

A Glance at the Press and Journalists in the Islamic Republic of Iran

In the Name of God, the Almighty

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Since the victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran 27 years ago, Iranian press and media have experienced many ups and downs. Before the Revolution during the time of Shah's regime the number of the printed press was limited and strict censorship was enforced against them to the extent that public and critical views were not permitted to be reflected in the newspapers. But the Islamic Revolution at the leadership of late Imam Khomeini (RA) influenced Iranian press and journalists and most of the Iranian press people joined wide spread strikes in the country on 29.Nov.1978 namely less than three months to the victory of the Islamic Revolution. It is to be mentioned that before the victory of the Islamic Revolution, around 74 different newspapers and magazines could be purchased in the Iranian news-stand.

But after the victory of the Islamic Revolution and establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran great importance was attached to the Iranian press and media. As a proof to this claim we refer to the Article 24 of the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran as follows: "All publications and the press are free to express and print materials and ideas unless they damage and violate the Islamic principals or public rights". The press law which was adopted by the Islamic Consultative Assembly in 1985 stipulates: "Main tasks of the press in the Islamic Republic of Iran are as follows:

1st) Informing people and promoting their knowledge.

2nd) Promoting the objectives stipulated in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

3rd) Diluting false and divisive segregation based on peoples' race, language, customs, traditions.

4th) Combating colonialist cultural presentations (including extravagances (Israf), squandering (Tabzir), conspicuous consumption, prostitution and) and preserving and promoting pure Islamic culture and spiritual virtues.

5th) Preserving and promoting No-east, No-west policy.

Article 3 of the same law refers to the right of the press and stipulates: "All the press enjoy the right to publically inform the ideas, fruitful critics, proposals of people and the officials with observance of Islamic norms, to the benefit of the society.

Article 4 of the said law also stipulates: "Government officials or non-Government parties do not have the right to exert pressure upon the press for publishing biased materials or censor or control the materials printed by magazines and newspapers".

Views and ideas of Imam Khomeini (RA), Founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran, are indicative of the Importance attached by him to the role and position of the media and the press in the development of the society. Imam Khomeini (RA) believed that the press, playing vital role in deviating or correcting the society, are considered as main parts of the present world.

The General strategy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is based upon giving priority to the media activities and freedom of speech and opening the way infavour of the press unless they violate other parties freedom. This policy has prepared the ground in favour of pluralism, promotion of fair and just political rivalries and tolerance, further exchange of diverse views, promotion of the supervisory role of people, parties and the press, tracking different social affairs by the media, expressing further critical views on government activities and government officials and finally giving the government a further responsive character toward the demands of the people.

It is to be mentioned that during the campaigns for the presidential election, deputies of the election of Islamic Consultative Assembly, and members of city councils and ... the press played very important role in the promotion of participation of people for determining their destiny and future. In this respect we can refer to the ninth presidential election of the Islamic Republic of Iran which as one of the most successful elections witnessed the vital role played by the press holding different political views.

Statistics on the Iranian press in the past decade shows that the number of newspapers concessionaires increased form 575 in 1994 to 2961 in 2005 which indicates a %19.3 growth within a decade. Within the same context the number of permits issued for publishing newspapers from 2001 to 2002 was 162 while this figure increased to 191 in 2003. This nubmer

in the current year (2005) has so far reached to 205 which implies a daily growth in this respect. By taking a look at the related statistics on all the printed press we can see a remarkable growth in the number of people, organizations, parties as well as real and legal entities willing to join the information sector aiming to disperse information in the society. It is to be mentioned that the number of the permits for all printed press in 2004 stands at 418 out of which 159 publications were specialized and 259 were for public purposes. Out of the 418 publications 44 were published by governmental sector and 374 were published by non-governmental sector. Therefore the number of all publications by the end of 2004 reached 2817. Out of this number 177 newspapers were published nation-wide and 119 newspapers were published only in Tehran and 58 newspapers were published in other cities.

It is to be added that 4 newspapers in English language, 2 newspapers in Arabic language and one newspaper in Armenian language are published in Iran. Besides one newspaper is currently published for the blind and one newspaper is published for the children.

Facilities and Services for Journalists:

In addition to the permit facilities and related statistics, the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance of the Islamic Republic of Iran as the responsible authority for the press and journalists affairs, due to the relations among information and media sectors and given the fact that as compared with other employments, journalism is in the category of harsh jobs and with the purpose to realize the contents, of Paragraph 12 of the Economic, Social and Cultural Development Plan, introduced the health and social security insurance plan for creators of cultural and artistic works to the legislative authorities.

This plan which includes a number of facilities and services such as retirement pension, the disabled pension, financial aids for the treatment and, in case, death of the creators of artistic and cultural works who include journalists, correspondents and photographers as well is indicative of the importance the government attaches to the press people.

Among other activities of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance in the recent years aiming to support the press people is the establishment of the Credit Fund to support authors, journalists and artists.

Activities of this Fund include the following:

- 1- Providing members with financial assistance, for earning their livelihood.
- 2- Providing members with required financial resources in form of loans for creating artistic and cultural plans and programs.
- 3- Granting members interest-free loans (Gharzol-Hassameh)
- 4- Providing financial resources for developing activities in the fields of culture and art.

Formation of guilds and unions by Iranian journalists and press people is considered as another admeasure to defend and protect their there rights. Among these guides and unions presently acting in Iran we can mention the Guild Association of Journalists, the Muslim Journalists Union and the Female Journalists Association.

In General during 2004 to 2005 the cultural development policies were further promoted in form of issuing related permits and further government support for publications and they even covered journalists welfare and livelihood. Therefore with respect to the basic guidelines of the new government which revolve around justic-based policies and attention to the poor we will further witness more attention to the press and improvement of their situation in the future.