling to expose the names of those senior officials involved in the affair and take legal action against them to reinforce the public's trust in the government system.

At the same time, Majles National Security and Foreign Policy Committee chairman Alaeddin Boroujerdi was detained for 24 hours this week on suspicions of being involved in the scandal. Boroujerdi denied having anything to do with the embezzlement, saying that his relations with the Arya Group had taken place within the confines of the law and were aimed to promote economic projects in his electoral province.

Iran reacts strongly to Clinton's Voice of America and BBC interviews

Iran reacted strongly to the interviews given last week by U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to the BBC and Voice of America, broadcasted in Persian to Iranians. In the interviews, Clinton announced that the United States is planning to establish an online "virtual embassy" in Tehran to maintain contact with the people of Iran, stressing the desire of the United States to engage in an ongoing dialogue with Iranians and support their aspirations of freedom in light of the regime's suppression efforts.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast reacted strongly to Clinton's remarks, saying they reflect the United States' lack of understanding towards Iran. He called on the American administration to stop meddling in the internal affairs of other countries while suppressing the people of the United States. Majles speaker Ali Larijani also condemned Clinton's statements, saying that if the United States is interested in opening a virtual embassy, it's time for President Obama to appoint a virtual secretary of state.

The Iranian media also reacted strongly to Clinton's remarks. The daily Keyhan wondered how the United States wants to help the people of Iran while being unable to solve the strong internal crisis currently faced by its citizens, and after its failure to save the tyrants of Arab countries who have been toppled in recent months. The daily Javan argued that the strategy pursued by the United States towards Iran does not stem from its leaders' desire to help the people of Iran, but rather from their recognition that it is impossible to rein in Iran's success on the domestic and international scene.

Anti-Semitic film Saturday Hunter goes into theatrical release

Nearly two years after it was first shown at the Fajr International Film Festival held in Tehran in early 2010, the film Saturday Hunter has recently gone into theatrical release. The film is drawing considerable attention from the conservative media and has been defined by Fars News Agency as "one of the

strategic works of the Iranian cinema". According to the news agency, the film is widely popular with students who watched it at university screenings.

Set in Israel, the film follows a boy named Binyamin who is psychologically abused and brainwashed by his grandfather, a "Zionist rabbi", in order to turn him into a merciless and bloodthirsty murderer willing to spill the blood of Palestinians and innocents to realize the goals of Zionism.

As the movie went into theatrical release, Siamak Moreh Sedq, the Jewish community representative in the Majles, voiced strong criticism against its creators, saying they make no distinction between Zionism and Judaism. In an interview to the ISNA news agency, the Jewish Majles member said that even Ayatollah Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic revolution, stressed on several occasions that political Zionism and Judaism are two entirely separate things that need to be considered apart. Parviz Sheikh Tadi, the film's director, rejected the criticism, saying that the movie is actually beneficial for the Jewish cause since it presents the Zionist rabbi as one who twists Judaism for the interests of the "Zionist regime".

Not just websites: have authorities in Iran started to filter contents of text messages on cellular phones?

The ISNA news agency reported this week that Iranian authorities no longer filter just websites and have recently started filtering the contents of text messages sent using cellular phones. According to the report, cellular companies have prevented the sending of text messages suspected of being of political character as they included such words and phrases as "Majles member", "discussion", and "province governor". The news agency questioned a statement released by the minister of telecommunications, who said that the problem with sending text messages is the result of technical malfunctions with some cellular phone devices or the text messaging system.

At the same time, a top official in the Ministry of Islamic Guidance reported this week that the content of 1,000 websites is checked by the ministry every day, and when suspicions of banned content arise, a report is sent to the committee responsible for setting website filtering criteria, which decides whether to filter the website or send a warning notice to its operators.

Majles vs. the government: initiative to summon President Ahmadinejad to a questioning re-launched; proposal to remove minister of economy rejected

This week saw the re-launch of the initiative to summon President Ahmadinejad to a questioning before Majles members, an exceptional move that may even end with the president's removal from office. The initiative was first brought up several months ago, only to be removed from the agenda of the Majles after several of its members who had initially signed the proposal to summon the president to a questioning revoked their signatures. According to Article 88 of Iran's constitution, the Majles can summon the president to a questioning with the support of at least one quarter of Majles members.

Earlier this week, the proposal, bearing the signatures of 74 Majles members, was submitted to Mohammad-Reza Bahonar, the Majles deputy speaker (ILNA, October 30). It is now expected to be brought up at a Majles committee where a representative on behalf of the president will be asked to provide explanations to the Majles members. If they are not satisfied with his explanations, the president will be required to appear at a questioning within one month. The Majles intends to question Ahmadinejad on various issues pertaining to his functioning in recent months, including his decision to sack Heydar Moslehi, Iran's intelligence minister, ultimately revoked due to the Supreme Leader's opposition; his continuing support for his controversial office chief Rahim Masha'i; his disregard for Majles resolutions; and the financial failures of his government.



Rooz Online, October 30

After the re-launch of the initiative to summon the president to a questioning, Majles member Ali Motahari, one of Ahmadinejad's strongest critics in the conservative camp, withdrew his resignation from the Majles. Motahari recently submitted a resignation letter to the Majles speaker to protest the suspension of the initiative to summon the president to a questioning. He even sent a letter about the issue to Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, who according to some Iranian media reports had reservations about the initiative.

Meanwhile, this week the Majles rejected a proposal to dismiss Shamseddin Hosseini, the minister of economy, for his involvement in the large embezzlement exposed about two months ago in Iran's banking system. Those who initiated the proposal claimed that Hosseini had not used his legal powers in dealing with the banks and financial institutions involved in the embezzlement, appointed inappropriate people for important positions in those institutions, and failed to monitor the banking system despite warnings he had received from the various control mechanisms (Fars, October 31).



The Majles speaker and the economy minister at the impeachment discussion

Following a discussion attended by the president, 141 Majles members voted against the proposal, 93 voted for it, and 10 abstained. Majles speaker Ali Larijani surprisingly voted against the removal of the minister. Larijani said during the discussion that, even though the conduct of the Ministry of Economy in the embezzlement has been found to be flawed, it is his view that the minister of economy has performed successfully, which is why he doesn't see fit to support his removal from office (Fars, November 1).

On the eve of the vote, government critics claimed that the president and his allies had put heavy pressure on Majles members in an attempt to persuade them to drop the impeachment initiative. Bultan News, a website close to the government, criticized the proposal to remove the minister from office and praised his performance, saying it led to such significant economic achievements as the implementation of the subsidy policy reform, stability on the stock market during a global economic crisis, expectations of increased economic growth in 2012, and declining inflation. The website warned that the minister's removal will halt the trend of economic improvement spearheaded by the minister and hit Iran's economic stability (Bultan News, October 31).

One day after the vote, Tehran Emrouz, a daily affiliated with Tehran's mayor Mohammad-Baqer Qalibaf, published an editorial titled "Expectations from the Majles were different". If the Majles had removed the economy minister, the article said, it would have reaffirmed its

determination to fight law-breaking, restored the public's trust in the government, and sent a clear message that Iran's top officials are under close scrutiny and, when they abandon their work, they get punished. Unfortunately, the daily said, that expectation was not fulfilled (Tehran Emrouz, November 2).

Majles committee accuses top Ministry of Economy and Central Bank officials of being responsible for massive embezzlement scandal

This week the Majles Article 90 Committee, responsible for monitoring the various state authorities, submitted to the Majles plenary session a report of its findings in the massive banking embezzlement uncovered about two months ago. The embezzlement, considered the biggest in the history of Iranian banking, involved the theft of nearly 3 billion dollars subsequently used to purchase government assets. The affair was orchestrated by businessman Amir Mansoor-Arya Khosravi, who used his connections with top Saderat Bank officials to fraudulently take over government bonds and later sell them to private banks. The affair was used by government critics to accuse it of failing to properly monitor the banking system, which, as they claimed, made it possible for the embezzlement to go on for several years.

The Majles committee report details severe flaws in how the Ministry of Economy and the Central Bank conducted themselves in the embezzlement. In part, the report claims that the Central Bank allowed the Arya Group, owned by businessman Mansoor-Arya Khosravi, to continue its dubious economic activity with various banks even after suspicions were raised about the activity.

According to the authors of the report, the Ministry of Economy also did not take sufficient measures to stop the activity of the group once there was enough information to cast doubt on its legitimacy. The ministry also did not exercise its legal responsibility to monitor the banks that worked with the Arya Group and did not monitor the activity of their board members as required. The report further claims that the minister of economy did not take the necessary measures to address violations by the banks involved in the affair even after receiving reports concerning this matter.

The authors of the report also said that the deputy governor of the Central Bank held several meetings with the president's office chief Rahim Masha'i and directors of banks involved in the embezzlement. This information may lend credence to claims made by government critics that Masha'i and the "deviant faction" (a term used to refer to the political faction affiliated

with the president's supporters and office chief) are involved in the embezzlement as part of their efforts to use national economic resources to further their political interests.

In the conclusions chapter, the Article 90 Committee recommended that disciplinary measures be taken against those involved in the affair, including the minister of economy and the deputy governor of the Central Bank. At the end of a Majles session that discussed the main points of the report, the majority of Majles members voted in favor of transferring it to the judiciary for further action (ILNA, October 30).

Following the release of the report, government critics once again demanded that strong measures be taken against senior government officials allegedly involved in the embezzlement. In its editorial, the daily Jomhuri-ye Eslami claimed that the release of the committee's report is not enough. The daily expressed its appreciation to the Majles for exposing the flaws in Iran's economic system. The daily added, however, that the flaws should be dealt with, the names of those senior government and Central Bank officials responsible for the flaws should be exposed, and legal action should be taken against them to reinforce the public's trust in the government system and prove that the authorities are determined to effectively fight corruption (Jomhuri-ye Eslami, October 31).

In another recent development in the embezzlement scandal, Majles National Security and Foreign Policy Committee chairman Alaeddin Boroujerdi was detained for 24 hours this week on suspicions of being involved in the affair. Boroujerdi denied any link between himself or his family and the embezzlement. Majles Foreign Policy and National Security Committee spokesman Kazem Jalali reported at a press conference that Boroujerdi had provided the committee members with explanations about his relations with the Arya Group, saying that their purpose was to promote economic projects in his electoral province, and that most committee members were satisfied that these relations had taken place within the confines of the law (Fars, October 30).

Iran reacts strongly to Clinton's Voice of America and BBC interviews

Iran reacted strongly to the interviews given last week by U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to the BBC and Voice of America, broadcasted in Persian to Iranians.

In the interviews, Clinton announced that the United States is planning to establish an online "virtual embassy" in Tehran to maintain contact with the people of Iran. She stressed the

desire of the United States to engage in a constant dialogue with Iranians and support their aspirations of freedom in light of the regime's suppression efforts.

Clinton noted that the American administration avoided providing direct assistance to the reformist opposition during the riots of 2009, fearing that such assistance could jeopardize the opposition's status. She stressed, however, that the United States is putting considerable efforts into providing Iranians with tools to help them deal with the regime's attempts to impose restrictions on the internet and the freedom of expression.



Virtual embassy in Tehran: "Oh, Imam [Khomeini], how can I now climb the wall of the virtual embassy?" (www.khodnevis.org, October 29)

Foreign Ministry spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast defined Clinton's remarks as "unbelievable", saying they reflect the United States' complete lack of understanding towards Iran. He called on the American administration to stop meddling in the internal affairs of other countries while suppressing the people of the United States. According to Mehmanparast, the statements made by the secretary of state reflect the confusion in America's foreign policy, particularly with regard to such a powerful, independent country as Iran (ILNA, October 29).

Majles speaker Ali Larijani also condemned Clinton's statements, saying that she appears to have mixed up diplomacy and "children's games". He noted that her remarks should not be taken too seriously, and that if the United States is interested in opening a virtual embassy, it's time for President Obama to appoint a virtual secretary of state to solve his problems (Fars, October 30).

The conservative media also reacted strongly to the interviews given by Clinton to Western Persian-language media. In its editorial, the daily Keyhan wondered how the United States wants to help the people of Iran when it is unable to heal the strong internal crises currently

faced by its citizens, and after its failure to save the tyrants in Arab countries whose regimes have fallen in recent months (Keyhan, October 31).

The daily Javan argued that Clinton's remarks are proof that, despite the efforts of the United States, its leaders are so hated by the people of Iran that the reformist opposition leaders asked them to play down their relations with them in the 2009 riots. The daily also said that, while the leaders of the United States claim their policy towards Iran stems from a desire to help the Iranian people, the real reason for the strategy pursued by the United States towards Iran is its recognition that it is impossible to rein in Iran's success in various fields, including its nuclear program, its industry, and the spread of Islamic awakening in the region (Javan, October 30).

Anti-Semitic film *Saturday Hunter* goes into theatrical release

Nearly two years after it was first shown at the Fajr International Film Festival held in Tehran in early 2010, the film *Saturday Hunter* (Shekarchi-ye Shanbeh) has recently gone into theatrical release. Directed by Parviz Sheikh Tadi, it is currently playing in several theaters and universities across Iran and drawing considerable attention from the conservative media. This week the film has been defined by Fars News Agency as "one of the strategic works of the Iranian cinema", revealing the depth of thought and goals of the "anti-human Zionist school of thought" (Fars, October 24).

Set in Israel, the film follows a boy named Binyamin who is psychologically abused and brainwashed by his grandfather, a "Zionist rabbi", in order to turn him into a merciless and bloodthirsty murderer willing to spill the blood of Palestinians and innocents to realize the goals of Zionism. Binyamin is separated from his mother to prepare him emotionally for adopting the Zionist ideology. At first Binyamin resists, but gradually he gives in and embraces radical Jewish views.

The Zionist rabbi, played by actor Ali Nassirian, is portrayed as a sadistic con-man and religious racist who manages to turn the boy into a bloodthirsty robot in the service of Zionism. The film, shot mostly in Lebanon, portrays Zionist rabbis as the ones in charge of Israel's government institutions, and as being financially and morally corrupt.



As the movie went into theatrical release, Siamak Moreh Sedq, the Jewish community representative in the Majles, voiced strong criticism against its creators, saying they make no distinction between Zionism and Judaism. In an interview to the ISNA news agency, the Jewish Majles member said that even Ayatollah Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic revolution, stressed on several occasions that political Zionism and Judaism are two entirely separate things that need to be considered apart. That distinction, according to Moreh Sedq, is not evident in the new film. Moreh Sedq also noted that the film does not offer a satisfactory portrayal of the Palestinian people's resistance, depicting Palestinians as ones who completely surrender to the "Zionist criminals". According to Moreh Sedq, the film ignores the involvement of the Israeli army, the Mossad, and other Zionist organizations in the crimes committed against the Palestinian people, leading the viewer to think that the Jewish clergyman is the one responsible for all these crimes. The Jewish representative in the Majles also had reservations about the film's trailer, currently aired on Iranian TV, saying it makes no distinction between Jews and Zionists. Criticism against Zionism must not be superseded by criticism against Judaism and Jewish clergymen, the Jewish Majles member said (ISNA, October 26).

The criticism about the lack of distinction between Judaism and Zionism was rejected by Parviz Sheikh Tadi, the film's director. In an interview given to Fars News Agency, Sheikh Tadi said that the movie is actually beneficial for the Jewish cause since it presents the Zionist rabbi as one who twists Judaism for the interests of the "Zionist regime". According to Sheikh Tadi, the Zionist Jews distort their religion, similarly to the Sunni Taliban, exploiting the sources of Jewish religious law to realize the goals of Zionism.

The director added that the film presents only a small part of the Zionists' crimes, and that it was based on twelve years of exhaustive, serious research, which included information gathering on Zionism, study of sources of Jewish religious law, conversations with "experts", and a several-month trip to Lebanon (Fars, October 25).

Fars News Agency reported last week that the film became widely popular with students who watched it at university screenings. The editor-in-chief of the monthly Cinema Resane had

praise for the film, saying it is highly important in depicting the crimes committed by Zionists against Muslims. He added that the exposure of the crimes will make it possible to influence the Muslim world and even wipe the "Zionist regime" off the map of the world in the future (Fars, October 25).

In contrast, a review published by the Alef website had reservations about the film's excessively detailed depiction of Zionist crimes. Almost half the film portrays the brutal violence employed by Zionists against Palestinians, the review said, and such a portrayal can severely shock the viewers and lead them to believe it's an exaggeration. Those unfamiliar with the sources of Jewish religious law and Zionist history may question the truthfulness of the film, while the actual crimes of the Zionists exceed what is shown in the film (Alef, October 27).

In recent years the battle against Zionism and Israel has assumed a prominent place in narrative and documentary TV productions. In 2007 Iran Broadcasting aired a TV series called *Zero Degree Turn*, which showed Zionists collaborating with Nazis on the backdrop of a love story between a young Iranian man and a French Jewish woman. In May-June 2008 the news channel of Iran Broadcasting aired the documentary series *The Secret of Armageddon*, which drew heavily on *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* to lend credence to claims about a plot by world Zionism to take over the world, including Iran. In March 2009 Iranian TV aired a series titled *Gilad*, which told the story of Ben-Hur Ben Gurio, a young Jewish trader who immigrated to Iran in the early 1960s. According to the series' creators, the production was designed to stress the distinction supposedly made by Iran between Zionists and Jews.

Not just websites: have authorities in Iran started to filter contents of text messages on cellular phones?

The ISNA news agency reported this week that Iranian authorities no longer filter just websites and have recently started filtering the contents of text messages sent using cellular phones. According to the report, cellular companies have prevented the sending of text messages suspected of being of political character as they included such words and phrases as "Majles member" and "province governor".

Majles member Ali-Akbar Olia commented on the matter by saying that certain words, such as "discussion" (jaleseh), prevent text messages from being sent. He noted that he had brought up the issue to the minister of telecommunications, who claimed that he was in no way involved and that perhaps the problems with sending text messages stemmed from

technical malfunctions in some cellular phone devices which do not support texting in Persian, or another malfunction in the texting system. The news agency questioned the minister's explanations, given the fact that the problem with texting appears only with certain text messages (ISNA, October 30).

The use of text messages for political purposes is also widespread in Iran. Texting has become so popular in the recent election campaigns that the telecommunications company was instructed by the authorities to block the option of sending text messages to cellular phones through the internet during the election propaganda days to prevent the sending of political text messages in bulk to a large number of subscribers. During the riots that broke out after the last presidential elections, the Iranian authorities also imposed severe restrictions on texting and for several days even completely blocked text messaging services.

Meanwhile, a top official in the Ministry of Islamic Guidance announced this week that the ministry is not responsible for filtering websites. The head of the ministry's headquarters for internet websites and non-governmental news agencies said in an interview to Fars News Agency that the responsibility for filtering websites rests with the committee in charge of setting criteria for web filtering. He noted that the content of 1,000 websites is checked by the ministry every day, and when suspicions of banned content arise, a report is sent to the committee, which then decides whether the website should be filtered or a warning notice should be sent to its operators (Fars, October 30).

The committee for setting criteria was established last year under the computer crime law, and it is headed by the prosecutor general. The committee is comprised of representatives from the ministries of education, telecommunications, intelligence, justice, science, and Islamic guidance; the head of the Islamic Publicity Organization; the head of Iran Broadcasting; a representative of the internal security forces; an IT expert; and a Majles representative. It filters websites according to five main criteria: publication of content that undermines public morality, content that offends the sanctity of Islam, content that compromises public safety and order, content that goes against state authorities and government institutions, and content that encourages computer crime.

Pictures of the week: Tehran flooded after heavy autumn rain

