

IRN36382.E 21 February 2001

Subject: Iran: Demonstration concerning water conditions in Abadan in July 2000 including number of participants; whether people were arrested and, if so, fates of those arrested

Regional Office: 7

From: Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

On 5 July 2000 protests occurred in Abadan over the lack of drinking water (AP 5 July 2000; AFP 5 July 2000; Reuters 5 July 2000). Sources described the protestors as "rioters" who broke windows, burned tires (ibid.; AP 5 July 2000) and overturned cars (AFP 6 July 2000). The city was experiencing an "unprecedented heatwave" with temperatures around 50 degrees Celsius (AFP 5 July 2000; Reuters 5 July 2000), with the water supply in the city seriously affected (ibid.; AFP 5 July 2000; *Tehran Times* 6 July 2000a). AFP reported that demonstrators had "gathered ... in front of the police headquarters to call for action by the authorities" (5 July 2000), while other sources reported that the demonstrators had gathered at the governor's office (Reuters 5 July 2000; *Tehran Times* 6 July 2000a). According to the *Tehran Times* 5,000 Abadan residents gathered and then "chanted some slogans against the local officials and hurled stones at the office" (ibid.).

The *Tehran Times* reported that tear gas had been used on the protestors (6 July 2000a), while *RFE/RL Iran Report* wrote that "Hojatoleslam Jami, the local Friday prayer leader, explained on 7 July that 'opportunists' were behind the violence. Order was restored when Basij took to the streets, *Kayhan* reported" (17 July 2000).

The *Tehran Times* described the incident as "bloody" (6 July 2000b). According to Reuters, "Iranian newspapers reported at least four people were injured by police bullets" (5 July 2000). Other sources reported three people killed (AFP 6 July 2000; *The Straits Times* 8 July 2000). However, the Student Movement Coordination Committee for Democracy in Iran (SMCCDI), while claiming that the demonstrations continued into early the next day, alleged that "at least 10 demonstrators [had] been killed and hundreds wounded by the forces sent from Ahwaz" (6 July 2000). The number of persons arrested were reported as: several, by a "conservative" Iranian newspaper (AFP 6 July 2000), 150 (*The Straits Times* 8 July 2000), over 150 (*RFE/RL Iran Report* 17 July 2000), over 200 (EIU 19 July 2000), and hundreds (SMCCDI 3 Dec. 2000). On 13 July 2000 Iran News reported that Yadollah Nikpour, the secretary-general of the Islamic Iran Participation Front (IIPF), had been arrested in Abadan and that his arrest was believed to have been in connection with the Abadan protests.

On 3 December 2000 the opposition SMCCDI recalled "the bloody crackdown in which Militians opened fire on thirsty people. Following this bloody crackdown, the Islamic regime has imprisoned hundreds of Iranians and reports are stating about the torture and execution of several of them." The Research Directorate was unable to corroborate these claims within the time constraints of this Response, nor obtain any information on the current status of those who were arrested.

In further detail on the Abadan protest the *Tehran Times* reported that its

reporters contacted some Abadan residents by telephone, who confirmed that the local inhabitants have long been suffering from the lack of fresh drinking water, but that the local government officials have taken no measures to remove this problem.

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It seems that the angry reaction from the local inhabitants was quite natural, as fresh drinking water is one of basic necessities of people living anywhere in the country. Thus, the local government officials should be taken to task for showing indifference to this problem, particularly considering the unprecedented high temperature in that region which is currently at around 50 degrees Centigrade.

Besides ▸Abadan◄, there are other parts of the country where people are facing similar problems.

Therefore, it is necessary that the government officials pay more attention to the problems facing the people, particularly the underprivileged strata (6 July 2000a).

An *Abrar* editorial commented:

All that occurred last week in ▸Abadan◄, that forced the people to gather in front of the governor's office to urge their rightful and legal demands, like access to hygienic drinking water, must be given serious attention, and favored by the high-ranking authorities of the system and the country in this specific period of time (8 July 2000).

A 7 November 2000 *RFE/RL Iran Report* article contained further information on the July events in ▸Abadan◄ and the issue of water quality, including comments from ▸Abadan◄ Friday Prayer leader Hojatoleslam Jami:

"The war in ▸Abadan◄ and Khorramshahr has not ended," ▸Abadan◄ Friday Prayer leader Hojatoleslam Qolam Hussein Jami said, adding that "we say there is still a state of emergency in ▸Abadan◄ and Khorramshahr." Jami was discussing problems with the drinking water in Khuzestan Province (which led to riots in late-July and early-August), but other reports suggest that security in the province is problematic, too. What these reports indicate, furthermore, is that government officials are both corrupt and inattentive. Local dailies hope that Khuzestan's new parliamentary representatives will help the province overcome its current difficulties. ...

The July riots in ▸Abadan◄ over poor water quality should have been foreseen, according to Hojatoleslam Jami, because the locals had been complaining for quite a while that the water was salty. He added that Khuzestan Province officials, from the governor-general down, were unresponsive to public complaints, and he said that if they did not know how to do their jobs, they should "go abroad and bring people from there," "Bahar" reported in July.

Contractors used oil tankers to transport drinking water, and Jami suggested that the contractors who were hired to provide water were corrupt. Jami also complained that a sugar beet project, in which the state-run banks are the biggest shareholders, is using up much of the water in ▸Abadan◄ and Khorramshahr and is also polluting the water supply. Ayatollah Shafii, who represents Khuzestan in the Assembly of Experts, pointed out in a meeting organized by the provincial governor-general that the local administration is not efficient, "Nur-i Khuzestan" reported in May. The provincial agricultural chief said that not only is the drought causing problems, but growers of onions and wheat are facing other (unspecified) difficulties. The demands of local workers are not being met, according to the province's Labor Ministry representative, and there is not enough housing. Governor-General Moqtadai suggested that "if everyone minded his own business...there would be good order in the country. If we do not accept this, any remarks made amount to mere sloganeering."

AFP reported on 22 August 2000 that the United Nations had described the drought in the region as the worst in 30 years and that the local UN director had

praised Iran's attempts to stave off the crisis caused by the second straight year of drought but the UN report concluded that "in spite of the government's efforts, its resources are already overstretched."

The drought has been a politically sensitive issue for Iran's clerical regime, which is accepting international aid for only the second time since the 1979 Islamic revolution.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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