

The following is a translation of the "Radio Farda" Persian program, which was broadcast via satellite on September 9, 2007 at 1730 UTC.

TRANSLATION BEGINS HERE

[Female announcer]

The best songs and latest news: Radio Farda.

[Male announcer]

Radio Farda news.

-The IAEA Board of Governors will hold a meeting regarding the nuclear program of the Islamic Republic.

-Advocates of Nawaz Sharif were arrested in Pakistan.

-The Iraqi Prime Minister asked his neighbor countries to unite against terrorist forces.

[Host Hessam Mahdavi]

It is 9:00 pm. Greetings to you, dear Radio Farda audience. This is Hessam Mahdavi, and in the next 30 minutes I will be your host with a collection of the latest news and the democracy magazine.

The IAEA Board of Governors is supposed to hold a meeting on Monday regarding the nuclear program of the Islamic Republic. Mohamed ElBaradei, the head of the IAEA, is supposed to submit his report regarding Iran's nuclear program. It is expected that Mr. ElBaradei will ask the Agency to give Iran another opportunity to comply with its announcement of a transparent nuclear program.

The party of Nawaz Sharif, the former Prime Minister of Pakistan, announced that Pakistani police arrested 2,000 advocates of the former Prime Minister on Monday. According to Nawaz Sharif's party, these arrests have occurred prior to the return of Mr. Nawaz Sharif to Pakistan. But governmental officials have said that they have only arrested 250 of the troublemakers.

Nouri al-Maliki requested his neighboring countries to assist him in fighting what he called evil forces. Mr. Maliki said that Iraq and its neighbors must

be united against terrorist forces. According to the Iraqi Prime Minister, terrorists will not stop at the borders of one country.

The US military in Iraq announced that on Saturday an al-Qaeda militant who organized the bombing last month, was killed. Mark Fox, a spokesman for the US military in Iraq, said that Abu Mohammad al-Afri, also known as Abu Jassam, was killed in an air strike 70 kilometers southwest of Mosul.

The summit of the member countries of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum ended on Sunday in Sydney, Australia with the release of a statement. In this statement the leaders of the participating countries attempted to solve issues regarding the Doha talks.

Fatah advocates requested a mass strike in the Gaza Strip on Sunday. According to witnesses, most stores were closed and classes were not held. Fatah advocates have planned this one-day strike to show their opposition to Hamas clashes with demonstrations that took place on Friday and also the Hamas government in Gaza.

Ban Ki-moon, the Secretary General of the UN, described the progress in Darfur, Sudan as very optimistic. The UN Secretary General before traveling to three African countries told journalists that the agreement in Darfur is valuable.

Dear Radio Farda audience, now it is time for our democracy magazine produced by Maryam Ahmadi.

[Clip for the democracy magazine]

[Maryam Ahmadi]

Greetings to our audience. This is Maryam Ahmadi with the democracy magazine which includes interviews regarding the new family support bill and reactions to it, criticism of society's silence with respect to the wave of suppression and executions, and a report regarding democracy in India.

[Music]

More than 2,000 human rights activists and feminists have signed an open petition to demand the revocation of a new bill supposedly supporting the

household which the government has submitted to the parliament. The signatories of the letter called the new bill a legalization of new discriminations against Iranian women. They also said that despite what the people proposing the bill claim, based on their intentions for making household laws necessarily comply with current laws and ameliorating shortcomings in existing family law, this bill not only does not comply with the reality of today's Iranian women, but it also suggests a regression to about 42 years ago.

According to the statement, Article 23 of the proposed bill has not only failed to request the disallowance of polygamy, but has also stated that men with multiple spouses must be financially capable of paying both women equally and must be fair and just to both of them. The statement also declares that this bill assesses humanitarian values based on a husband's financial ability. Instead of thinking of a solution for women who are suffering with no rights, such as not having the right to divorce, it unfairly increases the rights of men.

Article 25 of this bill binds the Ministry of Economic [and Financial Affairs] to annually declare a certain amount of money as the fair marriage portion [*mahr*] in order to avoid excessive marriage portions and to exponentially levy taxes on excessive marriage portions when the marriage is registered.

The signatories of the statement write that this means from now on, young brides, in addition to not having the right to divorce and not having the right to remarry unconditionally, are forced to pay the government a tax for a marriage portion that they have not yet received. There is no sign that they will even receive it later, until the end of their marriage.

Article 2 of this bill also makes the presence of a male judge in the family court mandatory and the presence of a female judge just for specific cases. Also, according to Article 22 of the proposed bill, registration of a temporary marriage, or *sigheh*, still is not mandatory and will be under the framework of an executive order which will be ordered by the Ministry of Justice.

This statement's signatories, in addition to their intense criticism of the existing discriminatory laws—especially polygamy laws—requested the unconditional revocation of this article. They also announced that if the parliament does not overthrow this bill, they will take more serious measures.

Fariba Davoodi-Mohajer, who acknowledges that this statement is a sign of awareness of the feminist movement, believes that this bill can overturn the family structure. Regarding Article 23 of this bill, Fariba Davoodi-Mohajer, a feminist activist, says:

[Fariba Davoodi-Mohajer]

Article 23 of this bill states that men are now allowed to remarry without permission from the first wife, and only the judge is allowed to evaluate whether the man is financially eligible to maintain fair treatment of both his wives. Basically, it is not clear how the judge reaches the decision prior to the marriage that the husband will treat both wives equally. And based on what factors does the judge evaluate the husband's behavior? And what compensation is offered if the husband does not comply with his promises to treat them equally?

By paying the marriage portion, men can remarry again. This is the same marriage portion which is taxed in this bill. In other words, every year there will be a fair amount of the marriage portion and every man wishing to pay more than the predetermined portion has to pay the government a tax prior to giving the marriage portion at the time of marriage. By ratifying this bill, you are just endangering people's households.

[Maryam Ahmadi]

Ms. Mohajer, if we establish a characteristic of Iranian society, such as the number of educated women, the number of young women entering universities, the number of high ranking professional women, with consideration of their financial and cultural situation, etc., and then study them one by one to compare this law with our findings about Iranian women; then if we give both cases to a non-Iranian who does not even know that this case belongs to Iran, what do you think—if we give both sets of information to someone who wants to make a connection between them—do you think he would be able to make any connection? Do you think he will find any harmony between this bill and those findings? And whether it is possible for society to tolerate these contradictory concepts?

[Fariba Davoodi-Mohajer]

Please be assured that this person will judge that this law was not written for these women. It is not even written for Iranian men. Traditionally, law should be written based on society's will and need. This law has only been

written for a few wealthy, libidinous men. It does not seem that Iranian men worried about the future of their own daughters will accept this kind of law in society.

The individuals who have drafted this bill claim that the law is compatible with today's laws. In my opinion, not only is it incompatible, but it also regresses to half a century ago. This law is not even compatible with Islam, because regarding polygamy it has been decided that this kind of justice is not possible. Basically, laws should change based on time, place, and logic to become up-to-date. I believe this bill announces the commencement of a war against half of Iranian society—women. It can be interpreted as a strike against civil society, and is a response from Ahmadinejad's government to women activists.

Even if that is the case here, it is a very lousy and childish act. Furthermore, it will have unseemly consequences such as higher instances of domestic violence, murder, suicide, runaways, and an increased divorce rate. An intellectual Iranian woman—a woman who has access to the internet, has access to high speed information, participates in international conferences—will not vote for or accept an outdated law.

Law should be a collection of societal values. This law is clearly against social values, and will not only draw reactions from women's rights activists, but will also persuade freedom-fighting men to react.

As you mentioned before, if a third party sees this law without knowing that this case is about Iran, he or she will immediately say that this law does not belong to Iranian men and women.

[Maryam Ahmadi]

Fariba Davoodi-Mohajer was talking about the new "Support for Families" bill. Mehrangiz Kar, a human rights activist in the US, acknowledges that the government's submission of this bill is a kind of tenacious attempt to stand up to activist women who demand discriminatory laws against Iranian women be changed, and who have demonstrated their will through equality demonstrations and the "One Million Signatures" campaign. Mehrangiz Kar.

[Mehrangiz Kar]

The government in today's world will claim that their final report is popular and is on the road for social development, which is compatible with the people's will. The government cannot attract the attention and support of the people through this childish grudge. Even populist gestures are losing popularity, and as soon as they expire, the stubborn and childish government will be confronted with unexpected opposition and resistance which they had not previously included in their calculations.

It has been years—since the very first days of the revolution—that Iranian women have been proclaiming their dissatisfaction with the invasion of their rights, but because publications, independent parties, peaceful demonstrations, and independent civil entities do not have the freedom to honestly and peacefully act and share the people's point of view with regime officials, we have reached a point where not only is the government not accountable, but it is also becoming more obstinate.

There have been rumors that the cabinet comes into session to see what sort of opposition may arise. And then instead of finding a proportional solution for restoring the situation by adjusting the opposition and attempting to appease the people, they choose to fuel the fire. For example, this anti-family bill, which the government has submitted to the parliament under the name "Support for Families," is a big humiliation to Iranian women activists who have been fighting all these years against gender-based discrimination.

And now through their sweat and blood, they have peacefully established two different campaigns for equality, one called "One Million Signatures," and the other for the revocation of stoning. These women have tried to familiarize government officials with their requests by going to jail, being lashed, and being released on bail in order—all this without violence and only by using words to demand their human rights.

Now this stubborn government, instead of hearing the peaceful demands of women, has displayed its resolve. And the administration in this 21st century maintains that these childish grudges are the solution to these problems. Therefore, with this current bill the government is responding absolutely foolishly to the great demands of Iranian women and their campaigns. Will success accompany this sort of government in the long term?

[Music]

[Female announcer]

In recent months along with the latest wave of executions, more restrictions on publications, an increase in arrests and other social, political, and cultural pressures, we were witnessing statements and articles by individuals and groups who critique the people's silence in the face of the regime's opposition to civil society.

In an interview with Abdolkarim Lahiji, Vice President of the International Federation of Human Rights Leagues (IFHRL), we have asked who the audience of these articles and statements is and considering the current status of society, what ways exist to breach this silence? Abdolkarim Lahiji.

[Abdolkarim Lahiji]

We and other Iranian civil society representatives, whether inside or outside of Iran, endeavor to tell people that in no society, country, or time have people reached a better life, equality, or freedom without resistance, which, unfortunately, is costly for health, freedom, or more generally their lives most of the time.

You might have heard the famous saying that "rights must be demanded, not granted." In this century we now live in, when we look at Iranian history, we see after years and years of resistance and conflicts they have achieved this current regime. Our intention is to declare that Iranian civil society is still active regarding women's rights, human rights, journalists' rights, defending the right to expression and to publish, and syndicates' rights. Yet unfortunately, this has had very limited development.

It is better for me to start with my own colleagues. During the past 12 years, Iranian attorneys defending human rights activism have become more transparent. Unfortunately, the number of lawyers involved in these sorts of cases [has decreased], such as defending political detainees, which as you know not only creates professional contradictions, but is also very dangerous for them. Many of them have been sent to jail and have been deprived of their jobs. Their right to practice law has been revoked. But when you look at it today, the number of these lawyers is very, very small. It might not even be one percent of attorneys in Iran.

In the journalism industry, the situation is a little better, but even there we are facing the same problem. In human rights and women's rights cases, when the campaign began to collect one million signatures, no one was aware of how awful women's rights in Iran are. This new bill, which is about to be ratified, makes the situation even worse. For example, it says that men wanting to take two or three wives do not need the permission of their first wife. This takes us back all the way to 50 years ago.

We unfortunately see our expectations have not been met during the last year since this campaign began—even considering all the efforts that the campaign's founders made. No one is satisfied with this situation. But unfortunately, people do not try for change and reform. Therefore, the exclusivity of this movement—the civil society movement in general and the opposition movement—causes the Islamic Republic to successfully continue its policies of pressure and suppression. When dozens of students get involved in defending their social rights, you will see that pressure increase.

[Female reporter]

Dr. Lahiji, what can we do in order to direct society's attention to the struggles of human rights defenders and to the human rights issue, to defend individuals who are sentenced to jail or death without a proper trial, to stop the repression and restrictions on freedom of expression? Who will take these matters to the UN? What measures can we take to bring these issues to society's attention?

[Abdolkarim Lahiji]

See, it either has to be done by the opposition, I mean the political institutions or parties, or by what we call civil society. In other words, through human rights entities, social institutions, syndicates, the media, we can promote a movement within the people. Unfortunately, political parties in Iran never react to these kinds of issues, unless they are the victims of repression. I mean, if one of the reformist gentlemen or their supporters among journalists or political activists goes to jail, or is prosecuted, they all scream. However, when the victim is among anti-Islamic groups or is not included in these political parties, they remain silent.

On the issue of executions and the high number of executions in Iran, one of the most important issues is the social and cultural considerations in Iranian society, because these people will still go to the streets to watch

executions. Political parties should say that this is promoting violence and they should restrict these events. In other words, by participating in these events, people basically are accomplices and assist them [the government] in promoting executions. We see that these political parties are only concerned about themselves, and only want to return to power again by taking over Parliament or the government itself.

Therefore, the second part of their responsibility is to at least teach people to criticize these events. I am not saying they should fight, but they should try to wake people from their sense of apathy and make them understand that their silence will bring more pressure on small groups who are trying to take this movement forward. As a result, all of civil society's speakers in the different steps that I just mentioned will advance this message—especially in the past decades we have witnessed here in Iran.

[Music]

[Female reporter]

The emphasis of the US to put more pressure on Iran to suspend its nuclear program and the latest agreements between this country and India regarding nuclear issues have caused some to ask why there is hypocrisy in US policy. The US official response to this question is to first make clear that they do not trust Iran and they have recognized the Iranian government as a supporter of terrorism. On the other hand, they believe in the Indian government which they recognize as a democratic country. But how it is possible for India, not only from the US perspective but also in the public mind, to be one of Asia's democracies?

[Music]

[Female Reporter]

India just celebrated the 60th anniversary of its independence. About 60 years ago, when the Indian peninsula was non-violently fighting the UK under leadership from Mahatma Gandhi, even the most optimistic Western observers believed that this country, given its multiple languages, tribes, and religions, was quickly heading to chaos and the military, given the right opportunity, would take over power.

Aldous Huxley, a prominent author of the 20th century, even wrote in 1961, 15 years after India's independence, "India is almost infinitely depressing,

for there seems to be no solution to its problems in any way that any of us [in the West] regard as acceptable. After the death of Jawaharlal Nehru, the powerful Indian Prime Minister, the country became a military dictatorship.”

This prediction, although it never came to pass in India, came true for the Islamic movement of the Indian subcontinent under the leadership of Mohammad Ali Jinnah and the Muslim League, which during the days of independence made separatist claims and demanded the creation of an independent country called the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, for the Muslims of the subcontinent. Pakistan and its eastern front, called Bangladesh, which separated through a bloody war in 1972, in most of its short life has been the scene of military invasion.

India, however, under the leadership of a secular party, moderate members of the Congress, the intelligence of the politicians of this country and based on the demands of Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of the country, and Ingra Nehru, his daughter, as well as both succeeding Prime Ministers who were assassinated, has followed a different path. Somehow, this large nation with all its contradictory religions, various languages, and different tribes, not only avoided becoming a place for military invasion, but is also now the most populated democracy of the world and has become a superpower in politics, advanced technology, and finance.

Despite terrible poverty throughout the country, inequality in wages and lack of natural resources, and separatists in Kashmir and in the northwest of India, this great country is still devoted to democracy. Furthermore, its political leaders have tried to strengthen the foundation of democracy there.

When one follows the events in these countries from the first days of independence until now, the powerful presence of a democratic India looks more like an unbelievable miracle. Amidst the many bloody Hindu-Muslim wars between 1946 and 1949, an “untouchable” was the head of the committee which drafted the Indian Constitution, which means a person at the lowest caste level of Indian tradition, named Ambedkar, drafted the constitution deliberately. Ambedkar had the same role in drafting the Indian constitution that James Madison had in drafting the US Constitution, with the difference that James Madison was not, for instance, a freed slave, and was among the intellectuals of American society.

India's constitution, with deliberation and vision—and most importantly with patience and far from myopic thought—officially recognized the rights of minorities with different languages, tribes, and religions in various regions. There was no room for monopoly. Religion was kept far from the political power. The traditional and outdated caste system was reformed. The redistribution of political power was at the center of focus. And the value and gratitude of an Indian individual was respected regardless of his religious, tribal, and regional background. Having many voices and being intellectual were officially recognized not as points of weakness, but as a real existence. Instead of placing effort to bring one voice to the political arena of the country, emphasis was placed on the multiple voices in the Indian regime.

TRANSLATION ENDS HERE