



## Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center



### Highlights of the week

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### President strongly criticized by conservatives for comments on Islamic dress code enforcement

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was strongly criticized by the conservative camp this week for comments made early last week against enforcing the Islamic dress code on women. In a television interview he gave on June 12, Ahmadinejad said that the government had no part to play in forcing women to wear veils according to the Islamic dress code, and that the government did not involve itself with that issue. He indicated that, while being aware of the need to solve the morality problems of Iranian society, he was against the enforcement of that issue. If there are problems in society, the president said, they must be solved wisely,

lawfully, and with respect of human dignity rather than by coercion. He even noted that it was inappropriate for internal security forces to address men and women walking together on the street and ask them about the nature of their relationship. The government does not accept such conduct, he said, and will monitor the implementation of the Islamic code enforcement.



The president's comments, made on the backdrop of the increasingly strict enforcement of the Islamic dress code in recent weeks, were strongly criticized by conservative circles, including some usually considered to be the president's supporters. Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, the Friday prayer leader in Tehran and chairman of the Guardian Council, addressed the president's comments during his weekly sermon, claiming that no one had the right to question the activities of the internal security forces in the enforcement of the Islamic dress code. That fight is not just a cultural matter, just as the fight on drug traffickers and thieves is not limited to the cultural sphere. He expressed regret that the president had brought up that issue, stressing that, in Islam, wearing a veil is an important matter that must be adhered to (various news agencies, June 18). Friday prayer leaders in other cities also mentioned the president's comments in their sermons. Seyyed Yousef Tabataba'inejad, the Friday prayer leader in Esfahan, said that the fight on corruption was the responsibility of all sectors of society. According to Tabataba'inejad, the Iranian people did not accomplish the Islamic revolution just to obtain nuclear energy, but also to establish an Islamic government. Conservative cleric and Mashhad Friday prayer leader Ayatollah Seyyed Ahmad Alam al-Hoda also addressed the issue in his weekly sermon, saying that not wearing a veil was tantamount to moral corruption and that the government must deal with any kind of corruption in a resolute and organized fashion, just as it deals with other examples of corruption (Alef, June 18).

Mohammad Taghi Rahbar, chairman of the Majles clerics' faction, also criticized the president, claiming that Ahmadinejad had in fact green-lighted immodest dress. He expressed willingness to confront the president to discuss the issue of veils (ILNA, June 16).

Senior cleric Mohammad Taqi Mesbah-Yazdi, considered to be President Ahmadinejad's spiritual guide, also had criticism for his comments, saying the claim that the government was not responsible for taking action on matters of religion and that clerics were responsible for such matters was an expression of secular thought that condoned religion-state separation. In Islamic thought, said Mesbah-Yazdi, regulating the people's religious affairs is one of the key missions of the authorities (Asr-e Iran, June 17).

Even the conservative daily Keyhan, which normally supports the government and President Ahmadinejad, broke ranks last week by criticizing the president for his comments. An article titled "Mr. President, we did not expect this from you" says that most Iranians consider modest dress an important positive value, and immodest dress a great sin. Cultural activity does not make law enforcement unnecessary. When public norms are violated, those responsible must be punished by law—saying that the government is not responsible makes no sense. The president's comments contradict the Islamic and revolutionary fundamentals of his thought, Keyhan says, and appear to reflect the bad advice given by some of his advisors who seek to provoke conflict between him and the clerics (Keyhan, June 15).

Ever since he was elected as the president of Iran, President Ahmadinejad has had a complex stance on issues involving religion and women. During the 2005 presidential campaign, Ahmadinejad stated that his government would not enforce the Islamic dress code. After his re-election in 2009, Ahmadinejad announced his intention to appoint women to the cabinet for the first time since the Islamic revolution. Strong opposition prompted Ahmadinejad to reconsider his plan to appoint at least three women to ministers and he was forced to settle for only one woman minister in the Ministry of Health. What is more, the president formerly sparked criticism among conservative circles over issues involving religion and women. In April 2006, the president announced a decision to allow women into soccer stadiums. That decision was strongly condemned by clerics, ultimately forcing him to back down. A tape released in late 2006 showed the president attending the Asia Cup opening ceremony in Doha, the capital of Qatar. His presence also provoked anger from clerics, since the ceremony included several dances performed by women.

In practice, however, the campaign waged by the authorities to enforce the Islamic dress code has stepped up considerably since Ahmadinejad's election for president, and so did gender segregation in public institutions.

## Rafsanjani admits: relationship with Supreme Leader not what it used to be

In an interview recently granted by the Assembly of Experts chairman and Expediency Discernment Council chairman to the monthly Modiriyat-e Ertebatat (“Management of Telecommunications”), Ayatollah Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani admitted that his relationship with Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei is not what it used to be. In the interview, excerpts of which have been published on several Iranian news websites in recent days, Rafsanjani said that he would like to step down due to his age, but he is concerned about the possible negative political repercussions of his retirement and would hate to see it construed as driven by anger. Rafsanjani denied that there was conflict between him and the Supreme Leader, admitting, however, that their meetings became less frequent. Formerly, he said, he used to meet the Supreme Leader on a weekly basis; now they usually meet once every two weeks for several hours at a time.



The chairman of the Assembly of Experts addressed a letter he had sent to Khamenei on the eve of the last presidential elections in Iran, in which he strongly criticized the president over serious allegations made by Ahmadinejad against him and his sons during a televised debate held prior to the elections. Following the publication of the letter, government supporters blamed Rafsanjani for the riots which broke out in Iran after the elections. Rafsanjani claimed that he had sent the letter hoping that the Supreme Leader would respond to the serious and false allegations made by the president against him and other clerics, including ex-president Mohammad Khatami; former Majles speaker and Supreme Leader’s advisor Nateq Nouri; and Mehdi Karoubi, one of the leaders of the reformist opposition. He pointed out that everyone realized he was not happy with the way the country was run (by Ahmadinejad), claiming, however, that he was only forced to send the letter after the president refused to take his words back. Rafsanjani noted that when he had asked Khamenei for his opinion about the

letter, the Supreme Leader replied that he had no comments about the contents of the letter, but it would have been preferable if he had published it after the elections.

Later in the interview, Rafsanjani also discussed his views on using the Internet and satellite TV broadcasts. In his opinion, technological progress poses no problem as far as religious law is concerned. He noted that he uses the Internet, reads news websites, and even watches the BBC online. Speaking about satellite networks, Rafsanjani said that Iranians cannot be prevented from watching TV channels broadcasted via satellite from other countries since Iran's enemies invest considerable financial resources to prevent it from blocking such broadcasts. Furthermore, it is human nature to do that which is forbidden (Farda; Asr-e Iran; Tabnak; Rah-e Sabz, June 20).

Since the presidential elections, Rafsanjani stopped giving his weekly Friday sermons in the University of Tehran. At the same time, pro-government conservative circles stepped up attacks against him, accusing him of joining forces with the reformist opposition against the regime. It also appears that his position in the Assembly of Experts, which he heads, is slipping. Since the presidential elections, the assembly convened in September 2009 and February 2010 amidst reports about strong disagreements over the strategy needed to deal with the political crisis in Iran between most assembly members and Rafsanjani, who was absent at the final meeting in September. Prior to the start of the assembly deliberations in February, several Iranian news websites reported that some assembly members were trying to impeach Rafsanjani as its leader.

### **Political censorship also used by reformists**

This week, supporters of the reformist opposition have discussed at length a decision made by the editors of the reformist website Rooz Online (which operates outside of Iran) to remove from the website a cartoon drawn by exiled cartoonist Nikahang Kowsar, mocking reformist opposition leader Mir-Hossein Mousavi. The cartoon shows Mousavi sitting at his desk ten years from now and writing his 300th memorandum of opinion. The cartoon was published by the well-known cartoonist, affiliated with the reformist opposition, several days after Mousavi released his 18th memorandum of opinion, detailing the fundamentals of the Green Movement's political platform.

Pro-government conservative media were quick to report the publication of the cartoon and its removal from the Rooz Online website. Reporting on the incident, Fars news agency claimed that it reflected the strong differences of opinion among the "anti-revolutionary" reformist opposition, and the loss of faith in Mousavi as a leader (Fars, June 16).

The publication and removal of the cartoon sparked a heated debate among supporters of the reformist opposition. While some of them criticized the cartoonist Kowsar claiming that his cartoon calls into question Mousavi's leadership, weakens the opposition, and is exploited by government supporters, others claimed that its removal is an example of political censorship and that Mousavi is not above criticism.

One of the pro-opposition bloggers wrote that while the Green Movement is democratic, that is no reason to let it be destroyed or to offend its leaders just for the sake of criticism. He said that those who criticize the leaders of the movement do not understand the sensitive position it is in (<http://sokhansanj.blogspot.com>, June 16).

Another blog says that Kowsar does have the right to criticize opposition leaders; however, being a top cartoonist whose works are widely publicized, he must show clear awareness of political conditions in his criticism instead of showing cartoons only designed to mock and to offend. Over the past year, Mousavi has sided with the Green Movement and the Iranian people to defend their rights. That does not mean he is above criticism nor does it make him a charismatic leader such as Ayatollah Khomeini, the leader of the Islamic revolution, but one cannot remain silent over the wrong done to him for the sake of criticism (<http://greenmember.blogspot.com>, June 17).



Fars, June 16

Another blogger, however, had reservations about the removal of the cartoon from Rooz Online. In an article titled "Why censorship?" the blogger wrote that, just as Kowsar has every right to publish cartoons condemning the government, he should also be allowed to criticize the opposition leaders. The blogger cited the universal declaration of human rights, according to which everyone is entitled to freedom of expression, including the freedom to publish opinions on any media without interference or restrictions (<http://nasabonline.blogspot.com>, June 16). Another supporter of the reformist opposition published a blog entry titled "No green is a saint", saying that every person is entitled to

criticize any idea and any faith. Nothing is holy, and Kowsar's cartoon is nice and was meant to be a warning sign (<http://a57.blogspot.com>, June 18).

### 100,000-rial bill debuts this week

100,000-rial bills (10,000 tomans, about \$10) went into circulation in Iran this week. The new bills include several security features to prevent forgery, including a watermark portrait of Ayatollah Khomeini, the leader of the Islamic revolution (Fars, June 22).



Central Bank Governor Hamid Pour-Mohammadi said several months ago that the new bills were printed as part of the Central Bank's monetary reform, in which three zeros were to be taken off the local currency (Fars, March 23). The plan to take off the zeros was conceived over two years ago as part of the efforts to combat inflation, which required the central bank to issue bills for higher sums than in the past. Bills worth 50,000 rials were first issued in early 2008. In August 2008, the government established a special committee to look into the consequences of a monetary reform in which three or four zeros would be dropped off the currency. The appointed committee members included over 50 economists, academia members, and directors, who ultimately recommended that the reform be implemented. The plan's supporters claimed that dropping the zeros would have a beneficial effect on curbing inflation, similarly to other countries which had taken a similar measure, such as Turkey. The opponents of the plan, however, claimed that if the government's economic policy remained unchanged, the reform would have no influence on the inflation, and that Turkey only made a reform in its currency after it had inflation under control. In early 2010, President Ahmadinejad announced that the plan to take off three zeros had been finalized; however, the date of its implementation has yet to be announced.

## Another religious ruling against pet dogs issued in Iran

Senior conservative cleric Ayatollah Nasser Makarem Shirazi has issued a religious ruling this week decreeing that dogs should not be kept as pets. 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 (ISNA, June 16).

Keeping pet dogs, considered to be unclean (*najis*) in Shi'ite law, is viewed as an expression of the corrupting influence of the West and has been problematic since the Islamic revolution. In 1999, the then chief of judiciary Ayatollah Mohammad Yazdi ruled that dogs must not be taken to public places as it is offensive to Muslim sentiments. Yazdi did allow pets to be kept in people's homes, saying, however, that taking them to the street was an offense to the public and called for police intervention.

In 2002, the Friday prayer leader in the city of Orumiyyeh (northwestern Tehran) also ruled that keeping pet dogs was tantamount to moral corruption, and issued a call to detain pet dogs and their owners. Several months prior to that, the authorities banned the sale of dogs while police forces fined those who dared to walk their dogs in public places. Despite the restrictions, there has been an increase in the number of dog owners in Iran in recent years, particularly evident among the wealthier sectors of society in the big cities.

As part of the campaign waged by the authorities in recent years to enforce the Islamic code of conduct, dogs have been rounded up to keep them from being in public places. At least in some cases, dogs were rounded up while being walked by their owners. Rounding up the dogs was justified as an attempt to get rid of "Western influence". In August 2007, the reformist daily E'temad-e Melli reported the arrest of a young man from Tehran who posted ads on his street asking for help in finding his lost dog. The police reported that the man was arrested for posting ads that "spread moral corruption", since they could encourage more people to keep dogs as pets.



Dogs being rounded up by internal security forces  
(from the blog <http://kamangir.net>, September 12, 2007)

### Pictures of the week: 118 Directory Assistance center in Tehran

