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Reporters Without Borders condemns the continuing harassment of news providers and yet another escalation in censorship.

With just six weeks to go to a presidential election, the intelligence ministry has been summoning netizens and media editors to give them instructions on what they may and may not cover. At the same time, persecution of contributors to the Sufi website Majzooban Nor is being stepped up.

Abdolghafor Ghalandarinejad, one of the site's contributors, was arrested by intelligence ministry officials at his home in the southern city of Bandar Abbas on 20 April and was charged with writing for the site, anti-government propaganda and "contact with foreign media." He was released provisionally yesterday pending trial.

Another contributor, Kasra Nouri, 22, was sentenced by a court in the southern city of Shiraz on 27 April to four years and four months on prison for giving interviews to media based abroad. He was arrested in Shiraz on 14 March.

The government is reinforcing its six-year-old persecution of Iran's Gonabadi Dervish current of Sufism and this website, in particular, which has been denouncing the persecution.

Many of the site's contributors are already in prison. Alireza Roshan, who was arrested along with Reza Entesari, Hamidreza Moradi and Mostafa Abdi during a raid on the site's Tehran headquarters on 8 September 2011, is serving a one-year jail sentence.

Afshin Karampour, who was arrested in Konar, in the southeastern province of Fars, on 7 September 2011, is currently being held in Tehran's Evin prison. Salehdin Moradi, who was arrested in Shiraz on 10 September 2011, is in Adel Abad prison.

Four lawyers who represented the Sufi netizens - Amir Islami, Farshid Yadollahi, Mostafa Daneshjo and Omid Behrouzi - have also been jailed.

Meanwhile, the reformist website Kalameh reports that the intelligence ministry summoned the editors of all the leading dailies in order to brief them about the "red lines and prohibitions" they must observe in their coverage of the presidential election due to be held on 14 June.

The head of the ministry's media section made it clear to them that they will not be allowed to criticize

the conduct of the election. The ministry and Revolutionary Guards will monitor their conduct and will tolerate no transgressions, they were told.

At the same time, the supporters of the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, hope to steal a march on their political rivals, the supporters of outgoing President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, by "authorizing" open criticism of the Ahmadinejad administration. The power struggle between the main conservative factions is clearly intensifying in the run-up to the election.

Mohammad Jafar Mohammadzadeh, the deputy minister of culture and Islamic guidance, said yesterday: "Care must be taken to ensure that the media do not publish negative or demoralizing information about the economic situation."

"The regime wants to use the June presidential election to bolster the Supreme Leader's authority, which has been publicly questioned by millions of Iranians since Ahmadinejad's disputed reelection in the June 2009 presidential election," Reporters Without Borders said.

"But without a free press and with 52 journalists and netizens currently detained, one cannot talk of a free election. This election should be an opportunity for Iran to end the crisis that has paralyzed it, but the Supreme Leader and Revolutionary Guards are just making things worse by preventing Iranians from making a free and informed choice."

Reporters Without Borders has meanwhile learned that Ali Akbar Javanfekr, the former head of the state-owned news agency Irna, and Fariborz Rais Dana, a leading economist and writer, were released on 15 April.

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