

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	609
Land:	Iran
Kilde:	Reporters Without Borders
Titel:	. Press freedom violations recounted in real time January 2015
Udgivet:	28. august 2015
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	10. september 2015

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/iran-press-freedom-violations-recounted-21-01-2015,47521.html>

Middle East/North Africa - Iran

Press freedom violations recounted in real time January 2015

28 August 2015

28.08.2015 - Journalist arrested in order to serve jail term

Reporters Without Borders condemns the latest arrest of **Keyvan Mehregan**, a journalist who writes for reformist newspapers and used to be the daily *Shargh's* political editor. Detained when he went to the Tehran passport office to renew his passport on 26 August, he was taken to Evin prison's sentence enforcement office, where he was told he has to serve a one-year jail term.

Mehregan has been detained several times since 2009 but this sentence stems from a raid on *Shargh* on 7 December 2010, when he and four other *Shargh* journalists were arrested. Released on bail of 10 million toman (7,500 euros) on 16 January 2011, he was arrested again after being summoned to Evin prison on 28 January 2013 and was freed a month later.

Reporters Without Borders has meanwhile learned that **Said Matinpour**, a journalist who worked for the Azeri-language weekly *Yarpagh*, was freed on 26 August 2015 on completing two thirds of an eight-year jail term. One of the Reporters Without Borders "[100 Information Heroes](#)," Matinpour had been held since 11 July 2009.

He was released under article 134 of the new Islamic criminal code (amended in 2013), which says that anyone convicted of several crimes or offences serves only the sentence for the most important one.

14.08.2015 - Sufi site contributor freed on completing sentence

Reporters Without Borders is relieved to learn that **Reza Entesari**, a contributor to the Sufi news website [Majzooban Nor](#), was freed on 14 August on completing a four-year jail sentence.

[Arrested along with other contributors](#) to the site in raids carried out in Tehran and Shiraz from 8 to 10 September 2011, he received the sentence at the end of an unfair trial before a Tehran revolutionary court on 13 July 2013.

Three other contributors to the site who were given jail terms ranging from four to ten years – **Hamidreza Moradi**, **Mostafa Abdi** and **Kasra Nouri** – are still detained.

11.08.2015 – Conservative weekly closed for third time

Reporters Without Borders condemns the latest example of government harassment of the print media – the conservative weekly *9 Day's* closure on 3 August for criticizing the recent nuclear accord. This is the [third time](#) in less than two years that *9 Day* has been closed.

The newspaper's closure was ordered by the Press Authorization and Surveillance Committee, the censorship arm of the Culture and Islamic Guidance Ministry, for "failure to respect the resolutions of the High Council for National Security."

9 Day is the mouthpiece of a radical conservative faction within the ruling elite that has been very critical in recent weeks of the nuclear accord that Iran reached with the 5+1 group (five UN Security Council members plus Germany).

The same day, the Press Authorization and Surveillance Committee issued warnings to several other media outlets, mostly ultra-conservative outlets such as the daily *Kayhan* and the *Rajanews* website.

Culture and Islamic Guidance Minister Ali Janati defended the decision to close *9 Day* at a [news conference](#) marking Iran's Day of Journalism on 8 August. "This newspaper crossed the red lines on nuclear issues that were established by the High Council for National Security," he said.

A few days before its closure, a "secret directive" was sent to the media instructing them to refrain from publishing critical articles or comments about the nuclear accord.

Signed by the Deputy Culture and Islamic Guidance Minister, it told them not to question the accord's terms, suggest there were differences among the country's leaders, or repeat unconstructive comments published by domestic or foreign media. Instead, it urged them to stress the importance of these unprecedented negotiations and the courage of the negotiators.

Conservative media outlets have reported that the Culture and Islamic Guidance Minister [filed a complaint](#) on 6 August accusing Vatan-é Emrooz, a radical conservative daily that supports former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, of "publishing secret government documents."

Vatan-é Emrooz was one of the media outlets that published the "secret directive," which the Culture and Islamic Guidance Ministry has yet to deny.

19.07.2015 - Journalist freed on completing six-year jail term

Reporters Without Borders has learned that **Masoud Bastani**, a journalist who worked for the daily Farhikhteghan and other reformist newspapers, was released on 19 July on completing the jail sentence he received in the Stalinist-style political trials held in Tehran the second half of 2009. Arrested on 4 July 2009, Bastani was sentenced to six years in prison on 1 November 2009. Bastani was hospitalized several times while serving his sentence in Rajaishahr prison, in Karaj (20 km northwest of Tehran), most recently last February, when he was taken to the neurological department of Tehran's Emam Khomeini after suffering a heart attack. His wife, fellow journalist **Mahssa Amrabadi**, was given a one-year jail sentence (and a suspended sentence of four years in prison) on 14 October 2010 for giving interviews and writing newspapers articles in support of her husband. She served the sentence from May 2012 to March 2013.

8.07.2015 - Online activist's father gets four months for giving interviews

Reporters Without Borders condemns the four-month jail sentence that a court in the northern city of Tabriz has imposed on **Seid Ahmad Ronaghi Malki** for "writing letters to the authorities" and "giving interviews" about the health of his son, a human rights defender and online activist who has been serving a long jail term.

Convicted in absentia, Malki has been given ten days to report to the authorities to begin serving his sentence.

His son, **Hossien Ronaghi Malki**, was arrested in December 2010 and was sentenced to 17 years in prison. After undergoing several kidney operations, he is in extremely poor health with a condition that is life-threatening. His parents managed to have him paroled on medical grounds on 18 June in return for 1.4 million toman (500,000 euros) in bail.

In a Facebook post on 4 July, the son wrote: "This morning, when the police came looking for my father, everyone thought they had come for me. No one knew that he had been tried and convicted."

The son has now also received a summons from the authorities with the aim of ending his medical parole.

"Hossien has completed his sentence and should be released under article 134 of the new Islamic Penal Code," [his mother said in an interview](#), referring to a 2013 amendment under which anyone convicted of several crimes or offences serves only the sentence for the most important one.

01.07.2015 - Newspaper editor freed after serving five years of jail term

Reporters Without Borders has learned that **Heshmatollah Tabarzadi**, the former editor of three publications that were shut down one after the other from 2000 to 2005, was released on 20 June on completing two thirds of an eight-year prison sentence. He edited the independent monthly *Gozarash Rooz* and two weeklies, *Payam Danshjo* and *Howiat Khish*.

Tabarzadi was arrested in a round-up of opposition politicians and journalists the day after bloody demonstrations in Tehran on 27 December 2009, and was convicted a year later on charges of

"publishing false information with the aim of upsetting public opinion" and "activities against national security."

He was granted a conditional release in December 2012, mainly on medical grounds. But, after sending letters about human rights violations to UN secretary-general Ban Ki-moon and the special rapporteur on human rights in Iran, Ahmed Shaheed, he was re-arrested on 15 January 2014 and was returned to Rajaishahr prison. Now aged 55, he has spent a total of seven years in various Iranian prisons.

30.06.2015 - Dual national Facebook commentator freed

Reporters Without Borders has learned that **Farideh Shahgholi**, a woman with dual Iranian and German citizenship, was released on 28 June after serving half of a three-year jail sentence on charges of anti-government publicity and insulting Supreme Leader Ali Khomeini in Facebook posts.

A resident in Germany for 25 years, Shahgholi was arrested while visiting her family in Iran in 2011 and was initially held for more than six months, including 50 days in solitary in Section 2A of Tehran's Evin prison. She was returned to prison on 22 May 2014 to serve the three-year jail sentence.

Meanwhile, the persecution of journalists in exile continues. Journalist and human rights defender **Mansoureh Shojaii** has [written an open letter](#) to judicial system chief Mohammad Sadegh Amoli Larijani protesting against the treatment she has received from judges and other officials since her arrest in 2009 and her flight into exile in August 2010.

The long list of abuses cited in the letter includes illegal pressure from judges to change her lawyers, bail confiscation, and mendacious use of arrest threats by prosecutors. Arbitrarily arrested in Tehran on 24 December 2009 on a charge of "anti-government publicity" in connection with her work for various feminist websites, she was held for 32 days in Section 209 of Evin prison before being released provisionally pending trial.

"According to the testimony of my doctors and under international law, including the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment, such treatment can be regarded as psychological torture," the letter says.

24.06.2015-State news agency fires five journalists for covering strike

Reporters Without Borders condemns the dismissal of five journalists from the state-owned Iranian [Labour News Agency \(ILNA\)](#) on 21 June after they defied orders not to cover a strike.

[In a Facebook post](#), Esmail Mohammadvali said he and his four colleagues were fired for covering a strike by workers in a factory owned by the company Farsite in the southwestern city of Dorud.

"We had been under pressure for months to censor information about protest movements in Iran, including those by teachers and workers," he said in his post. "On 19 June, the director's secretary warned us that we should not cover the protest currently taking place at the Farsite plant because this was not a legitimate movement (...)"

"We tried in vain to contact the director, to explain to him that it was not our job to decide whether the protest was justified, and that, after these workers came to Tehran to press their demands outside the labour ministry, we had a duty to cover their protest."

Mohammadvali added that he and the other journalists then found that their access to the news agency's website had been blocked and that their page on the website was shut down for two days. And finally, on the morning of 21 June, they were "summarily dismissed."

ILNA director Masoud Heidari responded that "transferring journalists in a news agency is normal" and that "some of these journalists exaggerated while others tried using blackmail."

Mohammadvali and the other journalists described these comments as outrageous. Other sources said Heidari was a former director of the company that owns [Farsite](#). They also said two of the five journalists would be allowed to resume working for the news agency.

Reporters Without Borders has meanwhile learned that **Solmaz Ikder**, a journalist who has worked for the daily Farhikhtegan and other pro-reform media outlets, was summoned on 15 June to the prosecutor's office inside Tehran's Evin prison, where she was banned from leaving the

country and was detained after being unable to arrange bail of 200 million toman (150,000) euros. However, she was granted a provisional release the next day.

Ikder has been convicted several times in the past, [including in August 2008](#) for covering the annual demonstration by the families of political prisoners executed in 1998, and in 2011 for attending Iran-e-Farda journalist [Hoda Saber](#)'s burial in Tehran's Behesht-e Zahra cemetery. Saber died in Evin prison on 12 June 2011 as a result of mistreatment and going on hunger strike.

15/06/2015 - Internet activist's lawyer arrested

Reporters Without Borders condemns lawyer **Mohammad Moghimi**'s arrest on 13 June on a reported charge of "having an immoral relationship" because he shook the hand of a female client, Internet and human rights activist **Atena Ferghdani**, when they met in Tehran's Evin prison.

Ferghdani's mother [reported yesterday](#) that Ferghdani "knew that the law forbids shaking a man's hand but she was moved by the sight of her lawyer" and shook his hand in a moment of emotion. "She is upset by this accident and above all by these baseless and unfair accusations," her mother added.

03.06.2015 - Long jail term for woman blogger

Reporters Without Borders is appalled to learn that blogger and human rights activist **Atena Ferghdani** was sentenced to 12 years and nine months in prison on 2 June.

Ferghdani had been held for the past five months on charges of "activities against national security," "anti-government propaganda by means for performance art," and "insulting government officials and parliamentary representatives in a published cartoon."

She was arrested on 11 January when she responded to a summons from a Tehran court for posting [a video](#) on Facebook and YouTube on 26 December in which she described her experiences in Section 2A of Tehran's Evin Prison – a section controlled by Revolutionary Guards – after a previous arrest last August.

"I was interrogated for nine hours a day," she said in the video. "The questions were mainly about my activities and what I posted on Facebook (...) In the bathroom, they had installed cameras that filmed everything we did. I found it very embarrassing. When I protested, the guards said they were turned off (...) but one day I took a plastic cup back to my cell and guards arrived within two minutes and tore my blouse in order to get it back. I just wanted to use it to do drawings."

Her family said that during her court appearance in January she hit by guards as she was being taken off to prison. "The guards slapped my daughter right in front of us," her father told journalists. She was put with non-political detainees in Gharchak prison in Varamin, a municipality south of Tehran.

She was hospitalized on 27 February, 18 days after beginning a hunger strike. Her lawyer, Mohammad Moghimi, said she "had a heart attack and was taken to Firozgar Hospital in Sharrai." She was transferred to Evin prison a week later.

Two other human rights defenders, **Atena Daemi** and **Omid AliShenas**, were sentenced to 14 and 10 years in prison respectively the same day.

19.05.2015 – Association of Iranian Writers targeted again

Reporters Without Borders condemns the latest case of judicial harassment of Iran's writers and journalists.

Several members of the executive bureau of the Association of Iranian Writers were summoned and interrogated from 3 to 5 May. They included **Reza Khandan Mahabadi**, who has been charged with "anti-government publicity" and "publishing a newspaper illegally." The charges refer to the association's Facebook page.

Plainclothes officers from the intelligence ministry searched his Tehran home on 29 April, confiscating his computer, hard drives and manuscripts.

Iranian civil society's oldest organization, the Association of Iranian Writers has been banned under both of the Shah's two regimes and the Islamic revolution. Two of its leaders, the writers and journalists **Mohamad Makhtari** and **Mohamad Jafar Pouyandeh**, were murdered in 1998.

18.05.2015 - Journalist freed on completing six-year jail term

Reporters Without Borders has learned that the journalist **Kaivan Samimi Behbahani** was released on 16 May on completing a six-year jail sentence on charges of "publishing false information with the aim of disturbing public opinion" and "activities against national security."

The former editor of *Nomeh* (The Letter), an independent monthly closed by the authorities in 2005, Behbahani was arrested on 13 June 2009, the day after President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's disputed reelection, and was convicted on 2 February 2010.

He was also banned from working as a journalist and, all the time he was held in an individual cell in Section 209 of Tehran's Evin prison and in various sections of Rajaishahr prison, he was subjected to a great deal of pressure to renounce his journalistic commitments.

27.04.2015 - Prestigious women's monthly suspended

Reporters Without Borders condemns today's decision by the Press Authorization and Surveillance Committee to suspend the women's monthly *Zanan* ("Women" in Persian) under paragraph 2 of article 6 of the press code, which bans "content and photos encouraging prostitution and vices contrary to public decency."

The suspension was prompted by a special issue about "white marriage" – cohabiting without contracting a formal Islamic marriage, a growing trend among young couples. Entitled "White Marriage, social ill or cure," the issue elicited angry reactions from conservative media that support Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.



Zanan was previously suspended in January 2008 for publishing "content harmful to society's psychological tranquillity." The Press Authorization and Surveillance Committee gave it permission to resume publishing in June 2013.

14.04.2015 - Newspaper journalist freed on bail

Reporters Without Borders has learned that **Yaghma Fashkhami**, a political reporter for the pro-reform daily *Roozan*, has been released on bail pending trial after being held for three and a half months. He was freed on 11 April.

Plainclothes intelligence officers arrested him on 24 December, a day after the prosecutor's office closed the newspaper because of an alleged "irregularity" in the supplement it published with its 20 December issue to mark the fifth anniversary of [Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri](#)'s death.

The public prosecutor has given his permission for the newspaper to resume publishing in a letter to the deputy minister of culture and Islamic guidance dated 23 March.

09.03.2015 - Four website activists freed after three and a half years

Reporters Without Borders is relieved to learn that four lawyers and contributors to the Sufi news website [Majzooban Noor](#) – **Afshin Karampour, Amir Islami, Farshid Yadollahi** and **Omid Behrouzi** – were released on 2 March as a result of a court decision to halve their jail sentences.

Arrested in raids in Tehran and Shiraz from 8 to 10 September 2011, they were sentenced to seven years in prison at the end of an unfair trial before a Tehran revolutionary court on 13 July 2013. Last December, a Tehran appeal court reduced their jail terms to three and a half years (plus a suspended 30-month term).

six other contributors to the site who were given jail terms ranging from six to ten years – **Reza Entesari, Hamidreza Moradi, Mostafa Abdi, Kasra Nouri, Salehldin Moradi**, and **Mostafa Daneshjo** – are still detained.

27.02.2015 - Authorities block two websites

Reporters Without Borders condemns the blocking of two websites since yesterday at the behest of judicial officials. They are [Jamaran](#), the official site of the Islamic Republic's late founder, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, and [Bahar](#), a site that support Iran's reformers.

The judicial authorities ordered them blocked for posting a photo of former President Mohammad Khatami attending the mourning of a member of the Khomeini family.

Judicial system spokesman Golamhossien Mohsseni Ejehi told the media on 16 February [that any coverage of Khatami](#) was henceforth banned at the behest of the High Council for National Security and Justice. Media that ignored the prohibition would be subjected to publishing bans or other sanctions, he warned.

23.02.2015 – Journalist arrested to serve old jail sentence

Reporters Without Borders condemns the 21 February arrest of **Ali Maghamai**, a journalist and son-in-law of a prominent human rights defender, to begin serving a jail sentence he received more than a year ago.

Originally arrested on 27 December 2010 and then released on bail, Maghamai, was sentenced to four months in prison on 11 January 2014. He was also given a suspended eight-month jail sentence. He did not appeal and was not told that an appeal court had upheld the sentence.

The editor of the networking section of a website specializing in information technology, Maghamai also worked for several reformist newspapers including *Mardom Emroz*, [which was closed last month](#).

Like Mardom Emroz editor **Mohammed Ghoochani**, he is the son-in-law of **Emadoldin Baghi**, a leading journalist and defender of prisoner rights who has been hounded by the authorities.

Prosecutors attached to the Tehran "media and culture" court charged Ghoochani on 26 January with "insulting Islam" for publishing a front-page photo of US actor George Clooney under an "I am Charlie" headline on 13 January.

The Islamic Republic's intelligence services still often harass the relatives of leading journalists and human rights defenders as a way of putting pressure on the media.

13.02.2015 - Six months in jail and 74 lashes for "insults"

Reporters Without Borders condemns the six-month jail sentence imposed on former journalist **Abass Salimi Namin**, who heads an Iranian history research society and edits its website (<http://www.irhistory.com/index.php>).

In an [open letter](#) on 2 February revealing the sentence and requesting the help of his colleagues, he denounced "the repeated and baseless complaints" brought against him by the prosecutor and "the profits made by those who own power and wealth."

Namin was given the six-month sentence for his comments about former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in a 2011 TV debate, in which he said "Ahmadinejad's extravagance was the result of the conservatives' silence." He was also sentenced to 74 lashes and a fine for insulting the judicial authorities and those running the University of Tehran.

Namin used edit to *Kyhan Hava* – a supplement of the newspaper Kyhan that was targeted at diaspora Iranians and stopped publishing in 1998 – and for years was one of a number of journalists known to have close links with the intelligence services.

03.02.2015 - Court closes online paper run by Ahmadinejad supporters

Reporters Without Borders condemns the Tehran culture and media court's decision to close the online newspaper *HMA*, which derives its name from the initials of "Supporters of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad" in Persian.

[The newspaper posted the court's decision on its front page today.](#) Issued on 26 January, the ruling said *HMA* is to be closed under paragraph D of article 7 of the press law for "publishing without permission," and in order to "prevent the occurrence of a crime" under paragraph 5 of article 156 of the constitution.

President from 2005 to 2013 and, like Supreme [Leader Ali Khamenei](#), named as a Predator of Press Freedom by Reporters Without Borders, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was one of the architects of a relentless crackdown on opposition politicians, journalists and human rights defenders accompanied by Stalinist-style trials.

Dozens of newspapers were closed during his two terms in office and more than 200 journalists and bloggers were arrested after his controversial reelection in June 2009. Some of them are still in prison.

29.01.2015 – Reformist weekly closed "to prevent a crime"

Reporters Without Borders condemns the closure of the reformist weekly *Setareh Sobh* (Dawn Star) by Tehran's culture and media court on 12 January. The court said it was closed to "prevent the occurrence of a crime" under paragraph 5 of article 156 of the constitution.*

In its 10 January issue, the weekly published an open letter by Ali Motahari, a moderate conservative parliamentary representative for Tehran, to Mohammad Sadegh Amoli Larijani, the head of the Judicial Authority.

It criticized Larijani's claim that the detention of the three leaders of the protest movement against President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's controversial reelection in 2009 was "legal and ordered by the High Council for National Security."

The three detainees include two 2009 presidential candidates. They are **Mir Hossein Mousavi**, a former prime minister and owner of the closed newspaper *Kalameh Sabaz*, and **Mehdi Karoubi**, a former parliamentary speaker and owner of the closed newspaper *Etemad Melli*. The third detainee is Mousavi's wife, best-selling author **Zahra Rahnavard**.

Detained on 24 February 2011, they have been held under house arrest and denied all rights.

Before its closure, *Setareh Sobh* had been planning to publish its first issue as a national daily this week.

*Article 156 of the Iranian constitution: The judiciary is an independent power, the protector of the rights of the individual and society, responsible for the implementation of justice, and entrusted with the following duties:

1. Investigating and passing judgement on grievances, violations of rights, and complaints; the resolution of litigation; the settling of disputes; and the taking of all necessary decisions and measures in probate matters as the law may determine;
2. Restoring public rights and promoting justice and legitimate freedoms;
3. Supervising the proper enforcement of laws;

4. Uncovering crimes; prosecuting, punishing, and chastising criminals; and enacting the penalties and provisions of the Islamic penal code; and
5. Taking suitable measures to prevent the occurrence of crime and to reform criminals.

27.01.2015 - Newspaper editor charged with insulting Islam

Reporters Without Borders has learned that **Mohammed Ghoochani**, the editor of the reformist daily *Mardom Emroz*, was charged yesterday before a Tehran "media and culture" court with "insulting Islam" for publishing a front-page photo of US actor George Clooney under an "I am Charlie" headline on 13 January.

Ghoochani's lawyer, Mahmoud Alizadeh-Tabatabaie, said he was granted a provisional release pending trial after payment of 100 million toman (100,000 euros) in bail. *Mardom Emroz* was closed on 17 January.

Reporters Without Borders has also learned that **Mehrdad Sarjoui**, a Tehran-based journalist who used to work for several English-language newspapers, was released on 13 January after being deemed to have completed his main sentence.

Sarjoui was returned to prison on 28 November 2012 after getting a three-year jail sentence and a suspended seven-year sentence. He was previously arrested on 14 January 2011 and sentenced to 10 years in prison by a Tehran court on a charge of "espionage by publishing interviews of citizens of enemy countries." An appeal court subsequently commuted the sentence.

21.01.2015 - Journalist and rights activist arrested at her home

Reporters Without Borders has learned that **Zahra Khandan**, a former journalist with several reformist news outlets who defends women's rights online, was arrested at her Tehran home on 19 January by Revolutionary Guard intelligence operatives in plain clothes. Her home was also searched. The authorities have not said why she was arrested or where she is being held.

According to the information obtained by Reporters Without Borders, several other women's rights activists have been arrested in Tehran after campaigning for the release of **Mahdieh Golro**, a fellow activist arrested during a protest outside the parliament building in Tehran on 22 October in protest against a series [of acid attacks on women in Isfahan and Tehran](#).

20.01.2015 - Young woman arrested in court over Facebook video

Reporters Without Borders condemns young human rights activist **Atena Ferghdani**'s arrest in a Tehran court on 11 January when she responded to a summons about the [video she posted](#) on Facebook and YouTube on 26 December in which she described what happened to her after her arrest last August.

After her arrest on 24 August, she was incarcerated in Section 2A of Tehran's Evin Prison – a section controlled by Revolutionary Guards – and was held until 2 November, when she was released on bail on 600 million toman (700,000 euros) pending trial.

"I was interrogated for nine hours a day," she said in the video. "The questions were mainly about my activities and what I posted on Facebook (...) In the bathroom, they had installed cameras that filmed everything we did. I found it very embarrassing. When I protested, the guards said they were turned off (...) but one day I took a plastic cup back to my cell and guards arrived within two minutes and tore my blouse in order to get it back. I just wanted to use it to do drawings."

Ferghdani is charged with "activities against national security," "anti-government propaganda by means for performance art," and "insulting government officials and parliamentary representatives in a published cartoon."

Her family said that during her appearance in court she was the victim of violence by the guards who took her off to prison. "The guards slapped my daughter right in front of us," her father told journalists. She is currently being held in Gharchak prison in Varamin, a city to the south of Tehran. It is a prison used for holding non-political detainees.

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