

# Public Support for IRNA Reported Growing Over Revelations Against Kayhan

People from all segments of Iranian society came out in support of the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) for its revelations against the hardline daily 'Kayhan'. The Public Relations Department of IRNA reported Iranian students, journalists, authors, workers and other strata of society praising the national press agency for its courage in divulging truths against 'Kayhan' in an article published in the Persian daily 'Iran' which dubbed it a 'media mafia' intending to stir violence and a culture of confrontation in the country. Phone calls of public support came after an announcement on Wednesday that IRNA was flooded with anonymous phone calls and threats of retaliation from Islamic fundamentalist circles. "Organized, threatening phone calls" came after the agency criticized the conservative 'Kayhan' daily, sources said. In three editions last week, Kayhan claimed two pro-reform intellectuals, Abdolkarim Soroush and Mohsen Kadivar, had received money from the U.S.-based Human Rights Watch. IRNA, which conservatives accuse of being biased in favor of reformers in

its press function, denounced the Kayhan reports as part of an organized campaign to sully allies of President Khatami, a campaign which is gathering heat as the presidential election and Khatami's bid for reelection gets nearer. 'Kayhan,' long a stronghold of conservative views, is struggling against public indifference to its attacks against reformists who call for an independent press. Kayhan's unsupported allegation was followed by a war of words and exchange of letters between the two institutions which climaxed in an IRNA decision to publish its side of the story so as to make the public decide for itself. IRNA has made clear it is ready to stand up against its claim and its supporters have vowed not to give a deaf ear to threats against the agency. On Friday an unknown woman called the Persian daily 'Iran,' saying the daily's premises would be bombed anytime. Many staff members of the daily have also been threatened and subjected to abusive language. IRNA staff members, in the face of continuing threats, have duty of disseminating information with greater enthusiasm.

## From Gary Sick

If you have been following the threads, especially Thread 2, you will be aware of false statements that have recently been published by two ultra-conservative papers in Iran--Kayhan and Ya Lesarat ol-Hoseyn--concerning Gulf/2000, Human Rights Watch, and a wide range of individuals and institutions that have participated in academic contacts and exchanges with Iran. A little background is in order.

Some weeks ago, a videotape began to circulate in Tehran that created a sensation. A man named Amir Farshad Ebrahimi, a former member of the Ansar-e Hezbollah group, gave a recorded interview about the past activities of Ansar. As you know, Ansar specializes in street violence and attacks on proponents of the political and intellectual views of the overwhelming majority of the Iranian people, as expressed in three elections. The full text of this interview, which has not been published in Iran, is available in Thread 2. It details some of Ansar's violent activities and its close working relationship with a number of well known figures in Iran.

In view of the gravity of the charges made by Mr. Ebrahimi, it might have been expected that a full scale investigation would have been undertaken to determine the truth of these allegations. Instead, he was sent directly to prison and held incommunicado, while judicial authorities launched a campaign against anyone suspected of having contact with him. Some of these individuals, such as human rights lawyer Shirin Ebadi (lawyer for some of those assassinated in the serial murders case

and critic of former intelligence official Saeed Emami who died mysteriously in prison), were also sent to prison.

Perhaps one of the reasons that Mr. Hussein Shariatmadari, the managing director of Kayhan newspaper, was unwilling to lead a campaign for disclosure of the videotape was that he and his publication were specifically named as having conspired with Ansar and Saeed Emami. The Tehran newspaper "Iran" noted in December that "Kayhan afternoon daily implicitly admitted on Sunday that Hussein Shariatmadari, its managing director, had collaborated with Saeed Emami, former deputy intelligence minister who was behind the serial murders and then committed suicide in the prison. Shariatmadari also worked as an interrogator forcing political prisoners to confess..."

In July 1999, Shariatmadari was summoned to court for violations of the press law. In March of this year Shariatmadari, a former commander in the Revolutionary Guards, was ordered to pay four million rials for libel and slander in a case brought by President Khatami's office, among others, after publishing unauthorized internal documents. At that time, news agencies and the Iranian media reported that his newspaper was "widely believed to have close ties with the Intelligence Ministry." Earlier this month, Shariatmadari was again called into court after his paper published unauthorized security information related to the videotape. His newspaper is one of the few that the jailers in Evin Prison permit their prisoners to read. That may be a blessing since Kayhan's

# IRNA Chief Appears in Court To Answer to Charges Against 'Iran' Daily

Fereidoun Verdinejad, former managing director of the Persian daily 'Iran' and current chief of the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA), appeared in Branch 1410 of Tehran's Public Court on a complaint lodged against him in the discharge of official duties. "The Press Court summoned me for 24 previous charges that have been answered and for 30 new ones filed while I was the managing director of Iran daily," he told IRNA. Verdinejad has been relieved of the post of managing director of the daily 'Iran' in favor of Hossein Ziaei as of January. "Seven new complaints (filed after his discharge from duty as 'Iran' managing director) were filed by the law enforcement forces (LEF) which were later dropped," Verdinejad said. Among the battalion of accusers that Verdinejad faces are the vigilantes of Ansar-e Hezbollah, Basijis (volunteer forces) from Tehran and other cities, private

complainants including a certain Jaleh Oskuei, publisher of the banned weekly publication 'Thursdays'. Oskuei has claimed that her weekly was shut down after it reprinted a news item first covered by the daily 'Iran'. Verdinejad defended himself of the charges of Oskuei and another private complainant -- a retired police officer whose daughter is being prosecuted for issuing a bouncing cheque and for robbery -- to the satisfaction of the judge. Verdinejad was commended for good behavior by Judge Saeed Mortazavi, saying most of the charges are libel and defamation, noting that the subject of a recent dispute between IRNA and the hardline daily 'Kayhan' was not brought up. A second hearing has been scheduled for Wednesday. Verdinejad, veteran journalist and advocate of an independent press, has been frequently criticized for his views by opponents of the movement for reforms.

subscription rate among non-prisoners has been falling precipitously due to Mr. Shariatmadari's political views and editorial policies.

The other newspaper that has joined in this campaign of falsification, Ya Lesarat ol-Hoseyn, is also identified in the videotaped confessions as the mouthpiece of Ansar-e Hezbollah and one of the centers of its activities, including political disinformation.

Apparently these two publications, which are now potentially implicated in some of the worst excesses and violence of recent years, have decided to divert attention from their own alleged misdeeds by fabricating charges against others and by falling back on that oldest of all excuses, blaming all of Iran's problems on outsiders.

One of the greatest achievements of the Islamic revolution was to acknowledge that Iran was now, at last, solely responsible for its own fate. President Khatami was able to call for a dialogue of civilizations and to encourage academic contacts with other societies. One of the objectives of Mr. Shariatmadari and Lesarat appears to be to turn back the clock and to sink into the old habits of suspicion, isolation and self-righteousness.

Gulf/2000 continues to make available the full texts of their articles, without editorial comment or emendations, and you can judge for yourself the accuracy of what they have to say. It is probably too much to ask that they extend the same courtesy to us for the benefit of their dwindling number of readers. Freedom of expression is not something they understand or appreciate.

In the meantime, they are doing damage to their own country by deliberately trying to alienate those who have worked to build bridges to Iran and who have argued against the hardliners in their own societies to stop demonizing Iran. In the end, I believe

Shariatmadari and his sort will fail and Iran will take its place as a proud, self-confident, independent state in the community of nations. But that is a process that must be worked out in Iran. Despite their fulminations, the future of Iran will be determined by its own people according to its own national interests. Others may follow events and express their own opinions, but outsiders, whether well meaning or otherwise, have no right (and in reality no capacity) to interfere.

Mr. Shariatmadari suggests that Iran is awash in traitors and that only he and his friends have access to the truth. On the contrary, the Iranian people have demonstrated their ability to speak for themselves. The fact that they disagreed overwhelmingly with the views of Kayhan and Lesarat in every recent election not only explains the declining readership and credibility of these papers but also the bankruptcy of their policies of disinformation and vilification.

In the meantime, we are proud to be included, even indirectly, in the pantheon of those courageous figures in Iran who regularly suffer the false and vicious attacks of Mr. Shariatmadari and his cohorts.

پاسخ جدول شماره ۱۱۰

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۱۱۸	۱۱۹	۱۲۰	۱۲۱	۱۲۲	۱۲۳	۱۲۴	۱۲۵	۱۲۶	۱۲۷	۱۲۸	۱۲۹	۱۳۰

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